BS"D
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org**. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

Dedicated to the memory of two Gadolim of our times: Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom (nifter Shabbat Vayera, November 9), and Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, z"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Tifereth Yerushalem (nifter November 6). Baruch Dayan Haemet.

The Torah focuses more on life than on death. As Jews, our religious mandate is to make the most of our lives and thereby to create a legacy to live on after we die. The Torah therefore gives us Chayei Sarah – the life of Sarah – as the title of the parsha devoted to her death and legacy.

Rabbis Mordechai Rhine (Devar Torah blow) and David Fohrman (alephbeta.org) both explore the famous Rashi on why the Torah presents Sarah's life as 100+20+7 rather than 127 years. Both also explore Rabbi Akiva's Midrash connecting Sarah to Queen Esther, who was queen over 127 provinces. Sarah connected 100, 20, and 7 over her life. At each age, she kept her best qualities from her younger self and added new meanings. Sarah therefore connected her life over time. Her descendant, Esther, connected 127 heterogeneous provinces over space – her connections existed in geography. For the first empire in history, Esther enabled King Achashveirosh to unify an amazingly diverse group of countries into one unified empire. Both Sarah and Esther made the most of the challenges and opportunities that their lives presented. In this way, Sarah and Esther were spiritual sisters.

The thematic unity of Sarah and Esther is especially relevant this week, which represents shiva for two of the most distinguished Rabbis of our time. Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, z"l, the older and first to die (November 6), was a son of Reb Moshe Feinstein, z"l, one of the most distinguished and honored Rabbis of the 20th Century. Thirty-five years after his death, the halachic rulings of Reb Moshe remain a prime foundation for any halachic discussion for Orthodox Judaism. Rabbi Feinstein took over from his father as Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Tifereth Yerushalem when his father passed away in 1986, and he has been a leading halachic authority of our time.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, originally studied to become an accountant. When he was 22, he contacted the Lubavitch Rebbe, Menachem Schneerson, z"l, and asked for an interview. The Rebbe, already elderly and frail, net with Jonathan and told him that the Jews of the United Kingdom needed spiritual help. The Rebbe's urging of Jonathan mirrored that of Mordechai to his cousin Esther. Mordechai told Esther that God would save the Jews from Haman. He offered Esther the opportunity to be God's partner. If she passed up the opportunity, she would die and God would find some other person to be his partner. The Rebbe urged Jonathan to take the opportunity as Esther had. Young Jonathan Sacks accepted the challenge. Not only did he spark a revival of Judaism in the United Kingdom, but he stimulated learning and Jewish practice throughout the world. He also helped improve relations between Orthodox Judaism and other branches of Judaism, and he improved relations between Jews and numerous other religions. Rabbi Sacks' 30 books and countless articles have stimulated study among intelligent Jews and non-Jews. For a beautiful tribute to Rabbi Sacks, see Rabbi Moshe Rube's Dvar Torah below.

The message of Chayei Sarah is that we build our legacies by making the most of our lives. Rabbis Dovid Feinstein, z"l, and Jonathan Sacks, z"l, both lived their lives fully and created highly distinguished legacies while stimulating countless followers. They deserve recognition among Jewish leaders such as Sarah and Esther.

Not all Jews are ready to learn from original sources or from the most distinguished leaders of their times. For those who need help understand Jewish religious practice and history, or for those of us not yet ready for these sources, a knowledgeable and stimulating Rabbi is essential. For nearly 50 years, my family had Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, to fill this role in our lives. Rabbi Cahan's Torah discussions, stories from the Midrash and Jewish history, and personal examples brought this learning to us at a level that we and fellow congregants could appreciate. Rabbi Cahan also emulated Sarah, Esther, and other distinguished Jewish leaders in living a full, meaningful life and thereby creating an everlasting legacy.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Nossan ben Pessel, Yaakov Tzvi ben Liba, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Chayei Sarah: On Whose Account?

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2000

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

This week, the Torah tells us the fascinating story of Eliezer's mission to find a wife for Yitzchok, his master Avraham's son. Eliezer was referred to in previous portions as one who drew from the teachings of his master. In order to accomplish his mission, Eliezer must interact. First he must meet the prospective bride, Rivka, then her parents, Bsu'el and Milkah, and then Rivka's conniving brother Lavan.

The Torah spares no effort to describe at length the ordeal of choosing the bride, Throughout the narrative, Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, is referred to in different ways. Sometimes he is called the "servant of Avraham," other times he is called, just plainly, "the servant, "and other times he is "the man." First he gives Rivka gifts: "And it was, when the camels had finished drinking, the man took a golden nose ring, its weight was a beka, and two bracelets on her arms, ten gold shekels was their weight" (Genesis 24:282). When Lavan sees the gifts he is excited, and he "approached the man, who was still standing by the camels by the spring" (ibid. v.30).

When Eliezer formally introduces himself to B'suel he declares his identity quite firmly. "I am a servant of Avraham" (ibid v. 34). And when Eliezer hears the words of acceptance from the soon-to-be in-laws, the Torah tells us, "when Abraham's servant heard their words, he prostrated himself to the ground unto Hashem" (ibid v.59).

Once again, he gives gifts to the new-found family. This time, however, he is not called with Avraham's servant, but just plainly, "the servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebecca; and delicious fruits he gave to her brother and her mother" (ibid v. 60). There seems to be some special condition for using the terms servant of Avraham. Don't we know who he was? I'd like to add my inflection on that title.

One evening, Rav Moshe Feinstein received a call from a young man whom he had never met. "I would like to ask the Rosh Yeshiva to be m'sader kidushin at my wedding." Rav Moshe reacted with a bit of surprise. "But I do not know you. Why are you calling me? Don't you have your own rabbi?"

The young man explained. "I come from a simple family with no yichus, (important lineage). I daven in a small shul with a little-known rabbi. Boruch Hashem, I am marrying a girl who comes from a family of well known origins, and many distinguished rabbis and lay leaders will be attending the wedding on her behalf.

"I, on the other hand, have little money and even less genealogical prestige. My in-laws don't think I am much of a scholar, and though I try to learn whenever I can, it seems that my bride's parents are disappointed in her choice. My parents are very quiet and simple people. They hardly know anyone, and I must admit that I am embarrassed that I will have no famous rabbis who will come from my side of the simcha. It would therefore be a tremendous encouragement to me if the Rosh Yeshiva would come on my behalf, and serve as the officiating rabbi."

At the time, Rabbi Feinstein was the dean of the prestigious Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem in New York, the head of the council of Torah Sages of Agudath Israel, and filled with myriad responsibilities to fulfill on a communal and personal level. In addition, he was not a young man, and the trip to the wedding would put further strain on his weary body. Nevertheless, Rav Moshe obliged. And the kallah's (bride's) family reacted in with awe for the prestige of the groom. "Imagine," they thought, "his rabbi is none other than the revered Gadol HaDor, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein!"

With that, the young man was able to forge the foundations of a respect that reverberated throughout his married years.

Matches are very delicate, and when Eliezer produced the beautiful gifts, he did not have to be known as Avraham's servant. "The servant gave gifts. The man took out a nose ring." But when it comes to laying the story out clearly, Eliezer puts away the monetary status and replaces it with something that money can't buy.

He declares his affiliation. I am the servant of Avraham. And when he thanks Hashem for the success, it is not the man talking, nor is it the servant. It is the servant of Avraham. Because when one goes into a spiritual deal, he need not present pecuniary credentials or show his bankbook. All he has to do is align himself with the right people, those who are well connected.

Good Shabbos!.

[Ed. Note: I chose this drasha in memory of Reb Moshe Feinstein's son, Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, z"l, who passed away on November 6, 2020. See dedication on p. 1.]

Chayei Sarah: Insiders and Outsiders

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2020

A major theme in this week's parasha, Chayei Sarah, is the question of insiders and outsiders. How do we relate to the larger country around us? How do we relate to foreigners? This is quite relevant to the question of immigrants in a society – are their contributions to be feared or embraced?

At the start of the parasha, Avraham tries to acquire a burial plot, and has to navigate through the resistance of the local people due to his status as an outsider, not a citizen of society. The parasha then turns to Avraham's search for a wife for Yitzchak, and he states firmly and clearly that he does not want his son's wife to be from the people of the land in which he lives. This could be read as an attitude of hostility towards the host country, but it also reflects the reality – that Avraham is a stranger, a minority. Jews have often experienced a sense of being a minority in a larger host country. Along with that comes a fear of assimilation and of losing one's sense of identity, and to combat that Avraham chooses to resist the larger society and reinforce his ties to his own family, and sends his servant to find a wife for Yitzchak from his relatives who live outside of Cannan.

This theme continues to play out in a fascinating way the servant encounters Rivka and her family. A close reading of the text reveals that the society in Padan Aram was of a different type than that of the land of Canaan, with different norms that, through Yitzhak's marriage to Rivka, and Yaakov's to Rachel and Leah, are eventually embraced by future generations of the People of Israel. The servant finds in that land a society that is not as patriarchal as other societies. It's family structure is not defined by the father and the father's household. Betuel, Rivka's father is almost hidden from the scene. When Rivka goes back to speak with her family she goes to "בֵּ֖ית אִמָּ֥הּ" – not just the literal "house of the mother," but rather her mother's household. This reflects a more matriarchal society where women had greater status (if not power), and where the household is defined in terms of the mother.

This comes up again later, when the family is ready to marry off Rivka, and her brother and mother say "נִקְרָ֥א לַנַּעֲרָ֖ וְנִשְׁ֥מְעָה אֶת־פִּֽיהָ – let us find Rivka and ask if she wants to go." This is shocking, as halakha tells us that a father can marry off his daughter who is a minor, and that her consent or lack of it is irrelevant (thankfully, this halakha is not implemented today!). And yet Rivka here is asked whether or not she actually wants to go through with the marriage. Rashi, quoting Bereshit Rabbah, says that we learn a principle from this story – that one cannot send off his daughter to her husband until she says "yes, I want that man." Rashi goes on to say that Rivka was even more assertive than that. When she responds, "I will go," she is saying "I will act on my own; I will go whether you approve or not." This concept of involving the daughter in the decision of marriage is incorporated into later halakha, or at least halakhic norms. The Talmud tells us that even though a man can betroth his daughter to another man without her permission, he should not do so unless and until she says, "That is the man that I want to marry." In the end, we embrace a dimension of an outside society into our understanding of who we are as a people and what we value.

This can also be seen in the following parasha. When Toldot opens, we find Rivka directly approaching G-d to ask about the children who are struggling in her womb. This is the first time in the Torah that a woman speaks directly to God, and God then responds directly to her! This theme is echoed later in Tanakh, when Chana speaks directly to G-d to pray for a child. It is then prayer and the way in which she prayed that became a model for the halakhic form of prayer!

Rachel and Leah, like Rivka, also bring aspects of this matriarchal society into our self-understanding as a people. When they say to Yaakov, "Do we anymore have a portion in our father's house?!" it is clear that they were expecting to have a share in the inheritance. The echo of this can be heard when the daughters of Tzelafchad come to ask to inherit their father's estate – a request which is endorsed by God and incorporated into the halakha.

In our interaction with the outside society, there are elements that we have chosen to embrace. Rather than saying that all aspects of the larger society are to be seen as hostile, we have shown that we can identify elements which deeply resonate with the Torah. We discover that these are in fact Torah values, values which are a part of our morality and ethics, but which we might have been blind to were it not for these generative interactions with other societies.

All of this was made possible through our welcoming of these "foreigners," – people to whom we were related, yes, but also people with quite different norms and practices. By embracing these outsiders, our society became richer, more multi-dimensional, and more nuanced. While a minority religion might have to create certain boundaries to avoid assimilation, there is much to be gained by being open to those outside of us. Immigrants, foreigners who come to live with us, bring dimensions of their societies which enrich us and which can be transformative to our self-understanding. In the Jewish context, these contributions become part of Jewish tradition and halakha, and were discovered to have been a true part of the Torah all along.

Shabbat Shalom

https://library.yctorah.org/2020/11/insiders-and-outsiders/

Chayei Sora: When Opportunity Knocks

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2020 Teach 613

Rabbi Akiva's students were having a rough day. Perhaps they had been up late the night before diligent in their studies. Or, perhaps they had been up late helping out at home. No matter. It looked like it was going to be one sleepy day in the yeshiva. Rabbi Akiva decided to get their attention.

Rabbi Akiva asked: What did Esther see that enabled her to rule over 127 provinces?
Rabbi Akiva replied: Esther looked at the 127 years of Sora's life. That is what empowered her.

The Medrash records this incident in Rabbi Akiva's life because it was apparently an effective way to wake up and galvanize the students. What is the deeper meaning behind comparing the provinces over which Esther ruled to the years that Sora lived?

One of the great traditions about Sora's life is that her years were all equally good [Rashi]. One wonders how Sora's life can be considered "good." Didn't she struggle through many challenges? For example, Sora wandered with Avraham for many years. She didn't have a child for many years although she desperately wanted one. She was taken captive by a king and held overnight. How can Sora's life be defined as "good"?

Apparently, despite the challenge, frustration, and possibly even pain, Sora was able to realize that life is meant to be lived to the max. In the life situations in which Hashem places us, we are meant to be the best we can be. Perhaps, one day--later--we will be shown why we had to go through a difficult chapter of life. Maybe it was a gateway to be well positioned for future blessing. Perhaps there was a different reason. But, either way, our job during the challenging time is to be the best we can be.

Esther, of the Purim story, found herself in a difficult situation. She was taken by force to be held by the king, to be his queen. Esther could easily have succumbed to her situation as queen over 127 provinces. She could easily have become depressed over the situation as a captive in the king's palace. She could have viewed her queenship over the provinces as 127 problems. Or, she could have dropped her Judaism and Jewish identity in an effort to blend in. "What made her rise above the situation, and remain a loyal, well focused person who ruled over her situation as queen of 127 provinces?" wondered Rabbi Akiva to his students.

Rabbi Akiva answered, "Esther looked at the 127 years of Sora's life," which were also challenging. Yet, our tradition about Sora is that she viewed her life as "good." Somehow she maintained the perspective that if Hashem placed me in this situation, it is my job to be at my best. Every challenge is an opportunity to be the best we can be. "Just as Sora was held captive in a king's palace," Esther thought, "So am I held captive. Just as Sora stayed strong and ruled on her situation, so must I. I must not let the challenge get the better of me."

Rabbi Akiva chose to share with his sleepy students this intriguing connection between Esther and Sora because he wanted them to become heartened and likewise try their best. Both Esther and Sora encountered challenging situations, maintained true to their ideals, and passed their respective tests with flying colors. But not all of life's challenges are so dramatic. Sometimes life challenges come in more mundane forms like feeling sleepy just as Rabbi Akiva is about to give the shiur. Rabbi Akiva's message is: True, you may be encountering hindrances which make it difficult for you to focus. Be empowered; rule over your situation. Do not let the situation rule over you.

The Chofetz Chaim (d. 1933) writes in a letter to the Cantonists (young Jewish boys who were kidnapped by the Czar to serve in the Russian army), that if they stay loyal to their Jewish upbringing even as the Czar tries to tear them away from it, they will look at these challenging years as the best years of their lives. This is true whenever we feel that challenges are knocking at us. Challenges are opportunities for us to shine. Hopefully we will one day see how the situation we were put in was to position us for great salvation. But either way- in the great challenges, and in the mundane ones- it is up to us to try to rule over the situation, with serenity, with equanimity, and with the enormous power of Hashem's salvation.

* Rav of Southeast Hebrrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.

How Old Are You? How Are You Old? Thoughts for Parashat Hayyei Sarah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

"And Abraham was old, well stricken in years" (Bereishith 24:1). The Hebrew phrase for "well stricken in years" is "ba bayamim" which literally means that Abraham came in days. When the Torah describes the elderliness of Abraham and Sarah, it uses similar wording: "And Abraham and Sarah were old, well stricken in years" (ba'im bayamim); literally, this means that Abraham and Sarah came in days, If the Torah informs us that Abraham is old (zaken) and that Abraham and Sarah are old (zekeinim), what is added by the words ba bayamim or ba'im bayamim? What do these words actually mean? How does one "come in days?"

While "ba bayamim" may simply be an idiomatic expression for emphasizing elderliness, it might also be alluding to something else, something far more important. Scientists who have studied the aging process have found that human aging can be evaluated in different ways. The chronological age records the number of years of a person's life. That is an objective fact. However, there are other measures of aging as well; and these measures vary from person to person and are not entirely correlated to chronological age.

Physiological age refers to one's physical health and physical condition. There are people who may be young chronologically but whose bodies are already "old." A person aged 40 may have the physical features of a person aged 80. They are in poor health. Their muscles are flabby. Their body signs indicate physical deterioration. Others, though,may be chronologically old but are in terrific shape; their muscles are well-toned; their body signs are much "younger" than their chronological age. They may be 80 chronologically, but their bodies have the vitality and strength of someone much younger.

Another measure of the aging process relates to emotional/psychological age. Some people are chronologically young but their minds are tired and depressed. They plod through life unenthusiastically and mechanically, lacking energy and direction. Others, though, may be chronologically old but they are emotionally and psychologically quite young. They live with energy and purpose; they have intellectual curiosity; they yearn to grow in learning and experience. They may look "old" on the outside; but inside they are brimming with vitality.

When Abraham and Sarah are described as zaken/zekeinim, this refers to their chronological ages. But when the Torah adds the words "ba bayamim/ba'im bayamim" it may be teaching us that Abraham and Sarah were living actively, making every day count. They were physiologically, emotionally and psychologically much younger than their chronological ages. They did not live passive lives waiting for their days to pass. Rather, they "came in days," i.e. they actively greeted each day, they were ready for new challenges and new adventures.

This interpretation is borne out by the Torah narratives themselves. Right after Abraham and Sarah are described as being old and ba'im bayamim, the Torah informs us that Abraham aged 100 and Sarah aged 90 are going to have a baby! As old as they were chronologically, they were ready to start a new phase in life with the energy and enthusiasm of a young couple awaiting their first child. When the Torah tells us that Abraham was old and "ba bayamim," he was busy making plans to marry off his son, Isaac. Abraham was at least 137 years old then—but was very much alive, very much involved in the doings of his family and his society.

Although the chronological aging process is automatic and beyond human control, the physiological, emotional and psychological aging processes can be influenced by human intervention. Humans can lower their physiological ages by exercising, staying fit, eating healthfully. Humans can lower their psychological/emotional ages by keeping alert mentally, by continuing to learn, by keeping focused on new goals to accomplish. Abraham and Sara "came in days"—they dealt with each day actively and purposefully. This is an important lesson for all human beings to learn. It's not just a question of how old you are, but of how you are old!

* Jewishideas.org. **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time**.

Book Review: Rabbi Marc Angel's Commentary on Pirkei Avot

By Rabbi Dr. Israel Drazin

Jews and non-Jews have recognized the practical wisdom of many of the sayings in Pirkei Avot, "The Ethics of the Fathers," and many Jews can quote its teachings from memory. Jews considered the Ethics of the Fathers so significant that many excellent commentaries have been written on the Ethics and the custom arose to read one chapter a week during the summer months.

But this Koren volume is unique in half a dozen ways that make it special. The Hebrew script and English translation are broken down, as is usual in Koren books, into easy to read phrases with excellent print. The translation of the six chapters by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is in modern English, with Rabbi Sacks sometimes paraphrasing the Hebrew text when it makes more sense to do so rather than presenting an awkward literal English translation. Rabbi Marc D. Angel has given a very learned introduction in which he points out, among much else, that "Great sages in ancient civilizations have provided teachings to help guide humanity to harmonious, happy, and wise lives. Among the wisest and most influential teachers were those of ancient Israel."

Rabbi Angel offers explanation of all of the wise ancient sayings, presenting both traditional commentaries as well as learned thoughts by others, Jews and non-Jews, which add depth to the teachings of the fathers. He supplements the wise lessons of the ancients with modern information such as the following. An Israeli Nobel Prize winner described the "illusion of validity": people tend to think their judgments are valid even when based simply on first impressions or relatively short observations and are often badly mistaken. A psychiatrist wrote that "We establish irrational ideals of the 'real' man and the 'right kind' of woman, which not only separates us more and more from our genuine potentialities, but in the long run also lead us into self-destructiveness." The philosopher of the late first and early second century CE, Epictetus, warned "Know you not that a good man does nothing for appearance sake but for the sake of having done right." An American scientist observed: "One human trait, urging us by our nature, is the drive to be useful."

