חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

KRAKOW · MAOR VASHEMESH, CHAYEI SARA

How deeds raise someone through five levels of soul

Maor VaShemesh

A person's spiritual advancement is measured by how many parts of the soul—nefesh, ruach, neshamah, yechidah, and chayah, each comprised of ten levels—he merits to receive through holy deeds, and Avraham's old age and blessing "with everything" (gematria fifty) signify that he attained all five. Rabbi Tarfon's wordplay on "Yochani" (hinting at yechidah, chayah, neshamah yeteirah) conveyed this teaching, but his nephews, missing its depth, revealed themselves as "sons of Keturah" rather than true "sons of Torah." AI SUMMARY

In the Gemara, Zevachim 62a, the sons of Rabbi Tarfon's sister were sitting before Rabbi Tarfon. He opened and said: "And Abraham added and took a wife, and her name was Yochani." They said to him, "It is written 'Keturah.'" He applied to them [the verse], "the sons of Keturah" (meaning: they are not sons of Torah).

We must understand the words of the Sages and their sharp wit. For it is stated in the Midrash HaNe'elam that this entire passage alludes to the soul and to the body; the soul is called "Abraham," see there. Now it is stated in the Zohar HaKadosh that at first a person is given a pure nefesh (lower soul); then he is given a greater one, a neshamah (higher soul), and so on, until through his holy deeds he merits all five parts: nefesh, ruach, neshamah, yechidah, and chayah. And it is known from the holy books that each part is comprised of ten levels of holiness.

This is what the verse alludes to: "And Abraham was old, advanced in days, and Hashem blessed Abraham with everything (bakol)." We have already said that "advanced in days" alludes to his coming and cleaving to the supernal lights, and "Hashem blessed him... with everything" means that he merited so greatly that he was given all five parts of the soul — something not every person merits. Each of the five parts is comprised of ten, totaling fifty, corresponding to the numerical value of "kol" (all/everything).

This is what Rabbi Tarfon alluded to: "Abraham added" — meaning that he added in holiness — "and took a wife whose name was Yochani" — an acronym for yechidah, chayah, neshamah yeteirah (an additional soul) — meaning that he merited to be given a yechidah and a chayah, which no other person merits.

But they did not understand his words, and said to him, "It is written 'Keturah.'" Therefore he applied to them [the phrase] "the sons of Keturah," as Rashi explains it — that they are not "sons of Torah." Understand this well.

