מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 25:1

Why effort should never stop just because you've already succeeded

Bereshit Rabbah 61:3

Sustained effort should not slack off with age or past achievement, as the verse "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not rest your hand" teaches through parallel examples: continuing to give charity, study Torah, teach students, or have children even in one's later years, since no one knows which endeavor will ultimately succeed. Rabbi Akiva's own experience illustrates the stakes of this principle on another level as well, as his first twelve thousand students perished for failing to treat one another with honor, while the small group he taught afterward, by acting otherwise, went on to fill the Land of Israel with Torah. Abraham, who fathered Yitzchak in his old age and then took another wife and had still more children, serves as the model for renewing one's efforts rather than resting on earlier accomplishments. AI SUMMARY

“In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not rest your hand” (Ecclesiastes 11:6) – Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Eliezer said: If you sowed in the early season, sow in the late season [as well], as you do not know “which will succeed” (Ecclesiastes 11:6), whether that of the early season or that of the late season, “or whether they both alike will be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6). Rabbi Yehoshua said: If a poor person comes to you in the morning, give him charity, [and if another comes] in the evening, give him [as well], as you do not know for which of them the Holy One blessed be He will record about you, for this one or for that one, “or whether they both alike will be good.”

Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Yishmael says: If you studied Torah in your youth, study Torah in your old age [as well], as you do not know which of them will endure, this one or that one, “or whether they both alike will be good.” Rabbi Akiva says: If you had students in your youth, procure students for yourself in your old age [as well], as you do not know which of them will endure, this one or that one, “or whether they both alike will be good.”

Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand students from Akko to Antipatris and they all died in one time period. Why? Because they were miserly toward one another. Ultimately, he produced seven [disciples]: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua, Rabbi Yoḥanan HaSandlar, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov. Some say: Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Neḥemya, Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai, Rabbi Ḥanina ben Ḥakhinai, and Rabbi Yoḥanan HaSandlar. He said to them: ‘My sons, the previous students died only because they were miserly toward one another. See to it that you do not act in accordance with their actions.’ They arose and filled the entire Land of Israel with Torah knowledge.

Rabbi Dostai in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥman: If you had children in your youth, take a wife in your old age and produce [more] children. From whom do you learn this? From Abraham, who

had children in his youth, and took a wife in his old age and produced [more] children. That is what is written: "Abraham took another [wife]..."