Rabbi Angel adds historical information. He describes, for instance, the period of the Great Assembly (a congress of some seventy elders), followed by the Zuggot (leadership by the pairs), followed by the governance by descendants of the family of Hillel, and gives biographical data about each man mentioned in the book. He notes that the Ethics "represents different generations and historical conditions in the Land of Israel," and he explains the differences. He describes five periods. He tells how there are sayings of nineteen sages who lived prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE; sixteen who flourished from 70 through the early second century when Israel was under the harsh dominion of Rome; fourteen between the early second century through the Bar Kokhba rebellion against Rome in 132-135; eleven sages following the rebellion through the late second century; and eight scholars who lived between the late second century through the early third century; sixty eight wise men in all.

The book is filled with a wealth of other information, inspiring stories, and the results of psychological experiments. For example: the psychologist Erich Fromm noted that most people fail in life because they are unable to make a decision when they come to metaphorical forks in the road; people are so impressed by being watched that when a picture of two eyes is painted on an honor box to pay for beverages, people paid more than twice as much for their drinks; nations perish when its people forget where they came from.

In short, while other commentaries on Pirkei Avot have much to offer, this volume will teach readers very much in an interesting, thought-provoking, and enjoyable manner.

*** Jewishideas.org. Note: it is useful to revisit the Koran Pirkei Avot, with English translation by Rabbi Sacks and commentary by Rabbi Marc Angel, now during shiva for Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l. This volume is available through the online store at jewishideas.org.**

Parshas Chayei Sarah

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

As the Torah completes the lessons we are to learn from the life of our forefather Avrohom, we are gifted with one more powerful lesson. One of the final acts of Avrohom is to determine what will be with the vast inheritance he leaves behind. The Torah tells us that he gave all that he had to Yitzchok and gave gifts to his other children. He then sent his other children away from Yitzchok while he still lived. (Bereishis 25:5-6)

The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 61:6) quotes Rabi Chama who notes that even as Avrohom clearly declared Yitzchok as his rightful heir, there is a glaring omission. Avrohom gave his possessions to Yitzchok, but there is no mention of blessings. After Avrohom dies, the Torah tells us that Hashem himself blessed Yitzchok. (Bereishis 25:11) G-d gave our forefathers the power of blessings and these blessings held the keys to the future success of the Jewish nation. Indeed, it was these blessings which lay at the center of the rivalry between Yaakov and Esav. It was these blessings that Rivkah prophetically instructed Yaakov to secure. It was these blessings which caused Esav to cry out in anguish begging his father for some remnant of them. How can it be that Avrohom did not make sure to pass these blessings to Yitzchok? Once G-d had given him these blessings, surely it was his responsibility to pass them on, just as Yitzchok would later seek to do.

Rabi Chama explains with a parable. A king had an orchard which he left in the hands of a sharecropper. In the orchard were two trees which were inextricably intertwined. One of these trees produced an elixir of life, and one produced a poison. The sharecropper realized that if he waters the life-producing tree, then he will water the poisonous tree. If he does not water the poisonous tree, then the life-producing tree would die. The sharecropper decided that being only a sharecropper, it was not his decision to make. He would care for the rest of the orchard, and let the king decide how to handle these two trees when he returned.

Hashem had given Avrohom the blessings and the responsibility for the spiritual destiny of the world. But when Avrohom went to bless Yitzchok, he found spiritually poisonous trees intertwined – the descendants of Avrohom's other children. As Rash"i on the Medrash explains, if Avrohom were to bless Yitzchok, they would ask for blessings, as well. "How could I bless one, and leave them?" Avrohom, therefore, decided that he is only a "sharecropper" in G-d's world. He tended to all other spiritual matters of the world and then said, "I have already done mine. From here on, what G-d wants to do with His world, He should do."

This Medrash should give us great pause and cause us to reconsider much in our everyday lives. Avrohom's life mission was to lay the foundation for the Jewish nation which would bring the world to its spiritual destiny and he devoted his entire life to that cause. The future lay entirely in Yitzchok, and Yitzchok needed the blessings to carry on Avrohom's work laying that foundation. Did it really matter if Avrohom's other children wouldn't understand? Was Avrohom truly prepared to face G-d and say that he had chosen not to complete his life's mission, letting the blessings G-d had given him die with him? Moreover, could Avrohom have the audacity to say "I have already done mine" when he was not passing on the blessings as he should?

G-d does not allow us to slight another. Despite his lofty level, and having been promised the Jewish nation, Avrohom was never above G-d's law, no matter the issue. If giving blessings only to Yitzchok would slight his other children, then they would have to have blessings, as well. Avrohom, therefore, said "I have done mine", for there was truly no more that Avrohom could do. Avrohom is a shining example of what it means to live within G-d's world and accept our role within that world as G-d has given it to us. No matter how significant the moment, we must always consider the impact on others, and every nuance of G-d's law. We are only sharecroppers in G-d's world. At times, no matter the issue, we need to step aside and let G-d take over.

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Dvar Torah for Chayei Sarah: Tribute to Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

As the Jewish world reels from losing one of its guiding lights, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, I came upon a video of his made not long ago that encapsulated his outlook. It must have been recent as it was a recording of a zoom chat he did.

A Jewish lady on the call recounted (in her heavy British accent) how she had spoken with Rabbi Sacks before on the question of theodicy, i.e., why bad things happen to good people. At the time, he had told her that he did not feel ready to

speak to it. So she asked him on this call if he now had formulated an approach to this age-old conundrum, and he responded in the affirmative.

"God does not want us to know the answer. For if we would know the answer we would not seek to better the world and show compassion to those who have fallen on hard times."

A major theme in Rabbi Sacks's work is that Judaism is a religion of protest. God has tasked us with the all too human task of defying the natural order. Nature (especially a murder hornet) does not show mercy, forgive, or give charity. But we can.

Contrast this with the philosophy of Epictetus, who said:

> *The good man must submit to the legitimate order of the universe. The whole is better than the part; the city is better than the citizen. Since you are a part of the whole, you ought to put yourself in harmony with it. If the good man, could understand the future, he would accept even his own illness, mutilation, or death, with tranquility and satisfaction, knowing that the order of the universe wishes it thus.*

Turnus Rufus, a Roman governor, reflected this sentiment when he asked Rabbi Akiva (Bava Batra 10a) "If God loves the poor, why would he not use his Godly power to enrich them." Indeed many modern atheists including Stephen Fry say that if God does exist he is immoral for allowing terrible travesties like disease, murder, and genocide to take place on this earth. Even people who believe in God have asked this question at some point or another, whether explicitly or as a quiet undercurrent at the backs of their minds.

We could delve into different philosophies of theodicy, but Rabbi Akiva gives the Ockham's razor approach that Rabbi Sacks gave. He tells Turnus Rufus that God does not help the poor person so that we could help him. God wants us to be his partner in perfecting the world. God cares enough about us to give us the space to protest against His natural order and uplift those it forgot.

These were the types of global yet personal insights (along with plenty of support from all other fields of knowledge) that Rabbi Sacks brought to the wider community from our Torah tradition. I often heard people describe Rabbi Sacks as the rabbi of the world. His multiple appearances in front of the UN and on the world stage helped solidify that conception. But what really made him worthy of the title was his ability to bring Torah truths into a prominent seat at the table in world issues. In a world where religion and spirituality always seem to be playing defense, Rabbi Sacks showed how the timeless values of our Biblical teachings serve as a valuable partner and balancer of the modern forces of science and technology. We are a valuable partner to God and we are an invaluable source of knowledge to the world.

By playing offense, Rabbi Sacks made the ultimate sanctification of God's name. Through the path he blazed, we will walk. May his memory be for a blessing.

Shabbat Shalom!

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Rav Kook Torah
Chayei Sarah: Princess of Her People and the Entire World

Universal Message

God changed both Abraham and Sarah's names: Abram to Abraham, and Sarai to Sarah. What is the significance of this name change? The Talmud in Berachot 13a explains that both changes share a common theme.

The name Abram means "father of Aram." At first, Abraham was only a leader of the nation of Aram, but in end, he became a spiritual leader for the entire world. Thus, he became Avraham — "Av hamon goyim," the father of many nations.

The name Sarai means “my princess.” In the beginning, she was only a princess for her own people. In the end, though, she became Sarah — “the princess” — the princess of the entire world.

In other words, the teachings of Abraham and Sarah were transformed from a local message to a universal one. Yet the Talmud tells us that there was a fundamental difference in these name changes. One who calls Abraham by his old name has transgressed a positive commandment. No such prohibition, however, exists for using Sarah’s old name. Why?

Abraham’s Thought, Sarah’s Torah

Rav Kook distinguished between the different approaches of these two spiritual giants. Abraham’s teachings correspond to the philosophical heritage of Judaism. He arrived at belief in the Creator through his powers of logic and reasoning, and used arguments and proofs to convince the people of his time. As Maimonides (Laws of Idolatry 1:9,13) wrote, “The people would gather around him and question him about his words, and he would explain to each one according to his capabilities, until he returned him to the way of truth.”

The Torah of Sarah, on the other hand, is more closely aligned with good deeds, proper customs, and practical mitzvot. Thus, the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 60:15) emphasizes the physical signs of her service of God — a cloud hovering at the entrance to the tent, a blessing in the dough, and a lamp burning from one Sabbath eve to the next.

The philosophical content of Judaism is universal in nature. Abraham’s ideals — monotheism, chesed, helping others - are relevant to all peoples. It is important that Abraham be recognized as a world figure in order to stress the universal nature of his teachings. He must be called Abraham, “the father of many nations.”

Practical mitzvot, on the other hand, serve to strengthen and consolidate the national character of the Jewish people. From Sarah, we inherited the sanctity of deed. These actions help develop the unique holiness of the Jewish people, which is required for the moral advancement of all nations. In this way, Sarah’s Torah of practical deeds encompasses both the national and universal spheres. Sarah, while “the princess” of the world, still remained “my princess,” the princess of her people.

(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 51-52. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 69.)

The Kindness of Strangers (Chayei Sarah 5775)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

In 1966 an eleven-year-old black boy moved with his parents and family to a white neighbourhood in Washington.[1] Sitting with his two brothers and two sisters on the front step of the house, he waited to see how they would be greeted. They were not. Passers-by turned to look at them but no one gave them a smile or even a glance of recognition. All the fearful stories he had heard about how whites treated blacks seemed to be coming true. Years later, writing about those first days in their new home, he says, “I knew we were not welcome here. I knew we would not be liked here. I knew we would have no friends here. I knew we should not have moved here . . .”

As he was thinking those thoughts, a white woman coming home from work passed by on the other side of the road. She turned to the children and with a broad smile said, “Welcome!” Disappearing into the house, she emerged minutes later with a tray laden with drinks and cream-cheese and jelly sandwiches which she brought over to the children, making them feel at home. That moment – the young man later wrote – changed his life. It gave him a sense of belonging where there was none before. It made him realise, at a time when race relations in the United States were still fraught, that a black family could feel at home in a white area and that there could be relationships that were colour-blind. Over the years, he learned to admire much about the woman across the street, but it was that first spontaneous act of greeting that became, for him, a definitive memory. It broke down a wall of separation and turned strangers into friends.

The young man, Stephen Carter, eventually became a law professor at Yale and wrote a book about what he learned that day. He called it Civility. The name of the woman, he tells us, was Sara Kestenbaum, and she died all too young. He adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew. “In the Jewish tradition,” he notes, such civility is called “chesed – the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image

of God." Civility, he adds, "itself may be seen as part of chesed: it does indeed require kindnesses toward our fellow citizens, including the ones who are strangers, and even when it is hard." To this day, he adds, "I can close my eyes and feel on my tongue the smooth, slick sweetness of the cream cheese and jelly sandwiches that I gobbled on that summer afternoon when I discovered how a single act of genuine and unassuming civility can change a life forever."

I never knew Sara Kestenbaum, but years after I had read Carter's book I gave a lecture to the Jewish community in the part of Washington where she had lived. I told them Carter's story, which they had not heard before. But they nodded in recognition. "Yes," one said, "that's the kind of thing Sara would do."

Something like this thought was surely in the mind of Abraham's servant, unnamed in the text but traditionally identified as Eliezer, when he arrived at Nahor in Aram Naharaim, northwest Mesopotamia, to find a wife for his master's son. Abraham had not told him to look for any specific traits of character. He had simply told him to find someone from his own extended family. Eliezer, however, formulated a test:

> *Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness [chesed] to my master."* (Gen. 24: 12-14?)

His use of the word chesed here is no accident, for it is the very characteristic he is looking for in the future wife of the first Jewish child, Isaac, and he found it in Rivka.

It is the theme, also, of the book of Ruth. It is Ruth's kindness to Naomi, and Boaz's to Ruth that Tenakh seeks to emphasize in sketching the background to David, their great-grandson, who would become Israel's greatest king. Indeed the sages said that the three characteristics most important to Jewish character are modesty, compassion and kindness.[2] chesed, what I have defined elsewhere as "love as deed,"[3] is central to the Jewish value system.

The sages based it on the acts of God himself. Rav Simlai taught: "The Torah begins with an act of kindness and ends with an act of kindness. It begins with God clothing the naked: "The Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them," and it ends with Him caring for the dead: "And He [God] buried [Moses] in the Valley."[4]

Chesed – providing shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry, assistance to the poor, visiting the sick, comforting mourners and providing a dignified burial for all – became constitutive of Jewish life. During the many centuries of exile and dispersion Jewish communities were built around these needs. There were hevrot, "friendly societies," for each of them.

In seventeenth century Rome, for example, there were seven societies dedicated to the provision of clothes, shoes, linen, beds and warm winter bed coverings for children, the poor, widows and prisoners. There were two societies providing trousseaus, dowries and the loan of jewellery to poor brides. There was one for visiting the sick, another bringing help to families who had suffered bereavement, and others to perform the last rites for those who had died – purification before burial, and the burial service itself. Eleven fellowships existed for educational and religious aims, study and prayer, another raised alms for Jews living in the Holy Land, and others were involved in the various activities associated with the circumcision of newborn boys. Yet others provided the poor with the means to fulfil commands such as mezuzot for their doors, oil for the Hanukkah lights, and candles for the Sabbath.[5]

Chesed, said the sages, is in some respects higher even than tzedakah:

> *Our masters taught: loving-kindness [chesed] is greater than charity [tzedakah] in three ways. Charity is done with one's money, while loving-kindness may be done with one's money or with one's person. Charity is done only to the poor, while loving-kindness may be given both to the poor and to the rich. Charity is given only to the living, while loving-kindness may be shown to the living and the dead.[6]*

Chesed in its many forms became synonymous with Jewish life and one of the pillars on which it stood. Jews performed kindnesses to one another because it was "the way of God" and also because they or their families had had intimate experience of suffering and knew they had nowhere else to turn. It provided an access of grace in dark times. It softened the blow of the loss of the Temple and its rites:

> *Once, as R. Yohanan was walking out of Jerusalem, R. Joshua followed him. Seeing the Temple in ruins, he cried, "Woe to us that this place is in ruins, the place where atonement was made for Israel's iniquities." R. Yohanan said to him: "My son, do not grieve, for we have another means of atonement which is no less effective. What is it? It is deeds of loving-kindness, about which Scripture says, 'I desire loving-kindness and not sacrifice'*" (Hosea 6:6).[7]

Through chesed, Jews humanised fate as, they believed, God's chesed humanises the world.

It also added a word to the English language. In 1535 Myles Coverdale published the first-ever translation of the Hebrew Bible into English (the work had been begun by William Tyndale who paid for it with his life, burnt at the stake in 1536). It was when he came to the word chesed that he realised that there was no English word which captured its meaning. It was then that, to translate it, he coined the word "loving-kindness."

The late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel used to say, "When I was young I admired cleverness. Now that I am old I find I admire kindness more." There is deep wisdom in those words. It is what led Eliezer to choose Rivka to become Isaac's wife and thus the first Jewish bride. Kindness brings redemption to the world and, as in the case of Stephen Carter, it can change lives. Wordsworth was right when he wrote that the "best portion of a good man's [and woman's] life" is their "little, nameless, unremembered, acts / Of kindness and of love."[8]

Footnotes:

[1] Stephen Carter, Civility, New York: Basic Books, 1999, 61-75.

[2] Bamidbar Rabbah 8: 4.

[3] Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World, 44-56.

[4] B. T. Sotah 14a

[5] Israel Abrahams, Jewish Life in the Middle Ages, London, Edward Goldston, 1932, 348-363.

[6] B. T. Sukkah 49b.

[7] Avot de-Rabbi Natan, 4.

[8] From his poem, 'Tintern Abbey.'

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. *See:* https://rabbisacks.org/kindness-strangers-chayei-sarah-5775/

Eve, Noah, Sarah: Sin, Stupor, Serenity

By Menachem Feldman*

From the dawn of history, people have been searching for a sense of joy, which is as elusive as it is desirable.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden in a state of tranquility and spiritual enlightenment, free of worry and hardship, they were unsatisfied, and therefore susceptible to the temptation of the forbidden fruit:

> *The woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise. So she took of its fruit, and she ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate*.1

According to the Kabbalah, what Eve wanted more than anything was not the fruit per se, but rather a feeling of the subjective self. In Eden there was no feeling of self, only an awareness of the Divine Presence. The serpent showed Eve that one could experience a sense of self, which created desire. Fulfilling one's own desire and pleasure, argued the serpent, is the way joy can be achieved. Unfortunately, experiencing the sense of ego resulted in tragic consequences. In a matter of a few generations humanity had deteriorated, the world was filled with moral corruption, and G d brought the Flood upon the earth.

As soon as Noah disembarked from the ark, we read:

> *Noah began to be a master of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent*.2

Noah was not some simple drunk who was finally able to get back to the bottle after a full year in the ark. Drinking wine was Noah's attempt to correct the spiritual effect of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, which brought about the moral depravity that ultimately led to the Flood. Noah understood that ever since Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, mankind possessed the feeling of self, which among other things focused their attention on their own needs. This led to selfishness, which robbed them of happiness. For the ego is never satisfied with what it has: however much it has, it always desires more.

Noah wanted to reverse the course of human psychology. He desired to break free of the confines of the ego, and at least temporarily escape the feeling of self. He hoped that getting drunk would suspend the sense of self and would bring about bliss and joy.

Very quickly, however, Noah learned that the route to joy is not the suspension of consciousness through consuming alcohol. That episode did not end well.

And then came Sarah our matriarch. According to the Kabbalists, Sarah was the first person to achieve the wholesome experience of a joyous life. She was the first to "correct" the negative behaviors of Eve and of Noah. Sarah understood that the path to joy does not run through the experience of self, like the pleasure of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, nor can it be achieved by escaping self-awareness, as Noah attempted to do. Sarah understood that while we cannot go back in time and return to Eden, and while we cannot liberate ourselves from the sense of self, we can achieve joy by devoting ourselves to something greater than us. When our sense of self is part of a transcendent experience, we are able to escape the ego without destroying awareness.

As a consequence of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, G d told Eve, "In sadness you shall bear children."3 For in a world where people perceive themselves, there is pleasure but also sadness. Yet many generations later Sarah understood that devoting oneself to raising a child, devoting oneself to a purpose beyond one's own self, is a model for becoming holy and achieving joy. Indeed, when Sarah gave birth, her son was named Isaac, which means "joy" and "laughter." She modeled the transformation from pain to joy, not only for herself but also for everyone around her, as the Torah relates, "Sarah said, 'G d has made joy for me; whoever hears will rejoice over me.'"4

Sarah teaches us that in order to transcend the ego, which stifles joy, one must transcend oneself by becoming part of a greater story and a greater mission, a mission to make the world a better place by carrying out the divine purpose of creation.5

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 3:6.

2. Ibid. 9:20–21.

3. Ibid. 3:16.

4. Ibid. 21:6.

5. Adapted from the teachings of the Rebbe, Maamar Vayihyu Chayei Sarah 5741.

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Chayei Sarah: Rebecca

By Chana Weisberg*

In this week's Torah portion, we are introduced to our matriarch, Rebecca.

Our Sages applied to her the verse (Song of Songs 2:2):

> As a rose among the thorns,
> so is my beloved among the daughters.

Rebecca is considered to be the proverbial "rose among thorns," growing up in a corrupt home and conniving society.

As the rose petals rub against its thorns, the roses emit their pleasant fragrance. Similarly, Rebecca's thorny background enabled her to become her greatest self.

From a tender age, Rebecca witnessed lying, deceit, and duplicity. Yet instead of succumbing to evil and allowing it to become a part of her psyche, it sensitized her to the bankruptcy of a G-dless way of life.

All too often nowadays, we justify every failing we have by laying the blame on our circumstances. Perhaps we were born into a dysfunctional family bereft of warmth and positive emotions; perhaps our spouse is cold or indifferent and doesn't provide the psychological support we need and deserve; perhaps our education didn't meet today's standards and career goals, and prevents us from achieving success.

While all this may be true, from Rebecca we learn how to thrive despite adversity by utilizing shortcomings to our advantage.

But Rebecca didn't only overcome the negativity of her background; she exploited its negativity, its thorns and prickles, to develop a keen perception and awareness of evil. This later enabled her to determine the true character of her sons and to make a monumental decision that would forge the path of history when it came time for Isaac to bless them.

Rebecca's life story teaches us that sometimes it's the prickles, thorns, and shakeups that life so disturbingly throws at us that can bring out the best in each of us.

-- From: Shabbas DeLights *

* **Shabbat DeLights** is a collection of essays on the Torah portion by acclaimed author, editor and teacher, Chana Weisberg.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

Likutei *Divrei* Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

We wish to dedicate this issue to the blessed memory
of Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, z"l
whose wisdom and eloquence guided us
and will continue to inspire generations to come.
Ted and Shoshana Plavin
Elkana, Israel

Volume 27, Issue 5 **Shabbat Parashat Chayei Sarah** **5781 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

To Have a Why

The name of our parsha seems to embody a paradox. It is called Chayei Sarah, "the life of Sarah," but it begins with the death of Sarah. What is more, towards the end, it records the death of Abraham. Why is a parsha about death called "life"? The answer, it seems to me, is that – not always, but often – death and how we face it is a commentary on life and how we live it.

Which brings us to a deeper paradox. The first sentence of this week's parsha of Chayei Sarah, is: "Sarah's lifetime was 127 years: the years of Sarah's life." A well-known comment by Rashi on the apparently superfluous phrase, "the years of Sarah's life," states: "The word 'years' is repeated and without a number to indicate that they were all equally good." How could anyone say that the years of Sarah's life were equally good? Twice, first in Egypt, then in Gerar, she was persuaded by Abraham to say that she was his sister rather than his wife, and then taken into a royal harem, a situation fraught with moral hazard.

There were the years when, despite God's repeated promise of many children, she was infertile, unable to have even a single child. There was the time when she persuaded Abraham to take her handmaid, Hagar, and have a child by her, which caused her great strife of the spirit.[1] These things constituted a life of uncertainty and decades of unmet hopes. How is it remotely plausible to say that all of Sarah's years were equally good?

That is Sarah. About Abraham, the text is similarly puzzling. Immediately after the account of his purchase of a burial plot for Sarah, we read: "Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything" (Gen. 24:1). This too is strange. Seven times, God had promised Abraham the land of Canaan. Yet when Sarah died, he did not own a single plot of land in which to bury her, and had to undergo an elaborate and even humiliating negotiation with the Hittites, forced to admit at the outset that, "I am a stranger and temporary resident among you" (Genesis 23:4). How can the text say that God had blessed Abraham with everything?

Equally haunting is its account of Abraham's death, perhaps the most serene in the Torah: "Abraham breathed his last and died at a good age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people." He had been promised that he would be become a great nation, the father of many nations, and that he would inherit the land. Not one of these promises had been fulfilled in his lifetime. How then was he "satisfied"?

The answer again is that to understand a death, we have to understand a life.

I have mixed feelings about Friedrich Nietzsche. He was one of the most brilliant thinkers of the modern age, and also one of the most dangerous. He himself was ambivalent about Jews and negative about Judaism.[2] Yet one of his most famous remarks is both profound and true: He who has a why in life can bear almost any how.[3]

(In this context I should add a remark he made in The Genealogy of Morality that I have not quoted before. Having criticised other sacred Scriptures, he then writes: "the Old Testament – well, that is something quite different: every respect for the Old Testament! I find in it great men, heroic landscape and something of utmost rarity on earth, the incomparable naivety of the strong heart; even more, I find a people."[4] So despite his scepticism about religion in general and the Judaeo-Christian heritage in particular, he had a genuine respect for Tanach.)

Abraham and Sarah were among the supreme examples in all history of what it is to have a Why in life. The entire course of their lives came as a response to a call, a Divine voice, that told them to leave their home and family, set out for an unknown destination, go to live in a land where they would be strangers, abandon every conventional form of security, and have the faith to believe that by living by the standards of righteousness and justice they would be taking the first step to establishing a nation, a land, a faith and a way of life that would be a blessing to all humankind.

Biblical narrative is, as Erich Auerbach said, "fraught with background," meaning that much of the story is left unstated. We have to guess at it. That is why there is such a thing as Midrash, filling in the narrative gaps. Nowhere is this more pointed than in the case of the emotions of the key figures. We do not know what Abraham or Isaac felt as they walked toward Mount Moriah. We do not know what Sarah felt when she entered the harems, first of Pharaoh, then of Avimelech of Gerar. With some conspicuous exceptions, we hardly know what any of the Torah's characters felt. Which is why the two explicit statements about Abraham – that God blessed him with everything, and that he ended life old and satisfied – are so important. And when Rashi says that all of Sarah's years were equally good, he is attributing to her what the biblical text attributes to Abraham, namely a serenity in the face of death that came from a profound tranquillity in the face of life. Abraham knew that everything that happened to him, even the bad things, were part of the journey on which God had sent him and Sarah, and he had the faith to walk through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil, knowing that God was with him. That is what Nietzsche called "the strong heart."

In 2017, an unusual book became an international bestseller. One of the things that made it unusual was that its author was ninety years old and this was her first book. Another was that she was a survivor both of Auschwitz, and also of the Death March towards the end of the war, which in some respects was even more brutal than the camp itself.

The book was called The Choice and its author was Edith Eger.[5] She, together with her father, mother and sister Magda, arrived at Auschwitz in May 1944, one of 12,000 Jews transported from Kosice, Hungary. Her parents were murdered on that first day. A woman pointed towards a smoking chimney and told Edith that she had better start talking about her parents in the past tense. With astonishing courage and strength of will, she and Magda survived the camp and the March. When American soldiers eventually lifted her from a heap of bodies in an Austrian forest, she had typhoid fever, pneumonia, pleurisy and a broken back. After a year, when her body had healed, she married and became a mother. Healing of the mind took much longer, and eventually became her vocation in the United States, where she went to live.

On their way to Auschwitz, Edith's mother said to her, "We don't know where we are going, we don't know what is going to happen, but nobody can take away from you what you put in your own mind." That sentence became her survival mechanism. Initially, after the war, to help support the family, she worked in a factory, but eventually she went to university to study psychology and became a

psychotherapist. She has used her own experiences of survival to help others survive life crises.

Early on in the book she makes an immensely important distinction between victimisation (what happens to you) and victimhood (how you respond to what happens to you). This is what she says about the first: We are all likely to be victimised in some way in the course of our lives. At some point we will suffer some kind of affliction or calamity or abuse, caused by circumstances or people or institutions over which we have little or no control. This is life. And this is victimisation. It comes from the outside.

And this, about the second: In contrast, victimhood comes from the inside. No one can make you a victim but you. We become victims not because of what happens to us but when we choose to hold on to our victimisation. We develop a victim's mind – a way of thinking and being that is rigid, blaming, pessimistic, stuck in the past, unforgiving, punitive, and without healthy limits or boundaries.[6]

In an interview on the publication of the book, she said, "I've learned not to look for happiness, because that is external. You were born with love and you were born with joy. That's inside. It's always there."

We have learned this extraordinary mindset from Holocaust survivors like Edith Eger and Viktor Frankl. But in truth, it was there from the very beginning, from Abraham and Sarah, who survived whatever fate threw at them, however much it seemed to derail their mission, and despite everything they found serenity at the end of their lives. They knew that what makes a life satisfying is not external but internal, a sense of purpose, mission, being called, summoned, of starting something that would be continued by those who came after them, of bringing something new into the world by the way they lived their lives. What mattered was the inside, not the outside; their faith, not their often-troubled circumstances.

I believe that faith helps us to find the 'Why' that allows us to bear almost any 'How'. The serenity of Sarah's and Abraham's death was eternal testimony to how they lived.

[1] I deliberately omit the tradition (Targum Yonatan to Gen. 22:20) that says that at the time of the binding of Isaac, Satan appeared to her and told her that Abraham had sacrificed their son, a shock that caused her death. This tradition is morally problematic.
[2] The best recent study is Robert Holub, Nietzsche's Jewish Problem, Princeton University Press, 2015.
[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, Maxims and Arrows, 12.
[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morality, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 107.
[5] Edith Eger, The Choice, Rider, 2017.
[6] Ibid., 9.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Abraham was old, well-stricken in age…" (Gen. 24:1) In addition to their shared ideals, the symbiotic relationship between Abraham and Isaac includes a remarkable likeness in physical appearance. Interestingly, one of the consequences of their physical similarity is the basis for one of the most curious statements in the Talmud. On the verse in our portion, "Abraham was old, well-stricken in age", our Sages conclude that at this point in time, the symptoms of old age were introduced to the world [Talmud Bava Metzia 87a].

The reason? People seeking out Abraham would mistakenly address Isaac, and those seeking out Isaac would approach Abraham. Disturbed by the confusion, Abraham pleads for God's mercy to make him look old, and Abraham's plea is answered: a 120 year-old man will never again look like his 20 year-old son!

How do we understand why Abraham was so upset by this case of mistaken identities? After all, what's wrong with being mistaken for your son? Doesn't every aging parent dream of slowing down the aging process and remaining perpetually young?

We find the answers hidden between the lines of this teaching, in which the dialectic of the complex relationship between father and son is expressed. Despite our desire for closeness between the generations, a father must appear different from his son for two reasons.

First, it is so that he can receive the filial obligations due to him as the transmitter of life and tradition. This idea is rooted in the Biblical commandment that the younger generation honors the elder. In fact, the last will and testament of Rabbi Yehudah the Pious (12th Century Germany) forbade anyone from taking a spouse with the same first name as that of their parents. This, explained Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik zt'l, was to avoid giving the impression that a child would ever address a parent by their first name. We may be close to our parents, but they are not to be confused with our friends.

Second, the son must appear different from his father so that the son understands his obligation to add his unique contribution to the wisdom of the past. Abraham pleads with God that Isaac's outward appearance should demonstrate that he is not a carbon copy of his father, but rather a unique individual. After all, when Isaac becomes a patriarch himself, he will represent the trait of gevurah, that part of God's manifestation of strength and justice that provides an important counterbalance to Abraham's trait of hesed (loving-kindness).

Abraham, the dynamic and creative world traveler, stands in contrast to the introspective and pensive Isaac, who never stepped beyond the sacred soil of Israel. With great insight, Abraham understood that unless the confusion in appearance ceased, Isaac might never realize the necessity of "coming into his own" and developing his own separate identity.

A Talmudic teaching of the pedagogic relationship between grandparents and grandchildren illustrates the importance of the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between the generations. Rabbi Hiya bar Abba states,"'Whoever hears Torah from his grandchild is equivalent to having received it from Sinai"! [Kiddushin 30a] This concept reveals that the line between Sinai and the present can be drawn in both directions. Not only do grandfathers pass down the tradition to their children and grandchildren, but grandchildren pass the tradition up to their forebears.

We can and must glean insights into the Torah from the younger generations. Consider the fascinating Talmudic passage that describes how, when Moses ascended on High to receive the Torah from the Almighty, the master of all prophets found God affixing crowns (tagim) to the holy letters of the law [Talmud, Menahot 29b]. When Moses inquired about their significance, God answered that the day would arrive when a great Sage, Rabbi Akiva, would derive laws from each twirl and curlicue.

Whereas Moses was given the fundamentals, namely the Biblical words and their crowns (corresponding to the laws and methods of explication and extrapolation), Rabbi Akiva, in a later generation, deduced necessary laws for his day, predicated upon the laws and principles that Moses received at Sinai.

This is the legitimate march of Torah that Maimonides documents in his introduction to his commentary of the Mishna, and it is the methodology by which modern-day responsa deal with issues such as electricity on the Sabbath, brain-stem death/life-support, and in-vitro fertilization, and more. The eternity of Torah demands both the fealty of the children to the teachings of the parents and the opportunity for the children to build on and develop that teaching. This duality of Sinai enhances our present-day experience.

Abraham prays for a distinctive old age to enable Isaac to develop his uniqueness. Sons and fathers are not exactly the same, even if many fathers would like to think that they are. Only if sons understand the similarity, and if fathers leave room for individuality, can the generations become truly united in Jewish eternity.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Sarah, Esther, and the Sleepy Students

Jews live their lives within the framework of the Jewish calendar. At this time of year, we identify strongly with the narratives contained in the weekly Torah portions that we read in the synagogue. Our thoughts are with the

biblical characters of the current parshiyot. We live in the company of Abraham and Sarah, Lot, Hagar and Ishmael, and Isaac and Rebecca.

If we are not thinking of the heroes and villains of the parsha of the week, we have an alternative. We can turn our thoughts to the recent holidays or to the ones which we shall soon celebrate. The holiday of Succoth is now part of the rapidly fading past, so we might be thinking of Chanukah, which is but a few weeks away. We are certainly not yet thinking of Purim.

The list of biblical heroines whose stories delight our children and inspire us at this time of year does not yet include Queen Esther. In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Chayei Sarah (Genesis 23:1-25:18), we do encounter two queenly women. We mourn the death of the matriarch Sarah, and we admire Rebecca's ability to live up to the spiritual standards of the mother-in-law she never met.

But Esther? There is neither trace nor hint of her existence.

So why would I be writing about Esther at this time of year? Purim is still many months away, and there are other female role models in the current Torah portions. Even Chanukah, which occurs much sooner than Purim, features feminine heroines such as Yehudit. Where does Esther shine in?

For the answer let us turn to the Midrash and to that singular sage, Rabbi Akiva. We know that Rabbi Akiva lived a remarkable life, underwent many changes, became a preeminent Torah scholar, and died a martyr.

The Midrash introduces us to Rabbi Akiva in reference to the very first verse in this week's Torah portion. It is a verse which seems to require no exegesis. The verse simply says, "Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years." What further explanation or commentary is necessary? She lived a long and productive life. What more is there to say?

To answer this question, we must remember that Rabbi Akiva was, first and foremost, a teacher. Like every teacher, he had a difficult task. Some students paid attention to Rabbi Akiva's lectures some of the time, but few, if any, listened attentively to every lecture. Like every teacher before and since, Rabbi Akiva had to devise methods to gain the attention of his disciples.

And so, the Midrash takes us into Rabbi Akiva's classroom. We really should consider this quite a privilege, for there are very few opportunities given in rabbinic literature to actually enter the classroom of one of our sages, let alone a sage as prominent as Rabbi Akiva.

Here is the Midrashic passage: "Rabbi Akiva was sitting and expounding Torah. His audience fell asleep. He tried to awaken them, and said, 'What motivated Queen Esther to reign over one hundred and twenty and seven provinces? We must assume that Esther, as a descendant of Sarah who lived for one hundred and twenty and seven years, considered it proper to reign over one hundred and twenty and seven provinces.'" (Bereshit Rabbah 58:3)

What are we to learn from this cryptic passage? To those of us who are teachers, there is a measure of comfort to be derived from learning that Rabbi Akiva too had difficulty maintaining the attention of his students. We also learn that his students were fully aware of the role that the number 127 plays both in the book of Genesis and in the book of Esther. We can assume that there is something about Rabbi Akiva's mention of this coincidence that awakened the sleepy classroom. But surely there is a much more profound lesson to be learned here.

Many commentators have searched for this deeper meaning. They point out that Sarah's life was a very full one, and at every stage she displayed the vigor of the seven-year-old child, the idealism of the twenty-year-old, and the wisdom of the aged centenarian. No moment went to waste. She led an active life, overcame numerous frustrations and obstacles, and prevailed. Her life was the paradigm of a life of meaning and accomplishment.

If there is a lesson to be learned from her life, it is that every year is valuable, and so is every month and every week and every day and every hour. If we are to translate 127 years into 127 provinces, then each year is an entire province, each month a region, each week a city, each day a neighborhood, each hour a street, each minute a building, and every second an entire room.

If one allows himself a second of slumber, he forfeits a room. If one sleeps for a week, he loses an entire city. Every segment of time represents a significant opportunity, and with every wasted moment opportunities are lost.

This is Rabbi Akiva's lesson to his sleepy students. "You're not merely dozing off and enjoying idle daydreams. You are wasting time, killing time, and in the process losing opportunities which will not present themselves again. If you miss a moment of a Torah lecture, you create a void that can never again be filled."

Rabbi Akiva's lesson is a lesson to all of us. In contemporary terms, it is a lesson about time management. Time is a gift, but it is an ephemeral gift. A moment lost can never be retrieved.

But Rabbi Akiva insists that this is not his lesson, but Sarah's lesson. It is the legacy that she left for her descendants. Queen Esther grasped that legacy. She did not assume the role of a passive queen, but actively reigned over all of her 127 provinces. She studied their needs, recognized their individual differences, and helped each of them best utilize their unique resources. As Grandmother Sarah valued each and every one of her years, so too did Esther value every one of her many provinces.

So must we all learn to utilize all of our blessings to the fullest, whether they be the blessing of longevity or the blessing of political power, the blessing of wealth or the blessing of grandchildren. Living a full life means appreciating all of our blessings and making the most of them.

What wonderful teachers we have had, and how differently and creatively they taught us these lessons. Sarah taught them in the context of the family tent. Esther taught them from her royal palace. Rabbi Akiva taught them from his classroom lectern.

Whatever our place in life, following their lessons will lead to a life of meaning and purpose, the kind of life for which we all strive.

Thus, although this week's Torah portion carries Sarah's name in its very title, she would be the first to make room for her progeny, Esther, to join her in teaching her lesson to us. Esther too has a place in Parshas Chayei Sarah.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Why Must We Treat a Dead Body with Respect?

Parshas Chayei Sarah is the first parsha in the Torah in which the Torah discusses the matter of burial. Previously, people certainly died, but there is not any mention of burial. In this week's parsha, we see the importance that Avraham Avinu attached to finding a proper burial site for his wife. He buried her in the Cave of Machpela. Even though we know that Adam and Chava are buried in the Cave of Machpela, Chayei Sarah is the first place the Torah actually records a person involving himself with the burial of another human being.

The truth of the matter is that we must understand that a body only has sanctity because it contains a living soul while we are living. Once the soul leaves our body, ostensibly we would say that the body has lost the source which gave it sanctity. Therefore, why do we need to treat a body with respect and properly bury a person who died? Offhand, we might argue that a body is simply an empty vessel. What gives a human body importance after the soul leaves it?

I saw the following suggestion in a Sefer called Machat shel Yad: The Halacha distinguishes between Tashmishei Mitzvah (items with which a person does a mitzvah, e.g. – Tsitsis, Lulav, Succah, etc.) and

Tashmishei Kedusha (items which involve Scriptural writing, e.g. – Sefer Torah, Tefillin, Mezuzah, etc.). After Succos, a person may theoretically throw out his Lulav and Esrog. The law is that Tashmishei Mitzvah do not retain sanctity, and after the completion of their use for the mitzvah performance, a person may discard them. (There is a nice custom to use the Lulav to burn the Chometz before Pesach, but this is only a custom and not a fundamental requirement.) Tashmishei Kedusha, however, remain eternally holy – even after the completion of their service in the performance of a mitzvah. Even if a Sefer Torah or Tefillin fall into water and become ruined, once they had sanctity, the sanctity remains forever.

The law of Tashmishei Kedusha prevails to such an extent that even items used as accessories to an item containing Torah pesukim (such as cloth coverings for Sifrei Torah) have sanctity even after they have become worn out, and must be buried rather than simply discarded.

What is the difference? The difference is that by Tashmishei Mitzvah, once the mitzvah is finished there is no more holiness. However, when the Name of G-d and words of Torah are written on parchment, the holiness remains forever.

This, he explains, is why a human body has sanctity even after death. Every Jew is a vehicle for Words of Torah. Just as parchment becomes holy forever, so too a Jew who spoke words of Divrei Torah, who said the words Shema Yisrael—his body now becomes like a Sefer Torah. Therefore, despite the fact that the soul has left, the words of holiness that were "inscribed" on that body during his lifetime put an eternal Kedusha on that body, for ever and ever.

With this concept, the author explains a very famous Talmudic passage. The Gemara [Berachos 17a] asks: "These women (who do not study Torah), how do they gain merit?" The Gemara answers: The fact that women help their husbands and children learn Torah—not only do they help them, but they wait for their husbands to return from learning and they wait for their children to come back from Cheder (the fact that they drive carpools and take their children to learn)—this is the source of women's reward for Torah study.

The Chofetz Chaim asks the obvious question: And when a woman does mitzvos, is that not a source of merit for her? Will a woman not get reward in the World to Come for giving charity? Women who pray to Hashem and do other acts of kindness do not get reward? That cannot be!

The Chofetz Chaim answers that the Gemara is not speaking about the World to Come. Certainly, women will get Olam haBah for every mitzvah they perform. The Gemara is talking about Techiyas HaMeisim [Resurrection of the Dead]. The Talmud [Ketuvot 111b] expounds from the pasuk "May Your dead come to life, may my corpses arise. Awake and shout for joy, you who rest in the dirt! For Your dew is like the dew that revives vegetation (tal oros talecha)…" [Yeshaya 26:19] Whoever utilizes the Light of Torah, the Light of Torah will revive him. To merit Resurrection, a person needs the "dew (i.e. – merit) of Torah". For fulfillment of all other mitzvos, indeed, a person will receive reward. However, Lulav, Esrog, Tefillah, etc. will not gain a person new life in the time of Resurrection. Techiyas HaMeisim requires the "dew of Torah" to revive him.

It follows that the Gemara poses a reasonable question: How will these women merit Resurrection? They do not study Torah! With what merit, then, will they receive Techiyas HaMeisim? The Gemara answers they do have the merit of Torah because they are enablers of Torah. Enablers of Torah, from a certain perspective, get even greater reward than those who engage in Torah learning itself. There is "enjoyment" in learning Torah, but there is no "enjoyment' in driving car pool. There is no "fun" in waiting for one's husband to return from learning. The husband's learning is enjoyable for him. Merely waiting for him is not so enjoyable.

In order to merit Techiyas HaMeisim, a person needs to possess the merit of Torah. Why? Because it is the merit of Torah that provides the person with the sanctity that makes him worthy of being revived at the time of Resurrection. We merit such revival because we are in effect Sifrei Torah, Kisvei Kodesh! The Zechus haTorah that women possess in an auxiliary fashion, in an enabling fashion, makes them into Kisvei haKodesh. Therefore, their bodies have eternal sanctity as well and that is why they too will rise at the time of Techiyas haMeisim.

Quoting Lavan's Words and Emulating His Motivation

One of the things we do at a Jewish wedding is called the "Badeken" [veiling of the bride]. If you have ever been by a "Badeken" you notice that the father of the Choson and the father of the Kallah bless the Kallah. What bracha [blessing] is given to the bride immediately before her Chuaph? Typically, we give the same blessing we give our daughters Friday night: May G-d make you like Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah (the Matriarchs). However, the official bracha that a person is supposed to give by the Badeken is the pasuk from this week's parsha: "Our sister, may you come to be thousands of myriads, and may your offspring inherit the gate of its foes." [Bereshis 24:60]

According to Halacha, the ancient custom was not that the fathers of the Choson and Kallah gave this bracha, but that the Elders of the City (Ziknei HaIr) came and gave her this bracha. This bracha originates from the bracha Lavan gave his sister, Rivka. A person might ask—we emulate the conniving Lavan? Of all the blessings in the Torah, this is what we say to a Kallah immediately preceding her going to the Chuppah? It seems strange, to say the least!

I saw an interesting observation. Usually, when your daughter, your sister, your relative goes to the Chuppah, you are thrilled. She is now getting married! A fine family! The whole works!

Lavan did not like this Shidduch—not one bit! Do you think he was happy that she was leaving? He tried to talk Eliezer out of immediately taking her back to Yitzchak. "Let the maiden remain with us days or a set of ten [months]; then she will go." [Bereshis 24:55] Lavan was into money. He did not want his sister to marry Yitzchak, who spent his time in prayer. "I do not want my sister to become some kind of Meah Shearim Rebbetzin! I am not happy with this!"

What does Lavan do? He overcame his prejudice, his hesitancy, and he gave a bracha entirely for the sake of heaven. He said, "I may not be happy with this shidduch; and I do not like this lifestyle; and this is not what you learned in your father's house; but I am giving you a bracha with a full heart." – "My sister, may you become the matriarch of thousands and tens of thousands!"

Therefore, when we say those words to our daughter and/or our future daughter-in-law by the Badeken, we are not giving Lavan's bracha. But rather, Lavan's bracha should be an inspiration to us that the true bracha is one in which the person who bestows the bracha does not expect to get anything out of it, an altruistic bracha. A bracha that is entirely for the sake of heaven. "For you—not for me. I get nothing out of this shidduch."

Sometimes a person may think that a shidduch will be helpful for him. No! That is not what I am interested in. It is a bracha entirely for HER benefit. That is the bracha that we must give a Kallah. We are not quoting Lavan, to borrow his words; we are quoting Lavan to emulate his motivation.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

So what was Yitzchak doing? In parashat Chayei Sarah we read how Avraham had sent his servant to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Yitzchak. Throughout the long absence of Eliezer, Yitzchak was keenly anticipating the result of the mission – what was he doing?

The Torah informs us 'V'Yitzchak Ba Mi'bo b'er L'Chai Ro'i V'hu Yosheiv B'eretz Hanegev' – Yitzchak had been living in the Negev which is the southern part of Israel and he travelled north to a place called B'er L'chai Ro'i.

'Vayeizei Yitzchak Lasuach Ba'sadeh lifnot arev' – from there he went to a field, and in that field he meditated (which means he davened) late in the afternoon. Sforno reminds us that B'er L'chai Ro'i was the same place to which Hagar took Yishmael after the two of them were banished from Avram and Sari's home. It was at B'er L'chai Ro'i that Hagar poured her heart out to Hashem, praying for him to save her child's life. It was there that her prayers were answered. Her eyes were opened and she saw a well of water in front of them.

So Yitzchak specifically wanted to daven to Hashem in a place where he knew He had previously answered prayers. From there he moved to 'Hasadeh' – 'the field' and we know from earlier on in the sedra that Avraham had purchased the cave of Machpela and the field that it was in. So therefore when the Torah says Hasadeh – the field, it must mean Chevron which indicates that Yitzchak went to visit the grave of his mother. And at that grave he poured out his heart – davening to Hashem. Not praying to his mother but through her so that Hashem should help Eliezer in his mission.

Now, the Torah tells us that he davened there 'lifnot arev' – towards the evening/late afternoon. And it's from here we learn that Yitzchak initiated the practice of davening in the afternoons – our Mincha prayer which we say every single afternoon was started then, by Yitzchak.

So therefore we are given a daily opportunity to learn some very important lessons from our patriarch Yitzchak. First of all, at critically important moments of our lives we need to turn heavenwards to Hashem. Secondly, where possible, it is appropriate that we choose to pray in a place which is known for prayers which have been successfully answered. And thirdly, to recognise the privilege that we have to be able to visit the graves of outstanding people of the past so that whilst davening to Hashem in those places, through the merit of those souls we should be blessed.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Rabbi Yehoshua Grunstein

"I am a resident alien among you"

We live and act according to the values of Abraham, our forefather. On the one hand, we are "residents", part and parcel of the wider world, like all other human beings. On the other hand, we are "aliens", strangers. A special nation. We have a unique Jewish lifestyle.

We are part of a world that is much larger than us, but we are still different. We are Jews. We used computers, smartphones and the like, but we keep them off on the Shabbat, and on holidays. So who are we? Are we part of the big wide world, though we follow certain special dietary rules or refrain from driving on certain days of the year, or are we Jews, outsiders, "oddballs", people who just happen to be living in this world? Which is wheat, and which is chaff?

I feel that the answer lies in the words of our forefather Abraham, the progenitor of the Jewish people. According to Maimonides Mishneh Torah, (The Laws of Idol Worship a/b and beyond), when Abraham introduces himself to the "People of Het", seeking a burial spot for his wife, he says: "I am an alien and resident among you" (Genesis 23:4).

I feel that nothing defines a Jew, who aspires to perfection as a human being and as a Jew, better than this ingenious expression: "an alien and resident".

Abraham is an "alien". He believes in a single G-d, follows a Jewish lifestyle, and is called Abraham Ha'ivri, "Abraham the Hebrew", for good reason, as we learn from Bereishit Rabbah, chapter 41: " '… and it was told to Abraham the Hebrew – R. Yehuda said: all the world is one side, Abraham is on the other." There is no comparison between a person who carefully separates milk and meat, refrains from working on holidays, prays 3 times a day, and abstains from food and drink on fast days, to someone else, whose world doesn't have any of these things.

Nonetheless, Abraham is also a "resident". He is part of the landscape, along with all of the nations who lived there at the time. He shares their experiences, such as the war of the four kings against the five kings, the attempt to save Sodom and Gomorrah from annihilation, and more. In other words, had Abraham lived at a time when the world was concerned about "global warming", he would have recycled paper and plastic, just like all of his neighbors.

Since then, we have been living according to the values of Abraham, our forefather (notably, our Amidah prayer, which we recite three times a day, beings with the words "the G-d of our fathers, the G-d of Abraham…"). On the one hand, we are "residents", part and parcel of the wider world, like all other human beings. On the other hand, we are "aliens", strangers. A special nation. We have a unique Jewish lifestyle.

According to Rabbi Avishai David's book, Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi's Conversations on the Weekly Parsha (pp. 57-58), Rabbi Soloveitchik asked if Abraham was part of their society, or if his value system clashed with theirs, producing an identity expressed in the phrase "I am an alien and resident among you", which Abraham used when addressing the people of Het. Rabbi Soloveitchik then suggested that in a certain sense, Abraham was part of them – a resident – since he participated in the local system of trade and industry and paid taxes. In other senses, he was and always remained a foreigner, totally different and separate – an alien.

Indeed, we live from day to day, carrying the same "identity card" we inherited from Abraham. We recite two blessings before the Shema prayer. The first focuses on the wider world, on Hashem as the creator of the world ("… who creates light and darkness… the creator of the lights"), or "and changes the seasons… brings in the nights"), echoing the fact that we are human beings like everyone else. We are part of this world. However, immediately afterwards, we recite the second blessing, which centers on the Jewish people, instead of the entire world ("You have loved us with a great love… who chooses His people, Israel, with love"). This doesn't concern the rest of the world around us. Rather, it focuses on our unique Jewish community. Only when these two concepts are connected – when we declare that we are part of the wider world (i.e. residents), though we are also a unique part of the global landscape (i.e. aliens), can we truly recite the Shema prayer twice a day, a prayer in which we once again emphasize both ideas.

Rabbi Joshua, the Son of Korhah, states: "Why was the section of "Shema" placed before that of "And it shall come to pass if you listen"? So that one should first accept upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and then take upon himself the yoke of the commandments. (Mishna, Tractate Berachot 2:2)

In the "global village" we all live in, I hope and pray that we continue the tradition passed down to us by our forefather Abraham, which teaches us that we must be both residents and aliens. Residents and guests, so that we can have an impact on the wider world, including the Jewish world, and so that we can come before our Maker, once our 120 years are up, and successfully stand trial for our actions during our lives, lives that encapsulate both "residency" and "alienness".

Rava said: After departing from this world, when a person is brought to judgment for the life he lived in this world, they say to him in the order of that verse: Did you conduct business faithfully? Did you designate times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you await salvation? Did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom or understand one matter from another? (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 31a)

Some of the items on this list are things that all human beings do, while others are uniquely "Jewish", such as designating times for Torah study, and more. This is the way, the only way, we can eventually approach Hashem and say to Him: "We've lived a complete life, the life of a resident and an alien".

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Torah is Real Gemilas Chassadim

She descended to the spring, filled her jug and ascended. The servant ran towards her and

said, “Let me sip please, a little, from your water jug.” She said, “Drink my lord” and she hurried, and lowered her jug to her hands and gave him drink. When she finished giving him drink, she said, “I will draw (water) even for your camels until they have finished drinking.” So she hurried and she emptied her jug into the trough and kept running to the well to draw (water) and she drew for all his camels. (Breishis 24:16- 20)

Rivka may not have known but she was auditioning for the position of Matriarch of the Jewish People. What was her test and how did she display her worthiness? Does she get the job because of her extra sensitivity and concern for animals?

The Mishne in Pirke Avos. There it is recorded there that Shimon HaTzadik was from the remnant of the Men of the Great Assembly and he used to say: “On three things the world stands on Torah, Service (Avodah), and Acts of Kindliness (Gemilas Chassadim).” What is “Gemilas Chassadim”? How is it different from just plain “Chessed”? Why not one word like the other pillars?

The Rambam says the main display of Gemilas Chessed is Levaya – escorting the guest. Giving food and drink feeds the animal soul while escorting a person affords dignity to the human being.

The Name of the letter GIMEL spells “Gamal”- a camel. What is the specialty of a camel? We all know that a camel is best suited to travel across arid lands because he can drink and store large amounts of water and remain for long periods of time removed from his source. He fuels up and is then able to be cut or dislocated from his source.

What is the first time that Gamal is mentioned in the Torah? Not by Eliezer and his 10 camels. The verse reads, “And the child (Yitzchok) grew and was (vayigmal) weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Yizchok was (higamel) weaned. (Breishis 21:8)

Why did Avraham make such a great celebration to honor the day that Yitzchok did not need to nurse from his mother Sara? Why does the Holy Torah bother to record it? Why did Avraham not make a party or a feast upon any other occasion? Gemilas Chassadim is a complete program to bring a person to maturity, giving him the ability to give. That escorts, builds, and dignifies a man in his life.

Rivka “emptied her jug into the trough” before running to fetch more water for the camels. Of all the matters in the universe why is it that this detail is included? Why did she first announce her intention to feed the animals before spilling the water into the trough and getting into high gear? What does this add? In a similar way Rivka preserved the inherent honor of the man Eliezer. He had requested a drink. She could have poured into another vessel or into his mouth but rather she gave him to drink from the jug directly in the most dignified fashion.

After this stranger drinks from her jug a new dilemma is born. Can she deliver home a jug out of which a stranger has just partaken?! It’s PAGAM! Rivka was alert to the fact that to spill out the water in front of him is insulting. Therefore Rivka cleverly announced her intentions first before emptying the jug into the water trough to spare him even a moment of personal discomfort.

Only then did she launch into her heroic activity to care for his ten camels, fueling them like ten Mack Trucks and all by hand. The whole giant effort may have included a desire to be economical as well as to quench some creaturely thirsts but it may have been mostly motivated by a desire to maintain to the dignity of the stranger. She was not tested on Chessed alone but rather Gemilas Chassadim which is the same numerical value as Torah, 611, because Torah is Real Gemilas Chassadim.

OU Dvar Torah

Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm’s “Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Genesis” co-published by OU Press and Maggid Publisher.

Parshat Chayei Sara: Frankness as Vice and as Virtue

Most people have mixed feelings with regard to that uncommon quality called frankness or candor – and that is as it should be. It is something no doubt to be admired, and all too rare in human relations. And yet it can, in the wrong hands, be misused for the wrong purposes and prove dangerous and disruptive. On the one hand, frankness is based on emet, truth, and our tradition teaches that the very seal and insignia of God is truth (Exodus Rabba 4:3). Frankness is a pre-requisite for clear and uncomplicated human and social relationships. Candor, while it may momentarily be annoying, ultimately proves to be the best guarantee of honorable living. It engenders a greater degree of truthfulness on the part of others as well. “Frankness,” said Emerson, “invites more frankness.” And, on the other hand, it can be a tool of the smug, self-certain, and even the malicious who tyrannize friend and foe alike by their disarming bluntness which goes by the name of frankness.

Perhaps, then, in order to view the quality of frankness from a greater perspective, we ought to recall the ethics of Judaism as taught by Maimonides, in which he gives us a philosophy of character. In general, Maimonides teaches that we should avoid the extremes of character and keep to the “derekh Hashem,” “the way of God,” which he also calls the “shevil hazahav,” “the golden path” (Hilkhot De’ot 1:7). In other words, one should generally follow the path of moderation, although in certain specific instances one may veer more toward one extreme than the other. So it is with the quality of truth-telling or frankness. The two extremes are, one, absolute candor even at the expense of another person’s happiness, sensitivity, and peace of mind, and two, so much kindness and deference to the feelings of people that the truth is never spoken in its fullness, and untruth begins to prevail. Following “the way of God” as explained by Maimonides, we would say that in general one ought to be moderate in his frankness, tempering his manner of expressing the truth with gentleness and sensitive concern for the feelings of others, but that in certain very special cases one must veer toward one of the extremes – in the case of truthfulness to the extreme of greater veracity, more direct frankness, and forthrightness.

One of those special cases where frankness must prevail even at the expense of temporary unhappiness is hinted at in Parashat Ḥayyei Sara, according to the brilliant interpretation of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the revered teacher at the Yeshiva of Volozhin, widely known by his initials, Netziv.A great tragedy marred the lives of Isaac and Rebecca. The next parasha tells of the painful confusion with regard to the blessings Isaac offered to his twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Apparently, Isaac favored Esau, and Rebecca preferred Jacob. In order to reserve Isaac’s blessing for Jacob and prevent its being wasted on Esau, Rebecca schemes with her son Jacob, persuading him to do something which runs against the whole grain of his character: to deceive his aged, blind father. The scheme is successful, but the end result is one of unrelieved anguish for all principals. Esau is left embittered, and more vagrant than ever. Jacob has soiled his soul and must flee from his brother into a long and bitter exile. Rebecca, the doting mother, is to die before she ever again sees her beloved Jacob. Isaac is confused and bewildered in the deep darkness that surrounds him in his blindness.

And yet, when we study and analyze the sidra carefully, we find that the tragedy is compounded by the fact that it was totally unnecessary. Isaac did not really favor Esau over Jacob. He merely wanted to prevent his total moral collapse. He wanted to salvage whatever shred of decency Esau still retained. He knew full well the difference in the characters of his two children. He, no less than his wife Rebecca, appreciated the saintliness of Jacob and suffered because of the wildness and sensuousness of Esau. He had never intended to give the blessing of Abraham to anyone but Jacob.

Why then the cross-purposes at which Isaac and Rebecca worked? If they were indeed in total agreement, why this deep and cutting tragedy that destroyed the happiness of the second Jewish family in all history? Because, the Netziv answers in his Emek haDavar, Rebecca never learned how to be frank with

her own husband. She was possessed of an inner inhibition which, despite her love for him, prevented free and easy communication with him. It was a congenital defect in her character. If only Rebecca had been frank with Isaac, if only she could have overcome her inhibitions and shyness and taken him into her confidence, they would have discovered that they do, after all, agree on fundamentals – and how much heartache would have been avoided!

And the Netziv sees this quality of restraint and suspiciousness in the very first act the Torah records of Rebecca when she first meets her prospective husband. When she is told by Eliezer that Isaac is coming toward them, what does she do? She slips off her camel, and she takes her veil and covers herself. This was not, says the Netziv, so much an act of modesty and shyness as much as a symbol of a lack of frankness, an uncommunicativeness that was to hamper her happiness the rest of her life. In all her dealings with her husband, she was metaphorically to veil her personality. That veiling presaged the lack of frankness, the restraint between the two. The veil became, in the course of years, a wall which grew ever larger and kept them apart and prevented them from sharing their deepest secrets, fears, loves, and aspirations.

Indeed, that is why the Torah tells us of certain domestic and seemingly purely private quarrels between Sara and Abraham, and Jacob and Rachel. One might ask, why reveal for all eternity the domestic spats between couples? Sara laughs when she is told that she would have a child despite her advanced age and she denies it to Abraham. He turns to her in anger and says, "You did so laugh" (Genesis 18:15). Rachel wants children, and keeps urging Jacob for help. Jacob turns to her and seems quite irritated: "Why do you annoy me? Do you think I am God that I can give you children?" (ibid., 30:2).

We can now understand why these incidents are recorded: they are there for contrast. They show us how the other patriarchs and matriarchs exercised complete candor in their private lives. If there must be a slight argument, let there be one, but let husband and wife be perfectly honest with each other. Let there be no distance between them, no dissembling – no outer politeness which bespeaks an inner remoteness. How different was Rebecca from Sara and Rachel. There was so little frankness in Rebecca's relations with Isaac, so little straightforwardness – and therefore, so much agony, so much unnecessary pain and frustration.

Indeed, it would seem as if Eliezer, Abraham's servant whom he had sent to fetch a wife for his son Isaac, recognized this at the very outset. Charged with this grave and significant mission of looking for a wife for Isaac, a worthy mother of the Jewish people, Eliezer feels himself diffident and concerned. He prays for divine assistance, and twice he singles out one element above all others: ĥesed – love, kindness. "May God show my master Abraham ĥesed, may He grant that his son be blessed with a wife whose greatest virtue would be kindness, love, sensitive understanding, self-sacrifice" (see Genesis 24).

If I can find that kind of wife, Eliezer thinks to himself, who will bring ĥesed to her new home, then I will consider my mission successfully accomplished. And yet, after he has met young Rebecca, after he has satisfied himself that this is the right woman for his master's son, he offers a prayer of thanksgiving in which he surprisingly adds another quality: "Blessed is the Lord God of my master Abraham who has not forsaken ĥasdo, His ĥesed (mercy), and amito, His emet (truth), from my master." If we read between the lines we discover that Eliezer is quite satisfied that this young woman will bring ĥesed to her home. She will be a kind, devoted, loving wife. But what suddenly begins to disturb his innermost thoughts, perhaps only unconsciously, is that while there will be enough ĥesed, there will be a lack of emet or truthfulness in the sense of candor. There may not be enough frankness because she would be too kind, too fearful, too gentle to speak openly and lucidly with her own husband. How wise was that old and loyal slave of Abraham! Thank you, God, for the ĥesed; now help us with a little more emet.

Domestic life, then, is one of those areas where we ought to leave the exact path of moderation and incline toward one of the extremes, that of greater openness – greater frankness and honesty even at the expense of comfort and unperturbed peace of mind. Even to this day, before the ĥuppa we perform the badeken, or veiling of the bride, recalling the veiling of Rebecca. Yet, as if to emphasize that we intend thereby only the idea of modesty and not that of inhibition, we read the ketuba, in which we include the promise of the husband that he will act toward his wife in the manner of Jewish husbands, who work for, love, and support their wives, and then the key word: bekushta, in truth. Kushta or emet – truth – should be the dominant mood that prevails in the home. Without it, without full and free frankness, husband and wife cannot act in concert with regard to the great issues in life, especially with regard to the greatest gift entrusted to them: their children.

And yet, while frankness is so very important in domestic relations, and while it is a wonderful and indispensable personal quality in all human relations, there is no question but that frankness can be overdone. Truth has the greatest claims on us; but its claims are not absolute. That is why the Talmud specifically permits the talmid ĥakham or scholar to modify the truth in three instances, where complete candor would result in needless embarrassment. Not to tell a lie is a great virtue, but compulsively to tell all, to reveal all your innermost feelings without regard for others, is itself an unethical quality. When Abraham walked with Isaac to perform the Akeida, Isaac asked his father, "I see the fire and the wood but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" Imagine if Abraham had exercised absolute frankness, unrestrained candor. He would have said: "Sorry son, but it is you I shall have to slaughter upon the altar." It would have been inhumanly cruel. That is why Abraham preferred to dodge the question with the reply, "God will take care of that." Or imagine if a physician who had just discovered that his patient is suffering from a terrible and incurable disease were to turn to him and, without any attempt to cushion the news, inform him bluntly of his imminent death. This kind of frankness is subhuman. It is living on the extreme edge of character, against which Maimonides counseled. That is why the halakha says 3 that if a person does not know his relative has died, and you do know it, and he will not learn of it during the next thirty days if you keep silent, then you must keep the information within and spare him the bad news.

Excessive frankness is, thus, a fault; a vice and not a virtue. When a friend begins a conversation with the words, "I want to be brutally frank with you," you may be sure that he intends brutality more than frankness. A whimsical poet once wrote, "of all plagues, good Heaven, Thy wrath can send, save, save, O save me from the Candid Friend."

Emet, then, is a virtue, if tempered with graciousness. Emet is important enough to be the connecting link between the Shema and the Amida. Yet we must remember that this emet is not mentioned alone. Along with it we enumerate a whole list of qualities which tend to make truth more palatable, which moderate frankness and make it human. Emet must also be yatziv venakhon vekayam veyashar, proper and straight; it must be ne'eman ve'ahuv veĥaviv veneĥmad vena'im, loyally and pleasantly and attractively presented; even if it is nora va'adir, an awesome and powerful truth, still it must be metukan umekubal, prepared for and acceptable to human sensitivity, and above all, vetov veyafeh, expressed in a manner that is good and beautiful. Frankness, yes; but mentschlich-keit as well. Emet – but up to and including tov veyafeh.

Only then can we be sure that hadavar hazeh aleinu le'olam va'ed, that this truth will remain with us forever.

That is why the halakha maintained that the law of reproaching the sinner (Leviticus 19:17) must be executed with a great deal of delicacy and attention to individual feelings. There is, in Judaism, an ethic of criticism. A frank reproof may be in itself unavoidably painful, but one should minimize the anguish and the guilt and the feelings of inferiority and worthlessness that may needlessly result from it.

Too much frankness – candor with cruelty – is one of the causes of the lapse from religious faith as well. Sa'adia Gaon, in the introduction to his major work, Emunot veDe'ot, lists eight causes of heresy, of skepticism. One of them is: ha'emet hamara, the bitter truth. Truth is often difficult to face, bitter to taste, and people may prefer to flee the unpleasant truth and satiate themselves with sweet vagaries of falsehood. I believe that in our day an even more frequent cause of the disdain some people feel for Judaism is that the truth, Torah, is presented as something bitter and terrible. When, instead of teaching Torah as an ennobling and uplifting doctrine, we force it down the throats of children as something dreadfully boring and meaninglessly restrictive; if it is advocated to adults as something dogmatic and irrelevant, if it is supported not by explanation but coercion, not by an appeal to conscience but by boycotts and smear-literature and stonings, then the emet becomes so bitter as to alienate large sections of our people from Torah. Torah is "sweeter than honey"; it is a crime to present it as dipped in gall. Frankness should not be confused with foolishness, and candor should not be confounded with crude, cruel coarseness.

Frankness, then, is a great virtue. In all of life, but especially in domestic life, is it an absolutely indispensable ingredient of happiness. Because she lacked it, because her personality and innermost heart was veiled, Rebecca's life was filled with misery. Yet, frankness must be attended by the grace of consideration, delicacy, and sensitivity.

Every morning, we begin the day with the following statement which sums up what we have been saying: "Le'olam yehei adam yerei shamayim beseter uvegalui," one should always be God fearing, both publicly and privately; "umodeh al ha'emet," let him always recognize and acknowledge the truth. But once he has acknowledged the truth, once he has learned it, it is always important not to blurt it out unthinkingly. For, insofar as speaking out the whole truth, let him be vedover emet bilvavo, telling all the truth only in his heart. When it comes to telling all that one considers to be the truth, exactly as one sees it and believes it – in all candor and frankness – one must also be judicious, and consider the secret fears and vanities of his fellows, their sensitivities and idiosyncracies. Complete and uninhibited frankness – only bilvavo, in one's own heart. Otherwise, candor must be wedded to considerateness, ĥasdo and amito, as Eliezer prayed, or emet and yatziv through tov veyafeh, as is our own devoted prayer every day all year long.

For this indeed is, as Maimonides called it, the derekh Hashem, the way of the Lord. And it is this way which has been bequeathed to us by our patriarch Abraham and which we were commanded to teach our children (Genesis 18:19): "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep derekh Hashem, the way of the Lord" – for in this way will righteousness and justice be achieved.

BS"D

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These words from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks last year can certainly be said about Rabbi Sacks himself - Yehi Zichro Baruch
from: The Office of Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org> via gmail.mcsv.net
date: Nov. 21, 2019
subject: To Have a Why (Chayei Sarah 5780)
The name of our parsha seems to embody a paradox. It is called Chayei Sarah, "the life of Sarah," but it begins with the death of Sarah. What is more, towards the end, it records the death of Abraham. Why is a parsha about death called "life"? The answer, it seems to me, is that – not always, but often – death and how we face it is a commentary on life and how we live it.
Which brings us to a deeper paradox. The first sentence of this week's parsha of Chayei Sarah, is: "Sarah's lifetime was 127 years: the years of Sarah's life." A well-known comment by Rashi on the apparently superfluous phrase, "the years of Sarah's life," states: "The word 'years' is repeated and without a number to indicate that they were all equally good." How could anyone say that the years of Sarah's life were equally good? Twice, first in Egypt, then in Gerar, she was persuaded by Abraham to say that she was his sister rather than his wife, and then taken into a royal harem, a situation fraught with moral hazard.
There were the years when, despite God's repeated promise of many children, she was infertile, unable to have even a single child. There was the time when she persuaded Abraham to take her handmaid, Hagar, and have a child by her, which caused her great strife of the spirit.[1] These things constituted a life of uncertainty and decades of unmet hopes. How is it remotely plausible to say that all of Sarah's years were equally good?
That is Sarah. About Abraham, the text is similarly puzzling. Immediately after the account of his purchase of a burial plot for Sarah, we read: "Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything" (Gen. 24:1). This too is strange. Seven times, God had promised Abraham the land of Canaan. Yet when Sarah died, he did not own a single plot of land in which to bury her, and had to undergo an elaborate and even humiliating negotiation with the Hittites, forced to admit at the outset that, "I am a stranger and temporary resident among you" (Genesis 23:4). How can the text say that God had blessed Abraham with everything?
Equally haunting is its account of Abraham's death, perhaps the most serene in the Torah: "Abraham breathed his last and died at a good age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people." He had been promised that he would be become a great nation, the father of many nations, and that he would inherit the land. Not one of these promises had been fulfilled in his lifetime. How then was he "satisfied"?
The answer again is that to understand a death, we have to understand a life. I have mixed feelings about Friedrich Nietzsche. He was one of the most brilliant thinkers of the modern age, and also one of the most dangerous. He himself was ambivalent about Jews and negative about Judaism.[2] Yet one of his most famous remarks is both profound and true: He who has a why in life can bear almost any how.[3]
(In this context I should add a remark he made in The Genealogy of Morality that I have not quoted before. Having criticised other sacred Scriptures, he then writes: "the Old Testament – well, that is something quite different: every respect for the Old Testament! I find in it great men, heroic landscape and something of utmost rarity on earth, the incomparable naivety of the strong heart; even more, I find a people."[4] So despite his scepticism about religion in general and the Judaeo-Christian heritage in particular, he had a genuine respect for Tanach.)
Abraham and Sarah were among the supreme examples in all history of what it is to have a Why in life. The entire course of their lives came as a response to a call, a Divine voice, that told them to leave their home and family, set out for an unknown destination, go to live in a land where they would be strangers, abandon every conventional form of security, and have the faith to believe that by living by the standards of righteousness and justice they would be taking the first step to establishing a nation, a land, a faith and a way of life that would be a blessing to all humankind.
Biblical narrative is, as Erich Auerbach said, "fraught with background," meaning that much of the story is left unstated. We have to guess at it. That is why there is such a thing as Midrash, filling in the narrative gaps. Nowhere is this more pointed than in the case of the emotions of the key figures. We do not know what Abraham or Isaac felt as they walked toward Mount Moriah. We do not know what Sarah felt when she entered the harems, first of Pharaoh, then of Avimelech of Gerar. With some conspicuous exceptions, we hardly know what any of the Torah's characters felt. Which is why the two explicit statements about Abraham – that God blessed him with everything, and that he ended life old and satisfied – are so important. And when Rashi says that all of Sarah's years were equally good, he is attributing to her what the biblical text attributes to Abraham, namely a serenity in the face of death that came from a profound tranquillity in the face of life. Abraham knew that everything that happened to him, even the bad things, were part of the journey on which God had sent him and Sarah, and he had the faith to walk through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil, knowing that God was with him. That is what Nietzsche called "the strong heart."
In 2017, an unusual book became an international bestseller. One of the things that made it unusual was that its author was ninety years old and this was her first book. Another was that she was a survivor both of Auschwitz, and also of the Death March towards the end of the war, which in some respects was even more brutal than the camp itself.
The book was called The Choice and its author was Edith Eger.[5] She, together with her father, mother and sister Magda, arrived at Auschwitz in May 1944, one of 12,000 Jews transported from Kosice, Hungary. Her parents were murdered on that first day. A woman pointed towards a smoking chimney and told Edith that she had better start talking about her

parents in the past tense. With astonishing courage and strength of will, she and Magda survived the camp and the March. When American soldiers eventually lifted her from a heap of bodies in an Austrian forest, she had typhoid fever, pneumonia, pleurisy and a broken back. After a year, when her body had healed, she married and became a mother. Healing of the mind took much longer, and eventually became her vocation in the United States, where she went to live.

On their way to Auschwitz, Edith's mother said to her, "We don't know where we are going, we don't know what is going to happen, but nobody can take away from you what you put in your own mind." That sentence became her survival mechanism. Initially, after the war, to help support the family, she worked in a factory, but eventually she went to university to study psychology and became a psychotherapist. She has used her own experiences of survival to help others survive life crises.

Early on in the book she makes an immensely important distinction between victimisation (what happens to you) and victimhood (how you respond to what happens to you). This is what she says about the first:

We are all likely to be victimised in some way in the course of our lives. At some point we will suffer some kind of affliction or calamity or abuse, caused by circumstances or people or institutions over which we have little or no control. This is life. And this is victimisation. It comes from the outside.

And this, about the second:

In contrast, victimhood comes from the inside. No one can make you a victim but you. We become victims not because of what happens to us but when we choose to hold on to our victimisation. We develop a victim's mind – a way of thinking and being that is rigid, blaming, pessimistic, stuck in the past, unforgiving, punitive, and without healthy limits or boundaries.[6]

In an interview on the publication of the book, she said, "I've learned not to look for happiness, because that is external. You were born with love and you were born with joy. That's inside. It's always there."

We have learned this extraordinary mindset from Holocaust survivors like Edith Eger and Viktor Frankl. But in truth, it was there from the very beginning, from Abraham and Sarah, who survived whatever fate threw at them, however much it seemed to derail their mission, and despite everything they found serenity at the end of their lives. They knew that what makes a life satisfying is not external but internal, a sense of purpose, mission, being called, summoned, of starting something that would be continued by those who came after them, of bringing something new into the world by the way they lived their lives. What mattered was the inside, not the outside; their faith, not their often-troubled circumstances.

I believe that faith helps us to find the 'Why' that allows us to bear almost any 'How'. The serenity of Sarah's and Abraham's death was eternal testimony to how they lived.

Shabbat Shalom Jonathan Sacks

[1] I deliberately omit the tradition (Targum Yonatan to Gen. 22:20) that says that at the time of the binding of Isaac, Satan appeared to her and told her that Abraham had sacrificed their son, a shock that caused her death. This tradition is morally problematic.

[2] The best recent study is Robert Holub, Nietzsche's Jewish Problem, Princeton University Press, 2015.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, Maxims and Arrows, 12.

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morality, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 107.

[5] Edith Eger, The Choice, Rider, 2017.

[6] Ibid., 9.

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from: The Office of Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>
date: Nov 11, 2020, 5:46 PM
subject: Beginning the Journey (Chayei Sarah 5781)
COVENANT & CONVERSATION

11th November 2020
Beginning the Journey (Chayei Sarah 5781)

Rabbi Sacks z''l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will carry on distributing these essays each week, so people around the world can continue to learn and be inspired by his Torah.

SHARE YOUR MEMORIES OF RABBI SACKS Z''L Unfortunately the family are unable to see people in person in the usual way during the Shiva period. We would therefore encourage anyone who wishes to share messages of comfort, stories, video reflections, or photographs to do so by sending them to: tributes@rabbisacks.org

A while back, a British newspaper, The Times, interviewed a prominent member of the Jewish community and a member of the House of Lords – let's call him Lord X – on his 92nd birthday. The interviewer said, "Most people, when they reach their 92nd birthday, start thinking about slowing down. You seem to be speeding up. Why is that?"

Lord X's reply was this: "When you get to 92, you see the door starting to close, and I have so much to do before the door closes that the older I get, the harder I have to work."

We get a similar impression of Abraham in this week's parsha. Sarah, his constant companion throughout their journeys, has died. He is 137 years old. We see him mourn Sarah's death, and then he moves into action. He engages in an elaborate negotiation to buy a plot of land in which to bury her. As the narrative makes clear, this is not a simple task. He confesses to the local people, Hittites, that he is "an immigrant and a resident among you" (Gen. 23:4), meaning that he knows he has no right to buy land. It will take a special concession on their part for him to do so. The Hittites politely but firmly try to discourage him. He has no need to buy a burial plot: "No one among us will deny you his burial site to bury your dead." (Gen. 23:6) He can bury Sarah in someone else's graveyard. Equally politely but no less insistently, Abraham makes it clear that he is determined to buy land. In the end, he pays a highly inflated price (400 silver shekels) to do so.

The purchase of the Cave of Machpelah is evidently a highly significant event, because it is recorded in great detail and highly legal terminology, not just here, but three times subsequently in Genesis (here in 23:17 and subsequently in 25:9; 49:30; and 50:13), each time with the same formality. Here, for instance, is Jacob on his deathbed, speaking to his sons: Something significant is being hinted at here, otherwise why specify, each time, exactly where the field is and who Abraham bought it from? Immediately after the story of land purchase, we read, "Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything." (Gen. 24:1) Again this sounds like the end of a life, not a preface to a new course of action, and again our expectation is confounded. Abraham launches into a new initiative, this time to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac, who at this point is at least 37 years old. Abraham instructs his most trusted servant to go "to my native land, to my birthplace" (Gen. 24:2), to find the appropriate woman. He wants Isaac to have a wife who will share his faith and way of life. Abraham does not stipulate that she should come from his own family, but this seems to be an assumption hovering in the background.

As with the purchase of the field, this course of events is described in more detail than almost anywhere else in the Torah. Every conversational exchange is recorded. The contrast with the story of the Binding of Isaac could not be greater. There, almost everything – Abraham's thoughts, Isaac's feelings – is left unsaid. Here, everything is said. Again, the literary style calls our attention to the significance of what is happening, without telling us precisely what it is.

The explanation is simple and unexpected. Throughout the story of Abraham and Sarah, God promises them two things: children and a land. The promise of the land ("Rise, walk in the land throughout its length and breadth, for I

will give it to you," Gen. 13:17) is repeated no less than seven times. The promise of children occurs four times. Abraham's descendants will be "a great nation" (Gen. 12:22), as many as "the dust of the earth" (Gen. 13.16), and "the stars in the sky" (Gen. 15:5); he will be the father not of one nation but of many (Gen. 17:5).

Despite this, when Sarah dies, Abraham has not a single inch of land that he can call his own, and he has only one child who will continue the covenant, Isaac, who is currently unmarried. Neither promise has been fulfilled. Hence the extraordinary detail of the two main stories in Chayei Sarah: the purchase of land and the finding of a wife for Isaac. There is a moral here, and the Torah slows down the speed of the narrative as it speeds up the action, so that we will not miss the point.

God promises, but we have to act. God promised Abraham the land, but he had to buy the first field. God promised Abraham many descendants, but Abraham had to ensure that his son was married, and to a woman who would share the life of the covenant, so that Abraham would have, as we say today, "Jewish grandchildren."

Despite all the promises, God does not and will not do it alone. By the very act of self-limitation (tzimtzum) through which He creates the space for human freedom, God gives us responsibility, and only by exercising it do we reach our full stature as human beings. God saved Noah from the Flood, but Noah had to make the Ark. He gave the land of Israel to the people of Israel, but they had to fight the battles. God gives us the strength to act, but we have to do the deed. What changes the world, what fulfils our destiny, is not what God does for us but what we do for God.

That is what leaders understand, and it is what made Abraham the first Jewish leader. Leaders take responsibility for creating the conditions through which God's purposes can be fulfilled. They are not passive but active – even in old age, like Abraham in this week's parsha. Indeed in the chapter immediately following the story of finding a wife for Isaac, to our surprise, we read that Abraham remarries and has eight more children. Whatever else this tells us – and there are many interpretations (the most likely being that it explains how Abraham became "the father of many nations") – it certainly conveys the point that Abraham stayed young the way Moses stayed young, "His eyes were undimmed and his natural energy unabated" (Deut. 34:7). Though action takes energy, it gives us energy. The contrast between Noah in old age and Abraham in old age could not be greater.

Perhaps, though, the most important point of this parsha is that large promises – a land, countless children – become real through small beginnings. Leaders begin with an envisioned future, but they also know that there is a long journey between here and there; we can only reach it one act at a time, one day at a time. There is no miraculous shortcut – and if there were, it would not help. The use of a shortcut would culminate in an achievement like Jonah's gourd, which grew overnight, then died overnight. Abraham acquired only a single field and had just one son who would continue the covenant. Yet he did not complain, and he died serene and satisfied. Because he had begun. Because he had left future generations something on which to build. All great change is the work of more than one generation, and none of us will live to see the full fruit of our endeavours. Leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow a life with immortality.

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to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Nov 13, 2014, 2:07 PM
subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chayei Sarah
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What Remains Is Not My Teacher's Torah, It Is How He Acted

The story of Eliezer finding a shidduch [marriage partner] for Yitzchak is one of the longest narratives in the entire Torah. Rashi cites a Rabbinic teaching: Despite the fact the Torah is normally very 'stingy' in its language and we often derive new laws from just the inclusion of an extra letter vov in a pasuk, here the Torah elaborates in great, repetitious, detail the events surrounding Eliezer's mission because "the conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs is dearer even than the Torah of the children." In other words, we can learn more about the manners and personalities of the founders of our religion – the "Avos" – by contemplating the actions and conversational nuance of their servants than we can even from delving into the Torah of their descendants.

Rav Aharon Kotler, zt"l, once commented about this teaching of Chazal: "Torah may be expounded, but personality traits must be learned". (Torah ken mir darshenen, ober midos tovos daf men oys lernen.) It is much more difficult to inculcate someone with proper behavior (middos tovos) than it is to teach them a piece of Talmud.

The reason the Torah goes to such lengths describing this narrative is because Eliezer was a reflection of Avraham Avinu. When we want to know what proper behavior and integrity is -- this is our paradigm. This is what the Book of Bereishis is all about! It is called the Book of the Upright (Sefer haYashar) because it teaches us the ways of the upright (Yashrus).

Many Gedolei Yisrael [great men of Israel] are such geniuses that we can never aspire to their level of Torah study. We have neither the talents nor the perseverance to reach their level of intellectual accomplishment and mastery of Torah knowledge. But something we can aspire to is to try to learn from their "menshlichkeit" and their "midos" [their pristinely ethical personalities].

I would venture to say that for most people who learned in Yeshivos and who we re exposed to great Torah personalities, they do not remember so much of the "Torah" of their teachers but they certainly remember how their teachers acted. That is what remains. What remains is not the "Torah"; what remains is "how my Rebbe used to act".

Someone recently told me that Rav Pam, zt"l, was walking down the street and an obviously non-religious person came over to him. The person recognized Rav Pam but Rav Pam did not recognize him. He told Rav Pam, "You were my Rebbe in fifth grade."

The fellow is today not observant. He told Rav Pam "Do you know what I remember about you? When I was in fifth grade, I was taking a test and you caught me cheating." Anyone who knew Rav Pam knows that cheating and falsehood were an anathema to him. The student went on, "Do you know what you told me? You told me 'If you need any help, I can help you.'"

This fellow probably does not remember even one interpretation or insight that Rav Pam ever said, but that is how he remembered him. He remembered that Rav Pam told him "I can help you."

This past Shabbos, I happened to be at a retreat and I was sitting at the Shabbos table together with **Rav Dovid Feinstein**. Another Rabbi brought over a fellow (who again was not religious) and introduced him to **Rav Dovid Feinstein**. While he was talking with **Rav Dovid** I asked the Rabbi who brought him over, who the fellow was. He told me that he used to live on the Lower East Side in the same neighborhood as the Feinstein family. I asked him, "Does this guy remember anything about Rav Moshe Feinstein?" He told me, "Yes. He remembers one thing about Rav Moshe Feinstein. When they used to play hop scotch on the street of the Lower East Side and Rav Moshe would walk down the street, Rav Moshe would wait until the kids finished hopping before he would walk through."

This made a tremendous impression on him. Forty or fifty years later, he still remembers the hop scotch that Rav Moshe refused to interrupt. Picture the scene: Rav Moshe Feinstein, the Posek of the Jewish people, the Gadol Hador, waiting on the street for these kids to finish jumping before he continues walking to his apartment building.

This is what people remember. This is the idea that "superior is the casual conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs to the intensive Torah study of their children." That is why the Torah spends so many pasukim retelling the story because "Torah can be expounded, but good manners have to be learned."

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from: Shlomo Katz <skatz@torah.org>
to: hamaayan@torah.org
date: Nov 12, 2020, 12:16 PM
subject: Hamaayan - The Price of Holiness
Parshas Chayei Sarah The Price of Holiness
BS"D Volume 35, No. 5 27 Marcheshvan 5781
November 14, 2020 Sponsored by the Parness family in memory of Max Parness a"h

At the beginning of our Parashah, we read how Avraham bargained with Ephron over Me'arat Ha'machpelah. Ephron said he would give the burial cave to Avraham for free, but the latter insisted on paying for it. Why did Avraham insist on paying for Me'arat Ha'machpelah?

R' Nosson Sternhartz z"l (1780-1845; foremost student of R' Nachman of Breslov z"l) explains: Precisely because Me'arat Ha'machpelah is such a holy place, it was surrounded by forces of impurity as long as Ephron owned it. [It is a prerequisite to man's having free will that the forces of purity and impurity in the world be approximately equal.] Avraham wished to elevate the cave to its appropriate level of holiness (see Rashi to 23:17). However, this required that he pay for the cave, since holiness cannot be attained for nothing. For the same reason, King David refused to accept the site of the Bet Hamikdash from its then-owner as a gift; he insisted on buying it. And, for the same reason, the Zohar teaches that a person should make a point to purchase Mitzvot. (Likkutei Halachot: Hil. Matanah 4:4, 11)

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) writes similarly: The Zohar teaches, "One who wants to engage in a Mitzvah, and to engage with the Holy One Blessed is He, should not seek to do so for free. Rather, he should expend his resources to the extent of his ability." Therefore, the Chafetz Chaim continues, it is wrong for people to form a breakaway Minyan where Aliyot are given away for free, rather than participate in the auction taking place in their Shul. Indeed, on a practical level, when one pays for an Aliyah, he effectively performs multiple Mitzvot–not only reciting a blessing over the Torah, but also lighting or heating the Shul through his donation. (Ahavat Chessed II ch.16)

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"I am an alien and a resident among you; grant me an estate for a burial site with you, that I may bury my dead from before me." (23:4)

R' Dovid Feinstein z"l (1929-2020; Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York and a leading Halachic authority, who passed away last week) writes: Many commentaries note the seeming contradiction in calling oneself both an "alien" and a "resident." Perhaps, Avraham meant the following: You Hittites consider me to be an alien because I moved here from Charan, and you probably think that I should take Sarah back there and bury her with her ancestors. However, Hashem has promised to give this land to my descendants after 400 years of exile. Then we will be residents here, so I claim the right to bury Sarah in the land where her offspring will live.

R' Feinstein adds: This may explain how Ephron came up with a price of 400 Shekalim for Me'arat Ha'machpelah and the surrounding field. The Torah establishes the value of a plot of land as one Shekel per year. [The Torah is referring to a plot of land having a specific agricultural output, which is how land area was measured in Biblical and Talmudic times.] Perhaps Ephron viewed the price as a rental fee of one Shekel per year for the approximately 400 years — a total of 400 Shekalim — until Avraham's descendants would actually take ownership of the cave and field away from Ephron's descendants. (Kol Dodi)

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"Ve'hayah / Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Please tip over your jug so I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will even water your camels,' her You will have designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak; and may I know through her that You have done kindness with my master." (24:14)

The Gemara (Chullin 95b, as explained by Rashi z"l) teaches that the test Eliezer used to find Rivka did not violate the Torah's prohibition on divination because Eliezer did not actually rely on it. R' Naftali Hertz Weisel z"l (1725-1805; German banker, and a prolific author of works of Torah commentary, Hebrew grammar, and Mussar) elaborates: Our verse is not a definitive statement: "The maiden who responds thus is the right girl for Yitzchak." Rather, it is a prayer: "Please, G-d, arrange that the girl who responds thus will be none other than the girl who is meant to marry Yitzchak." Eliezer knew that he was not a prophet, and he did not expect Hashem to inform him in a supernatural manner who was the right girl. Rather, Eliezer had every intention of interviewing the girl before selecting her; he was merely praying that Hashem save him trouble and send the right girl immediately. This explains why our verse begins with a masculine form of the verb ("Ve'hayah"). The subject of the verb is the matter about which he was praying ("Let it be so"), not the girl, which would be the case if it said, "Ve'hayta" / "She will be [the one You have designated]." (Imrei Shefer)

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from: Parsha@torahinaction.com
date: Nov 11, 2020, 1:35 PM
subject: Jersey Shore - Parashat Hayye Sarah
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Last Friday, **Rav Dovid Feinstein**, son of Rav Moshe Feinstein, was taken from this world. He was one of the great leaders of our generation, and the holiness that he brought to the world with his presence will be sorely missed. In his memory, I would like to share a dvar Torah which he said on this week's perashah.

At the end of the perashah, it says that Abraham got remarried. One may ask why he decided to remarry when he was already close to 140 years old? Also, the Gemara teaches that Abraham was already privileged to experience the taste of the World to Come, so at this point in his life, he certainly did not desire any pleasures of this world. Rav Dovid explains that even though Abraham was not attracted by the pleasures of this world, he still valued the opportunity to do misvot, which is our entire purpose in this world. Therefore he chose to take another wife, even at his advanced age, in order to continue to fulfill the misvah of bringing children into the world.

Rav Dovid embodied this principle in his own life as well. He lived a long, productive life in which he wrote many sefarim and became one of the top poskim of his time. He was always learning and teaching others but always below the radar. He stayed out of the limelight, preferring to stay in his great father's shadow. However when R Moshe passed away he stepped up to the plate and joined all the organizations like Torah Umesorah, Agudat Israel etc. and became the leader that everyone looked to for guidance, especially for private individuals with problems. He realized that he was needed and therefore kept on doing more and more until his pure neshamah left this world. May his zechut continue to protect us, and may his memory be an inspiration for each of us to strive to become as great as we can be.

Shabbat Shalom Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Practice

Practice makes perfect. In a eulogy delivered by Rabbi Mayer Yechiel Miller, the grandson of Rabbi Avigdor Miller, z"tl, the grandson revealed, "My grandfather was not born great. He worked on becoming great every minute."

This seemingly obvious statement deserves reflection.

I once heard a criticism of the biographies of Torah giants: "The books make us think that all our Torah leaders were prodigies born with uncanny, abnormal abilities and talents. This is very far from the truth. Our greats studied the ideals of our Torah and then worked on their inborn flaws and developed their Hashem-given talents in order to achieve perfection. The Hafess Hayim z"tl learned how to avoid the sin of lashon hara, and Rav Moshe Feinstein z"tl studied anger control and patience."

The simple rule, “Practice makes perfect,” applies to the spiritual as well as physical aspects of our being. Rabbi Miller, z”tl, never spoke without weighing the propriety of his words before allowing them to leave his lips. He honed this skill with the diligence of an Olympic athlete preparing for the gold. Each time he was about to speak, he waited five seconds before allowing the words in his mind to leave his lips. Day in and day out he practiced, until he mastered the technique.

Whenever you are about to speak, spend five seconds contemplating what you are about to say. Release the words only after editing them carefully in your mind. Do this three times today, and again tomorrow, and then the next day. Then, as in an exercise program, increase the load. It only takes a few seconds each time, but the practice will lead to a much more perfect you. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

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from: torahweb@torahweb.org
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subject: Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Becoming Blessed
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torahweb.org
Becoming Blessed
Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

This parsha discusses great events of Jewish history, such as the acquisition of meoras hamachpelah and the marriage of Yitzchak to Rivkah. Hidden within the crevices of this story of the nation of Israel, is the story of personal redemption of Eliezer.

Eliezer was a scion of Canaan, the first person to be cursed. It happened when Noach woke up from his drunken stupor, and realized what Cham had done to him, he cursed Cham's son Canaan that he become enslaved. Eliezer was among the progeny of Canaan, and thus from the cursed family. Though Eliezer was very close to Avraham, he could not break out of that curse, and thus when Avraham was looking for a suitable wife for Yitzchak he rejected Eliezer's daughter out of hand, saying, "my son is blessed and you are cursed, and cursed one can't join a blessed family" (Rashi 24:39.)

And yet, in our very parsha Eliezer becomes redeemed! Lavan calls out, "come in, the one blessed by Hashem" (24:31). The Medrash Rabbah (60:5) says that the words "blessed by Hashem" had been put in Lavan's mouth by Hashem, and indeed he had become blessed. What caused such an incredible transformation?

Let us first explore the concept of "cursed". While we think of a "curse" as being a generic term for failure or evil, and "blessing" as a generally positive term of good being bestowed upon a person. But those words actually have a more specific meaning. They are measures of productivity and fecundity. "Blessing" is the ability to bring forth a lot more than was put in, and "cursed" produces no more than that which was put in. Thus when the earth was cursed in the wake of Adam's sin it would no longer give forth fruit easily. On the other hand, Yitzchak was blessed, and he had reaped a hundred times the seed that he had put in (Breishis 26, 12) .

What is the personal quality most associated with beracha, and inversely with klala? We are told in Mishlei (28:20), "a trustworthy person is full of blessing." Why a "trustworthy" person? Doesn't a "trusted" person only retain what he was given? Why would he be blessed (i.e. produce more than given)?

This requires a bit of rethinking on our part regarding where blessing emanates from. We tend to think of our efforts as producing wealth, but in fact our efforts can only reorganize that which already exists. For example, I can take a tree, saw it into planks, and make a table, but I have merely rearranged the wood. Producing more than I invested is not the product of human effort; planting one seed and producing a tree which yields hundreds of apples is achieved by tapping into "blessing", a force beyond our world. Similarly, when a person starts a business, the earnings commensurate to the effort invested can be described as being the result of his industriousness, but the extraordinary wealth that a successful business can generate is a blessing sourced from somewhere outside of us.

Imagine a pipe that is a conduit from a reservoir to a sink. The more absorbent the pipe is, the less water flows out to the end; the less absorbent the pipe, the more water will flow through. The more a person sets himself up to merely be a conduit, the more he merits that Hashem will channel benevolence through him.

Canaan was cursed because he attempted to divert - and subvert - the blessings that Hashem had intended for the world as a whole to himself (see Rashi 9:25). He therefore became a slave, someone who has that which is needed for subsistence, but never more.

Eliezer displayed integrity to his mission (Midrash, ibid.) He could have tried to take Yitzchak, the prize catch, for himself. Instead, he acted with total integrity, removing himself from the equation totally. When he acted in completely good faith, relating to his mission as its executor and not trying to profit from it, he reentered the realm of the blessed.

This is one of the most counterintuitive lessons of the Torah. We instinctively grab in order to have more and more. The Torah, however, teaches us that the honest and the faithful become the conduit for the blessings of life.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha CHAYEI SARAH 5781
Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

Jewish tradition teaches us that the house of our mother Sarah had unique qualities. I have written about this often but add the following nuance to my previous writings. We are taught that in the tent of Sarah there were three outstanding qualities: the blessing of bountiful bread that is the quality of hospitality, the cloud of spirituality that always hovered over her home and the fact that the candle lit for the Sabbath burned throughout the entire week until the entrance of the next Sabbath.

This idea of that candle contains within it the great message that every day of the week is only a prelude to the great day of the Sabbath. We say so in our prayers when we count our days according to the upcoming Sabbath. This is the Jewish soul that constantly yearns for the Sabbath throughout the mundane activities of the weekday world. The Jew cannot believe that somehow the troubles, travails, distractions, and challenges of ordinary life which are omnipresent are really the basic issues of our existence and define our purpose in life.

Those who think that way are hardly removed from the rest of the animal kingdom that exists only in the moment, for the present, without any great vision as to what life should be and what one's purpose in existence is. It is only the Sabbath day that puts the whole week into perspective and enables us to see the greatness that the creator intended for all of us.

Throughout the ages, Jews always defined themselves in terms of the Sabbath. The criterion for Jewish legitimacy always was that one was a Sabbath observer. Jews took the Sabbath and made it their given name and, later in history, even their surname. They always wanted to be identified with the Sabbath, because they realized that the candle of life burns from one Sabbath to the next, and is never extinguished, thereby giving one the glimpse and goal of eternity in an otherwise finite world.

There have been many great works written about the Sabbath: halachic, philosophical, fanciful, inspirational, and psychological. All of them deal with special facets of the Sabbath, which is like a diamond that sheds light in all directions, no matter which way it is turned. The Sabbath became the

object of love and endearment, and not only of identity and Jewish pride. Jews understood that the destruction of the Sabbath, God forbid, would mean the eventual destruction of the nation and its purpose as being a holy people. This is the treasure that our mother Sarah bequeathed to us – a flame from a lonely candle that lights our way through an often dark and dangerous weekday world. We are witness to the tragedy that engulfs individuals and entire sections of the Jewish people who are devoid of the Sabbath and do not possess that candle of light that only the Sabbath can provide. That is why this week's Torah reading is entitled "The Life of Sarah", because as long as the Sabbath lives within the Jewish world, our mother Sarah is with us, to comfort and guide us, and to help raise us to eternal greatness.
Shabbat shalom
Berel Wein

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
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subject: Torah Weekly
Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 14 November 2020 / 27 Heshvan 5781
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parashat Chayei Sarah
Practice Makes Perfect
"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years…" (23:1)
Apparently, it takes at least 10,000 hours of practice to master an artisanal skill. That's a serous amount of time, and sometimes before you clock up those 10,000 hours, you may be tempted to think that you've got it down. I well remember putting a lot less than 10 hours into learning Chuck Berry's classic intro to Johnny B. Goode, in a pastiche version I wrote called "Yankie Levine" for the Ohr Somayach Simchat Beit HaShoeva the year before last (when masks where something that only surgeons wore). Despite what I considered to be adequate practice, on the performance night I found that my fingers had not yet learned the notes that my brain thought they had, and under the pressure of performance, well, let's say, Chuck was rockin' and a'rolling in his grave.
On the other hand (l'havdil), this Rosh Hashana I got up to daven Pesukei d'Zimra in Ohr Somayach, (my privilege for more years that I can remember). I was feeling a little 'under-the-weather,' nothing terrible, but suffering from yet-undiagnosed COVID-19. Nevertheless, I got 'up to bat,' and thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman's relentless drumming the nusach into my head (and years of practice), I adequately completed my task.
Rav Shlomo Wolbe once remarked that being a Jew means being "a professional human being". To be professional at anything — especially being a human being — takes a lifetime of dedicated practice.
"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years…" Why didn't the Torah just write, "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred and twenty-seven years"? Sarah never stopped growing. She never stopped practicing to be a professional human being — not at seven years, not at twenty, not at a hundred and not even on the day she left the world. That is what made her the mother of the Jewish People.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Author.aspx/1199
chiefrabbi.org
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah Chayei Sara: Is the title misleading?
A tribute to Rabbi Lord Sacks z"l
Is the title of this week's parsha misleading? Chayei Sara means the life of Sara, but when one has a look at the content of the parsha, sadly it's all about the death of Sara, and the manner in which Avraham made arrangements to bury her.
In the Midrash, Rabbi Akiva draws a parallel between two outstanding Biblical characters, Sara Imeinu – Sarah our matriarch, and Esther HaMalkah, Queen Esther. What's the connection between the two? According to Rabbi Akiva, at the beginning of our parsha, the Torah tells us that Sara was 127 years old when she passed away. It was thanks to her merit that at a later time Esther became the queen over 127 provinces.
But the comparisons between the two run far deeper than that. After all, both Sara and Esther were exceptionally selfless and kindhearted people. Both had two names: Sarai became Sara, and Hadassah was Esther. Both of them were connected to royalty: Esther of course was the queen while Sara literally means princess, and she was given that name because she was a person of regal bearing.
Hashem said to Avraham, "Kol asher tomar elecha Sara, shema bekolah." – "Whatever Sarah tells you to do, hearken to her voice."
And in the book of Esther we are told,
"Vaya'as Mordechai kechol asher tzivta eilav Esther." – "Mordechai did all that which Esther asked him to do."
Actually there is one further comparison which I find to be the most compelling of them all: It's thanks to Sara and Esther that we exist as a people today. Esther, with the help of Heaven, was able to intervene in order to save us physically at a time when Haman sought to annihilate Am Yisrael. Sara gave birth to our people and it's thanks to her personal example that we have internalised her values and her teachings, which we keep in our hearts and in our minds to this day. Thanks to Sara, we have survived spiritually as a nation and that's why our parsha is called Chayei Sara. Sadly she passed away but in spirit she will always continue to live on.
Last motsei shabbat we all heard the very sad news of the passing of my illustrious predecessor, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, and throughout this week, we have been grieving. And we have been joined by so many people around the globe, well beyond the confines of our people, because his global impact was so enormous and so extraordinary.
Like Sara Imeinu he was somebody who touched the hearts and moulded the minds of so many people. His impact was enormous and his legacy will certainly continue to live on. Like Sara Imeinu, concerning Rabbi Lord Sacks we will always be able to say that although, sadly, he has passed away, in spirit, he will always continue to live on in our hearts and in our minds.
Yehi yichro baruch – may his memory be for an eternal blessing.
Shabbat Shalom.
Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
www.matzav.com or www.torah.org/learning/drasha
Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Drasha Parshas Chayei Sarah - Take My Money, Please!
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
The stories of Sefer Braishis are the guideposts of morality for the Jewish nation. They teach us ethics and guide our character. Sometimes we can even apply their lessons to teach us even the simple and practical ways of the world. This week we can even learn a little business acumen from our forefather, Avraham.
In this week's portion, Avraham sets out to find a burial site for his wife, Sora. He approaches the children of Ches and asks to meet Ephron, who sanctimoniously offers any plot of land and benevolently offers it for nothing.
Avraham does not jump at the offer, but immediately declares that he is ready to pay top dollar: in fact, even before Ephron uses the words, "behold I have given it to you," Avraham responds, "I have given you the money! Take it from me! And now allow me to bury my dead."

Then, in a quick turnabout, Ephron announces an exorbitant price which Avraham, without bargaining or negotiating, pays immediately.
The entire transaction is strange. Despite Ephron's generous overtures, it seems that Avraham is throwing the money at him in an effort to consummate the deal. And the minute a price is mentioned, exorbitant as it may be, Avraham pays it without further question. All it seems is that he wanted to close the deal and leave. Why?
Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz, the Bostoner Rebbe of Lawrence, NY once told me this wonderful anecdote:
The Ponovezer Rav, Rabbi Yosef Kahanemen zt"l, was one of the foremost builders of Torah in the post-war era. He was also a remarkable fund-raiser. Once he was welcomed into the home of a wealthy individual who was more interested in discussing Torah with him than giving money to the Ponevezer Yeshiva. Every time the Rav would talk about the donating for the construction of the new building, the man would begin to expound on a different Torah topic. Finally, Rav Kahaneman told him the following story:
A woman in Poland had a daughter who was well past her prime. The matchmaker suggested that she alter her passport and claim she was much younger than her true age. He explained that he knew a Polish passport official, who, for the right price, could make her any age she would like.
The official met the woman and then looked at the girl. "Oh, this is not a major problem. I am sure that there must have been an error in processing the original document. Of course, we can rectify this most egregious error. In fact, for a small service fee of 500 zloty I can take seven years off the date on her birth certificate, and we can have her at 21 years old!"
Despite the steep service charge, the mother heartily agreed and quickly took the money from her purse. Feeling that there were many more zloty from where the first 500 came from the officer held up his hand. "You know what," he smiled devilishly, "maybe there was a bigger error than we actually had thought! Actually, for 700 zloty I could make her 20 years old!"
Reluctantly, the mother agreed and went to her purse for more zloty. At that point, the officer began to get quite greedy. "You know, he said, for an additional 300 zloty, I could even have her at 18!"
The mother became very nervous. Quickly she handed over the 700 zloty and yelled, "No, thank you. 20 years old is fine!" She grabbed her daughter. "Quick," she shouted, "let's get out of here! Soon we will be left with no more zloty and no more years!"
The Rav's message struck its mark. The man stopped his Torah-filled filibuster and handed over a sizable check.
Avraham knew his negotiating partner well. He understood that the longer Ephron would wait, the more time Sora would lie in state, and the more expensive the transaction would become. As soon as he heard the false graciousness of Ephron, Avraham immediately told him that he would pay full price – on one condition. Take the money and give me the plot. He understood when it was time to do what had to be done and move on. He was not interested in prolonging negotiations that would only leave him without money and perhaps without land. Often it is worthwhile to take a hit and leave, because the pain of the moment is far less than the agony of insincerity.
Dedicated to our son Roy Zeev Abraham in honor of his Bar Mitzvah. May he continue the cherished tradition that has been handed down to us by our parents, parents' parents' all the way back to the patriarchs.
By Mr. and Mrs. David Abraham
Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
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subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Chayei Sarah
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Patriarchal Events Foreshadow History for Their Descendants

The Ramban in Parshas Lech Lecha and other meforshim elsewhere in Sefer Bereshis discuss the concept of Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim. This basic idea teaches that while the narration of Sefer Bereshis seems to be merely "nice stories," the reality is that the incidents that occurred to the Patriarchs of our nation—Avrohom, Yitzchak, and Yaakov—have profound effects on the rest of Jewish history. "Everything which occurred to the fathers happened to the sons as well." That which the Avos experienced set the pattern and the template for what was destined to happen to Klal Yisrael for the rest of Jewish history.
For example, the Ramban points out the pattern (which does not take a genius to recognize) that when Avram went down to Egypt because of the famine, Pharaoh took Sarai, and as a result of that Hashem punished Pharaoh, who eventually sent Avram and Sarai away with great wealth. This is literally what happened with Yaakov Avinu and his children going down to Egypt because of a famine, and ultimately being sent out with great wealth after Pharaoh was punished. That which happened to the fathers, happened to the sons!
Some of the instances of the Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim pattern are extremely obvious, like the case I just mentioned. Others are not so obvious. Perhaps we will only understand some of them in retrospect when the future redemption takes place and "history will be completed." Tonight, I would just like to share what I think is a very chilling instance of this principle.
In this week's parsha, Avraham comes back from the Akeida to learn that his wife has passed away. Avraham has the task of finding a suitable burial place for Sarah Imeinu. Chazal (at least according to some Rishonim) consider this to be the last of the Avraham's "Ten Tests". Whether it is the final test or not, Chazal are replete with the Ribono shel Olam's appreciation for how Avraham Avinu acted in this incident.
I will cite just two examples of how Chazal look at what Avraham Avinu did here:
There is a famous Gemara in Bava Basra [16a]. The Satan approaches the Ribono shel Olam and tells Him "I have searched the entire world and I did not find another Tzadik like Avraham, for You told him 'Arise – walk the length and breadth of the Land for I will give it to you,' and yet, when he needed to bury Sarah he could not find a place to bury her (he had to buy it) and yet he did not question Your Ways." (The Gemara then says that HaKadosh Baruch Hu asked the Satan if he had ever seen the righteous Iyov, but we are not getting into that story.)
Similarly, there is a famous Medrash (Shemos Rabbah), which Rashi quotes in the beginning of Parshas Va'Era. The Almighty appeared to Moshe Rabbeinu (after Moshe had complained to Him "…Why have You harmed this people, why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name he harmed this people, but You did not rescue Your people." [Shemos 5:22-23]). Hashem responded: "I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as Kel Shakkai, but through My Name Hashem I did not become known to them." [Shemos 6:3].
The Medrash explains the deeper message in Hashem's mentioning the Avos to Moshe Rabbeinu here: "Woe to people who are lost and who are never to be found. Many times, I appeared to them (the Avos) only with My "less miraculous" manifestation (Kel Shakkai) without making known to them My Name Hashem (which can change nature) and yet they never complained to Me despite all the troubles they encountered in life!"
Here again, the Medrash mentions that Hashem praised Avraham to Moshe, citing the fact that he had to pay an exorbitant price to pay for a gravesite for his wife, after having been promised that the entire Land would belong to his children – and yet Avraham never complained!
I heard an interesting question from Rav Issac Bernstein, a Rav in London England. He asks: Did Avraham Avinu really need to buy the Me'aras HaMachpelah? As soon as he went to Bnei Ches and asked for a place to

bury his wife they told him "…You are a prince of G-d in our midst; in the choicest of our burial places bury your dead, any of us will not withhold his burial place from you, from burying your dead." [Bereshis 23:6] It sounds like they were telling him "It is yours for free!" Avraham Avinu responded, "I want to pay for it!" So Ephron, once he smelled the money, started negotiating a price.

But Avraham did not have to pay for this! It was offered to him for nothing. Why didn't he want to accept it? I can give you several reasons.

First, just like by the King of Sodom – Avraham refused to take anything that he did not pay for — "I do not want you to say that you made Avraham rich." [Bereshis 14:23], so too here he did not want a free burial plot! In general, there is a principle — "He who hates presents will live." [Mishlei 15:27].

Additionally, perhaps Avraham adopted the philosophy of the Brisker Rav. When Rav Yitzchak Zev Sovloveitchik was marrying off one of his sons, the proprietor of a Jerusalem catering hall came to him and said I want you to make the wedding by me and it will be free of charge. The Brisker Rav refused the offer and insisted on paying for it. He later commented "The most expensive way of doing something is getting it for free." (When you get something for free, you wind up indebted to your benefactor. Then you really need to pay).

However, whatever Avraham Avinu's calculations were to refuse the free gravesite, the truth of the matter is that it was offered to him free of charge. So what are these Gemaras and Medrashim telling us by pointing to Avraham Avinu who did not complain to G-d even though he needed to pay for a gravesite after being promised that the Land would belong to him? Rav Bernstein cites an eye opening Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer which mentions both of these teachings of Chazal and helps us understand the meaning of these Medrashim.

It says in Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer that when the Malachim came to Avraham Avinu in Parshas Vayera and he wanted to slaughter a cow to make a meal for them, the cow ran away. The cow ran away…into the Me'aras HaMachpelah! Avraham ran after the cow and followed it into the ancient cave. When he went inside, he discovered Adam and Chava lying in the Me'aras HaMachpelah surrounded by lit candles with a fragrant aroma. He found them lying in exquisite serenity and suddenly felt spiritually inspired and uplifted by the site. At that moment he declared "This is where I want my wife and I to be buried!"

That is when Avraham Avinu first thought of purchasing the Me'aras HaMachpelah. When the time came to bury Sarah, he told the Children of Yevus (even though they were genealogically the Children of Ches as the Torah calls them Chitites, – since they lived in the city of Yevus, they were also referred to as Yevusim) that he wanted to buy the cave from them. They responded – we know that G-d is destined to give your descendants all this land, including our city of Yevus. Swear to us that you will not take the City of Yevus unless we give you permission! Avraham Avinu, the Medrash continues, agreed to the deal and signed a document to that effect. The inhabitants of Yevus took the document and made statues, which they put in the center of the city, to which they attached the document containing Avraham's oath that his descendants would not forcibly take the City of Yevus away from its original inhabitants.

Generations later, when the Israelites approached the City of Yevus, they saw these statutes with the document and they therefore could not take the city away from the inhabitants, because of Avraham's oath.

Yevus is Yerushalayim. The Chittim in effect told Avraham – "Ad chatzi haMalchus…" – it is all yours to have – but not Yerushalayim! For that Avraham had to make an oath and for that he paid.

What is the end of the story? The Jews could not conquer Yevus. At the end of Sefer Shmuel, Dovid HaMelech came to a fellow named Aravna haYevusi and he asks to buy Yevus from him, because the Jews were unable to conquer it as a result of Avraham's shavua. That is the only way we got Yerushalayim. Dovid HaMelech the great-great (many times) grandson of Avraham Avinu had to pay to get Yerushalayim.

For 3,000 years, we have been fighting over Yerushalayim. That is what I mean that this is another example of Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim. We know that Yerushalayim is the united and eternal capital of Eretz Yisrael. The Arabs say "No, this is our holy place also." This is history repeating itself. The actions of the fathers foreshadow what will happen with their children. For 3,000 years, this has been going on – what will be with Jerusalem? Eventually, we got it and with G-d's Help we are going to once again have it – without anyone contesting our right to exclusive ownership.

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http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/
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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Chayei Sarah: Avraham Avinu's wonderful death

'And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said: "Send me away unto my master"'(Chayei Sarah 24:54)

As opposed to its name, this week's Torah portion of Chayei Sarah ("The Life of Sarah") does not actually talk about her life, but rather tells the story of her passing. Actually, the entire portion deals with the deaths of Sarah and Abraham and the establishment of the next generation with the marriage of Isaac to Rebecca.

At the beginning of the Torah portion, we hear about the death of Sarah and about Abraham's efforts to purchase Ma'arat Hamachpela (the Cave of the Patriarchs) in the city of Hebron, to serve as a family burial complex for Sarah and himself. After this, we read about Abraham's servant being sent to Aram Naharayim to search for a partner for Isaac. That search ultimately ends with Rebecca being brought back to Abraham's home and with the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca. As the portion concludes, we read about Abraham's final years, his parting from his sons, his death and his burial in the Cave of the Patriarchs, where he had buried his wife Sarah.

Abraham's death is described almost idyllically: "And Abraham expired and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people." (Genesis 25, 8)

Abraham died satisfied! What was he satisfied with? We are familiar with the sense of satisfaction, a sense of fullness and of reaching a maximum level of energy. Indeed, this is how the Ramban (Nachmanides, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, biblical scholar and commentator born in Spain in 1194, died in Israel in 1270) describes Abraham's death. "This means he realized all the desires of his heart, and sated with all good things... that his soul was sated with days, and had no desire for his days to provide anything new for him... and this is the description of God's kindness toward the righteous and of His benevolence to them."

Abraham adopted a lifestyle that filled him spiritually. He believed in his life, his deeds, and acted to implement the godly values he had discovered. Abraham busied himself with acts of loving-kindness and welcoming guests; he made sure to spread the deep truths he stood for after many long years of examination; he wandered to a distant land where he planted his roots; he walked before God with innocence and faith. His life was full of faith and with the actions that stemmed from it. When it came his time to pass from the world, he did not experience distress. He died satisfied, pleased and fulfilled.

THE SAGES of the Midrash added another layer to these words in an attempt to explain Abraham's impressive death, if such a word can be used to describe a death. "The Blessed be He shows the righteous while they are still in this world what will be the reward that will be given to them in the

world to come, and their souls are satisfied and they sleep." (Genesis Raba 62, 2)
The Midrash describes death as sleep. When life is full and satisfying, when there is harmony among one's values, desires and deeds, a moment comes when life ends and a person can look back satisfied and pleased, while also looking forward with faith to the reward in the next world.
Bronnie Ware is an Australian nurse who takes care of terminally ill patients during the last stages of their lives. As part of her work, she conducted honest conversations with her patients and decided to document their last words in her book, The Top Five Regrets of the Dying. She describes five things that people regret when they are at the cusp of death: that they did not live a life true to themselves, but rather tried to answer to the expectations of others; that they worked too hard; that they did not express their feelings; that they did not keep in touch with friends; that they did not allow themselves to be happier.
Abraham represents the person who was true to his values, worked hard for lofty goals, was a loyal friend, and in short, a person who lived a gratifying life full of content. Such a person feels satisfied when he is about to die. He says to himself, "I lived a life that was good and significant. Now I can close my eyes with a sense of tranquility."
Last Shabbat, the Jewish nation parted from one of its best and most beloved leaders, Rabbi Professor Lord Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory, the former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. Rabbi Sacks was a role model who filled his life with significant deeds. He was a profound philosopher with an astute and penetrating understanding of the human soul and of human society. He worked tirelessly deriving Torah wisdom and illuminating the entire world with it. He was also a loyal and fundamental representative of the Jewish nation to the nations of the world and their leaders. With his unique talents and fervent faith, he excelled at showing how Judaism calls upon all people to take responsibility for their lives and for repairing society and all of humanity.
The untimely passing of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is a tremendous loss to the Jewish people. He will continue to be a model of a person who dedicated his life to lofty purposes and successfully achieved his goals.
May his memory be a blessing.
The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

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subject: [Rav Kook Torah]
Rav Kook Torah
Psalm 26: Two Levels of Love
Chanan Morrison
"O God, I love the abode of Your house, and the dwelling-place of Your glory." (Psalms 26:8)
What is the difference between מְעוֹן בֵּיתֶךָ "the abode of Your house" and מְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדֶךָ "the dwelling-place of Your glory"?
True Love and Self-Love
Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, well known for his sharp-witted sayings, was a fearless champion of truth. Once he saw a young man enjoying a fillet of fish.
"Why are you eating the fish?" the rabbi asked.
Surprised by the question, the young man replied, "Because I love fish!"
"And is it because you love the fish so much that you killed and cooked it? If you really loved the fish, you would have let it live in the water!"
"The truth is," the rabbi observed, "that you do not love the fish. You love yourself. Because the fish gratifies your appetite, you killed and ate it."
Two Stages
This verse portrays the psalmist's mental preparations for prayer. He first notes his delight upon entering a sacred place. "O God, I love the abode of Your house!"
As we develop feelings of love, they are connected to our sense of self. The love and pleasure we experience when entering God's house are rooted in the awareness that we find ourselves in a place of sanctity. The soul is intoxicated with the uplifting experience of holiness and inspiration.
This love is bound to our self. We are aware we are standing in מְעוֹן בֵּיתֶךָ, in "the abode of God's house." The focus is on us, on our love and delight.
Then comes the higher level of מְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדֶךָ. The holiness intensifies; the love is refined and purified. This is no longer a love where the self has a place. There is no longer a self-awareness that allows one to say, "I love." There is no מעון, no abode where I exist.
There is only an exceptional love without parallel in the physical realm, a love only found in the highest love of God. This love transcends any sense of an external observer.
There is only מְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדֶךָ, "the dwelling-place of Your glory."
This is the extraordinary experience of boundless, eternal love; it belongs to the state of heightened consciousness when "My flesh and my heart cease; God is the rock of my heart, my portion forever" (Psalms 73:26).2
With this great love, the psalmist is ready to engage in the majesty of lofty prayer.
(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 44)
1 Story told by Rabbi Abraham Twerski in Visions of the Fathers (ArtScroll, 1999). 2 Cf. Tanya chapter 43.

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From tech@nachmankahana.com
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Rabbi Nachman Kahana
BS"D Parashat Chayai Sarah 5781
Rabbi Nachman Kahana
Parashat Chayai Sarah
Our rabbis have taught that HaShem put Avraham Avinu through ten tests. Most commentators say that the ninth was the "binding of Yitzchak" (Akeidat Yitzchak) and the tenth, the negotiations between Avraham and the Hittite Council of Elders for the purchase of Ma'arat Ha'machpela as a burial site for Sarah.
If logic dictates that every succeeding test increased in difficulty, then what was the focus of this last test of real estate purchase set before Avraham that caused it to be more challenging than the Akeida?
Was it the need to deal with worldly matters of "real estate" while he was steeped in a profound emotional crisis at the loss of his beloved Sarah? Perhaps! Was it his being taken advantage of by the unscrupulous Efron the Hittite, who charged 400 shekels for a burial site? Perhaps!
These were indeed aggravating realities, but the real hard core of the test – I believe – ran far deeper into the area which was to impact upon Jewish history.
A fundamental religious principle appears in many of our classical commentaries and responsa:
The actions of the fathers (Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov) guide their children (the Jewish people) along the path to redemption
The moment of truth came when Avraham, despite the ramifications of what he was presently going to say, stood up before the Hittite Council of Elders and proclaimed:
I am a stranger and a dweller among you
Rashi quotes the midrash which explains what Avraham meant:
If you wish [to sell the burial site], I will act as a stranger who recognizes your right of ownership over the area; but if you do not [sell me the burial site], I will implement my right of sovereignty and seize the land by virtue of G-d's promise to me, "And to your children will I give this land"

Recall that Avraham was told by HaShem to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's home to take up residence in a land which HaShem would identify later. At that time, Europe was desolate, as were most parts of Africa and Asia, not to speak of the Americas. But instead of sending Avraham to establish a Jewish State in an unpopulated area where there would be no protest, Avraham was directed to the most populous area in the world – a thin sliver of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea inhabited by seven nations numbering in the hundreds of thousands, possibly even millions.

Each of these peoples, all descendants of Cham the son of Noach, arrived in the land much before Avraham. They cultivated its fields, constructed buildings, and established places of worship, which taken together served as a common civilization.

At this juncture in their history, a stranger arrives from the east and declares that he is the true sovereign over all the land. Not just the area of Canaan, but of all the lands from the Euphrates in the north to the Nile in the south, and from the Mediterranean in the west to Mesopotamia in the east.

By this statement, Avraham challenged the rights of countless peoples who considered themselves as the owners of these lands by virtue of conquest and possession. This was an act of immense courage; because from that moment on, Avraham was perceived by everyone to be a threat to their way of life – to their very existence.

We were here before you! You are a foreign implant in the Middle East. We do not tolerate other beliefs! Does this sound strangely familiar? Don't we hear it daily from Arab spokesmen, echoing the feelings of the ancient children of Cham when reacting to Avraham's declaration of sovereignty? These anti-G-d, latter-day advocates of denial spew their venom in the media, on campus, in the Security Council, on Capitol Hill, and on the Temple Mount.

And we ask ourselves where is the Avraham of our generation who will stand up before the world and declare that Eretz Yisrael is our G-d-given heritage?

This is obviously too huge a test for today's Jewish leaders – whether they be great talmidei chachamim who, almost to the man, advocate a low profile when dealing with Yishmael in the east and Esav in the west, and certainly the secular Jews who believe that our ties to the land are historic and do not stem from G-d's promise to our forefathers.

If I were to merit the opportunity to stand before an international forum, I would shout the words of Avraham Avinu. Although we recognize certain individual rights of non-Jews in the Holy Land, G-d and His people Israel are the sovereigns over the entire land between the two great rivers.

The rejection of our sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael as being G-d given is the root cause of all our problems today in Eretz Yisrael.

In the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War, when Hashem presented to Am Yisrael the entire area of Eretz Yisrael west of the Jordan River on a silver platter, the Jewish thing to do would have been to immediately:

Erase the two abominations standing on the Temple Mount.

Annex all the areas of Shomron, Yehuda, Aza, and the Golan Heights into the State of Israel.

Open the bridges over the Jordan River to Jordan and help, facilitate, assist and inspire all the Arabs to leave the country.

Commence on an ambitious project of resettling the newly acquired land between the Sea and the River.

Throw open the gates of Aliya for the millions who would have returned had the government acted according to the first four.

However, since our leaders lack the Jewish pride which filled Avraham Avinu, we are witnessing the negation of everything which is right.

The Temple Mount has become the focal point for Moslems in Eretz Yisrael, when on a typical Friday in Ramadan 300,000 Moslems ascend the Mount and turn their backs on Yerushalayim to bow down to Mecca.

Our government is being pressured to establish another failed Arab state in the area of Shomron, Yehuda and Aza, and to relinquishing the Golan Heights to the Syrians in return for a piece of paper.

Instead of diminishing the Arab population, our government does everything to increase it as they turn a blind eye to the multiple Arab marriages, so that a Bedouin family can number from 50 to 75 and more children, and slowly take over the entire Negev.

The long-awaited ingathering of all Jews to Eretz Yisrael did not crystallize because of the weakness of the "children" compared to the pride and strength of Avraham Avinu when he declared our G-d-given sovereignty over every millimeter of this Holy Land.

In past desperate periods in our history, HaShem sent a leader who exuded the Jewish pride exemplified by Avraham Avinu. When that day will come in our time, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran and all the other would-be Hitlers who slither around the planet will be no more. And the banners of the twelve Jewish tribes will be raised by the people who have returned to take possession of all of Eretz Yisrael.

We need the gallant leader who would stand tall on the Temple Mount with talit and tefillin and announce to the world that the "Land of Israel" is not a mere cliché, it is a fundamental decree of HaShem that the Land is sanctified and is the possession of HaShem's chosen people, according to the minimum borders as stated in the Torah. These borders include the present day's states of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Sinai Peninsula, parts of Turkey; in short all the lands between the Mediterranean and the entire length of the Euphrates River whose source begins in Turkey and empties into what is commonly called the Persian Gulf.

So, remember the three Bs: B careful, B healthy, B here

And JLMM: Jewish Lives Matter More

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Shabbat Shalom: Chayei Sarah (Genesis 23:1 – 25:18)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And Abraham was old, well-stricken in age…" (Gen. 24:1)

In addition to their shared ideals, the symbiotic relationship between Abraham and Isaac includes a remarkable likeness in physical appearance. Interestingly, one of the consequences of their physical similarity is the basis for one of the most curious statements in the Talmud. On the verse in our portion, "Abraham was old, well-stricken in age", our Sages conclude that at this point in time, the symptoms of old age were introduced to the world [Talmud Bava Metzia 87a].

The reason? People seeking out Abraham would mistakenly address Isaac, and those seeking out Isaac would approach Abraham. Disturbed by the confusion, Abraham pleads for God's mercy to make him look old, and Abraham's plea is answered: a 120 year-old man will never again look like his 20 year-old son!

How do we understand why Abraham was so upset by this case of mistaken identities? After all, what's wrong with being mistaken for your son? Doesn't every aging parent dream of slowing down the aging process and remaining perpetually young?

We find the answers hidden between the lines of this teaching, in which the dialectic of the complex relationship between father and son is expressed. Despite our desire for closeness between the generations, a father must appear different from his son for two reasons.

First, it is so that he can receive the filial obligations due to him as the transmitter of life and tradition. This idea is rooted in the Biblical commandment that the younger generation honors the elder. In fact, the last will and testament of Rabbi Yehudah the Pious (12th Century Germany) forbade anyone from taking a spouse with the same first name as that of their parents. This, explained Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik zt'l, was to avoid giving the impression that a child would ever address a parent by their first name.

We may be close to our parents, but they are not to be confused with our friends.
Second, the son must appear different from his father so that the son understands his obligation to add his unique contribution to the wisdom of the past. Abraham pleads with God that Isaac's outward appearance should demonstrate that he is not a carbon copy of his father, but rather a unique individual. After all, when Isaac becomes a patriarch himself, he will represent the trait of gevurah, that part of God's manifestation of strength and justice that provides an important counterbalance to Abraham's trait of hesed (loving-kindness).
Abraham, the dynamic and creative world traveler, stands in contrast to the introspective and pensive Isaac, who never stepped beyond the sacred soil of Israel. With great insight, Abraham understood that unless the confusion in appearance ceased, Isaac might never realize the necessity of "coming into his own" and developing his own separate identity.
A Talmudic teaching of the pedagogic relationship between grandparents and grandchildren illustrates the importance of the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between the generations. Rabbi Hiya bar Abba states,"'Whoever hears Torah from his grandchild is equivalent to having received it from Sinai"! [Kiddushin 30a] This concept reveals that the line between Sinai and the present can be drawn in both directions. Not only do grandfathers pass down the tradition to their children and grandchildren, but grandchildren pass the tradition up to their forebears.
We can and must glean insights into the Torah from the younger generations. Consider the fascinating Talmudic passage that describes how, when Moses ascended on High to receive the Torah from the Almighty, the master of all prophets found God affixing crowns (tagim) to the holy letters of the law [Talmud, Menahot 29b]. When Moses inquired about their significance, God answered that the day would arrive when a great Sage, Rabbi Akiva, would derive laws from each twirl and curlicue.
Whereas Moses was given the fundamentals, namely the Biblical words and their crowns (corresponding to the laws and methods of explication and extrapolation), Rabbi Akiva, in a later generation, deduced necessary laws for his day, predicated upon the laws and principles that Moses received at Sinai.
This is the legitimate march of Torah that Maimonides documents in his introduction to his commentary of the Mishna, and it is the methodology by which modern-day responsa deal with issues such as electricity on the Sabbath, brain-stem death/life-support, and in-vitro fertilization, and more.
The eternity of Torah demands both the fealty of the children to the teachings of the parents and the opportunity for the children to build on and develop that teaching. This duality of Sinai enhances our present-day experience.
Abraham prays for a distinctive old age to enable Isaac to develop his uniqueness. Sons and fathers are not exactly the same, even if many fathers would like to think that they are. Only if sons understand the similarity, and if fathers leave room for individuality, can the generations become truly united in Jewish eternity.
Shabbat Shalom!

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When does Mincha Start?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Why Mincha?
If the word mincha means a "gift" or sometimes, more particularly, "an offering made from flour," why does this word refer exclusively to our afternoon prayer, rather than to any of our other prayers?"
Question #2: When Mincha?
"When is the optimal time to daven mincha?"
Question #3: What Mincha?
"What do the words mincha ketanah and mincha gedolah mean?"
Introduction
The Gemara in Brachos that I will cite shortly quotes a posuk from this week's parsha as the source for our daily mincha prayer, providing an opportunity to discuss some of the laws concerning when one may begin davening mincha.
Why mincha?
But first, why do we call the prayer mincha? As our questioner noted, the word mincha means a gift, and the Torah uses the term mincha to refer to a grain offering, which could be offered at any time of the day. Some mincha offerings were voluntary, whereas others were required. Some were private offerings, such as the forty loaves that accompanied the korban todah, the thanksgiving offering. Others were korbanos tzibur, public offerings, such as the lechem hapanim that graced the shulchan in the Beis Hamikdash, the korban omer offered on the second day of Pesach, and the special shtei halechem that were offered on Shavuos.
Assuming that our daily afternoon prayer corresponds to the afternoon korban offered in the Beis Hamikdash (as we will soon discuss), that offering is called tamid shel bein ha'arbayim, the offering brought every afternoon. The term bein ha'arbayim means the afternoon, since it is after the sun begins its daily descent and beforesundown. The korban tamid was offered twice a day, in the morning, shacharis, and in the afternoon, bein ha'arbayim. Thus, since our morning prayer is called shacharis, shouldn't we call the afternoon one bein ha'arbayim? And, even assuming that the prayer is called mincha because the tamid shel bein ha'arbayim was accompanied by a mincha offering, the morning tamid, also, was accompanied by a mincha offering, yet its corresponding prayer is called shacharis.
As you would imagine, I am not the first one to pose this question; about 800 years ago, it was raised by Tosafos (Pesachim 107a, s.v. Samuch), who provides two answers. Tosafos suggests that since korbanos mincha accompanied the two daily korbanos tamid, and the morning one is called shacharis, the afternoon korban was called mincha. Perhaps calling the afternoon prayer bein ha'arbayim was considered too unwieldy.
Tosafos presents a second approach, which is based on a Talmudic passage that refers to the prayer of Eliyahu on Mount Carmel as mincha. To quote the Gemara, "A person should always be careful concerning the mincha prayer, since Eliyahu was answered only with the mincha prayer" (Brachos 6b). Tosafos notes that Eliyahu prayed while the afternoon korban mincha was offered (see Melachim I 18:36), and therefore, the association of a successful prayer with the korban mincha was established– and the name stuck!
Brachos
A different rishon, the Avudraham, suggests a third approach, which is based on the fact that Adam Harishon sinned in the afternoon – the same time of the day when we would be praying the mincha service. The Torah describes that Adam sinned leruach hayom, which Targum Onkelos calls manach yoma, the same word as mincha!
Thus, whereas according to both of Tosafos' approaches the term mincha used for the afternoon prayer is borrowed from a different context, in Avudraham's understanding, the word mincha does mean the afternoon.
Having answered the first of our opening questions, let us now begin an introduction that is needed to explain and answer the second question.
"When is the optimal time to daven Mincha?"
Prayer origin
The Gemara (Brachos 26b) reports a dispute between amora'im regarding the origin of our three daily tefillos. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi ruled that tefillos were established to commemorate the daily korbanos offered in the Beis Hamikdash, whereas Rabbi Yosi ben Rabbi Chanina contended that they were established by the Avos. Specifically, Avraham Avinu established shacharis, Yitzchok Avinu created mincha, and Yaakov Avinu instituted maariv, each of which the Gemara derives from pesukim.
The Gemara then demonstrates that both Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's approach and that of Rabbi Yosi ben Rabbi Chanina date back to the time of the tanna'im, and it concludes that both opinions are correct – the tefillos

were established by our forefathers and, at the same time, our observance also includes a commemoration of the daily korbanos. This is evidenced by the halachic requirement to recite these tefillos at the times appropriate for offering their corresponding korbanos. In other words, the times governing when each tefillah should be recited match the time that the corresponding korbanos were offered in the Beis Hamikdash, and, before it was built, in the Mishkan.

Prayer deadline

The Mishnah (Brachos 26a) discusses the latest time that one may daven the various prayers, citing a dispute regarding the latest time for shacharis, the tanna kamma holding at midday and Rabbi Yehudah holding at one third of the day, two hours before midday. (This is the conclusion of the Gemara on 27a; the Gemara also concludes there that we paskin like Rabbi Yehudah.) Similarly, the Mishnah (Brachos 26a) cites a dispute as to the latest time that one can daven mincha.

However, the Mishnah does not mention when one may begin davening mincha. Instead, a beraisa quoted by the Gemara (26b) shares the following, seemingly incomplete, information: "When is mincha gedolah? After six and a half hours. And when is mincha ketanah? After nine and a half hours." The Gemara does not explain what halachic significance these two terms, mincha gedolah and mincha ketanah, have. From the context, it appears that each of these two terms refers to a time in the day, but from what point are we measuring 6½ hours and 9½ hours, and how long is the hour we are using in our measure? And, what halachic ramifications do these two times have?

Different hours!

Whereas our contemporary clock uses hours that are all exactly sixty minutes long, and each minute is also of the same, exact duration, this method of calculating time, although extremely accurate from one perspective, does not take into consideration the major event that defines our day – the path of the sun around the earth, or the earth around the sun.

As we all well know, the length of time of daylight varies greatly throughout the year, and sunrise and sunset always vary slightly from one day to the next. Chazal use a calculation of time that involves dividing the daylight hours into 12 equal units. These hours, which vary in length from day to day, are called sha'os zemaniyos (singular, sha'ah zemanis). As we will soon mention, there are different opinions whether we calculate this from halachic dawn, called alos hashachar, until nightfall (tzeis hakochavim, when the stars are visible) or from sunrise to sunset. For our purposes, let us assume that we consider sunrise to be the beginning, or "zero-hour" of our day, and sunset as the end of the twelfth hour. We now divide our day into twelve equal hours, but the length of each hour will vary throughout the year.

When is noon?

Calculating this way, the end of the sixth hour is always exactly midday, the point in the day when the sun is at its highest point and closest to being directly overhead. (In reality, the sun is never directly overhead, unless one is located somewhere near the equator, between the two tropics. North of the tropics, the sun is always in the southern half of the sky, rather than directly overhead.) This time of the day is sometimes called "high noon," which is the time of the day when the sun creates no shadow, and halacha calls it chatzos.

We should be careful not to confuse this with 12:00 noon on our clock. Twelve o'clock is rarely the actual time of chatzos; this is primarily because the creation of time zones caused the time on our clocks to diverge from the sun's time. Standardized time zones were not formulated until the invention and common use of the railroad. Until that time, each city created its own time, based on sunrise and sunset in that city, and noon and high noon were identical. However, this system proved difficult to use when trains arrived on a schedule from a different city, where sunrise was earlier or later on a given day. In order that people could anticipate when the trains would arrive in their town, they created a system whereby people in different places would keep the same clock.

Mincha gedolah

Returning to the passage of Gemara in Brachos, the question is why the beraisa is telling us about two points of the day, called mincha ketanah and mincha gedolah.

The Rambam appears to have understood the beraisa to be explaining when is the earliest time to daven mincha, but provides two times. One, mincha gedolah, is the earliest possible time, whereas the other is the preferred time. In other words, the earliest time to daven mincha is at 6½ hours, although it is preferred for someone to wait until 9½ hours to daven mincha. This is because it is ideal to daven mincha later in the day and closer to sunset.

Other rishonim appear to have understood this passage somewhat differently from the Rambam (see Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 233, citing Rosh and Tur), although there is not a significant difference in halacha between the two approaches. The Aruch Hashulchan explains that, even according to the Rambam, waiting until mincha ketanah to daven is not required, but only preferred. If there is a reason to daven at mincha gedolah, such as if one would like to begin a seudah, one may. Certainly, the exigencies of travel or employment allow one to daven at mincha gedolah, even according to the Rambam.

Clocking minutes?

When, on my clock, have we reached mincha gedolah? Assuming that I know when chatzos is, do I add thirty minutes to determine when is mincha gedolah? Or must I know exactly how long each sha'ah zemanis is today and add half of that to chatzos, which will make mincha gedolah either somewhat earlier or somewhat later than it is according to the 30-minute method, depending on the part of the year?

The Rema (Orach Chayim 233:1) rules that we use the calculation of sha'os zemaniyos. Notwithstanding that the Mishnah Berurah (233:4) accepts this conclusion, in his own notes on his rulings (Shaar Hatziyun), he queries that perhaps this should be determined by thirty clock minutes. Why?

As we mentioned above, the time for each prayer is based on a corresponding korban in the Beis Hamikdash. In the case of tefillas mincha, the corresponding korban could have been offered immediately after chatzos (see Mishnah Pesachim 61a). We wait an additional half hour to make sure that no one errs and offers it too early. Since the extra half hour is to make sure that a person does not miscalculate, perhaps its time should be thirty minutes, not dependent on whether the day is longer or shorter (see Rashi, Pesachim 93b). Should the hedge factor to avoid error vary according to season?

Therefore, the Mishnah Berurah implies he is uncertain whether this half hour should be zemanis or not. Because of this, the minhag in Yerushalayim, for example, is to be stringent in both directions. In winter months, when a sha'ah zemanis is less than an hour, the practice is not to daven mincha until thirty minutes after chatzos. In the summer months, when a sha'ah zemanis is greater than an hour, mincha gedolah is calculated on the basis of 6½ sha'os zemaniyos.

Davened earlier

What is the halacha if someone davened mincha between halachic midday and mincha gedolah, which is too early to daven? Must he daven again?

Based on the words of the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch, the Magen Avraham concludes that he has not fulfilled the mitzvah and is required to daven again.

Rashi implies that he agrees with this position, when, in his comments explaining this beraisa in Brachos 26b, he writes: "If one would like to offer the afternoon tamid earlier than mincha gedolah, he may not, since the Torah says bein ha'arbayim, which means when there begin to be evening shadows, because the sun is now inclining to the western part of the sky. This is after 6½, since between 5½ and 6½, the sun is directly overhead."

This leads to the following question: The Mishnah (Pesachim 61a) states that the korban Pesach cannot be offered before noon, but implies that, if offered immediately after halachic noon, it is kosher. Yet, the time for both the daily afternoon tamid and the korban Pesach is expressed in the Torah by the same term, bein ha'arbayim. Thus, if the korban Pesach is kosher when offered at halachic midday, a korban tamid offered at midday should also be kosher.

Therefore, the daily mincha prayer, which corresponds to the afternoon tamid, should be "kosher" when prayed at midday – in other words, it should fulfill the mitzvah, at least bedei'evid (Pri Megadim).

Although there are approaches to resolve this question, the Pri Chodosh and other acharonim dispute the conclusion of the Magen Avraham, concluding that someone who davened mincha after chatzos but before mincha gedolah fulfilled the requirement and does not daven mincha again (Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 232:1 and 233; Aruch Hachulchan; Mishnah Berurah 233:2, quoting Beis Yaakov and Magen Giborim).

Tashlumim

There is a halachic rule that someone who missed one of the daily prayers should make it up during the next tefillah slot by reciting a second shemoneh esrei, immediately after davening the correct, appropriate prayer. For example, if someone missed mincha, then, immediately after reciting shemoneh esrei of maariv, he should recite a second shemoneh esrei, to make up the missed mincha. This replacement prayer is called tefillas tashlumim.

The following question is germane to someone who davened mincha too early; that is, he davened after chatzos and before mincha gedolah, in which case, according to the Magen Avraham, he is required to daven mincha again. What if the person did not daven the mincha again that day, does the Magen Avraham require him to daven a tefillas tashlumim for the missed mincha? Some contend that, in this situation, the Magen Avraham does not require a tefillas tashlumim. Their reason is that tefillas tashlumim does not replace the lost mitzvah of tefillah bizmanah, the prayer recited in its correct time, since that cannot be replaced – rather, a tefillas tashlumim replaces only a missing tefillah. But, in our situation, this individual davened – although he recited his prayer before mincha gedolah. Although he may have missed mincha bizmanah, nothing is gained from having him daven a make-up because he has already davened (Tenuvas Sadeh).

Mincha ketanah

I mentioned earlier the Rambam's opinion that the optimal time to daven mincha is after mincha ketanah, which the beraisa teaches is 9½ hours of the day. How do we calculate "9½ hours of the day"?

As discussed earlier, there are various opinions how to calculate this, some measuring the day from alos hashachar until tzeis hakochavim and others from sunrise to sunset. The most accepted approach is to calculate the 9½ hours as measured from sunrise to sunset. In fractions, this is 19/24 into the sunshine part of the day.

Conclusion

Often, we are in a rush – there is so much to do, I need to get to work – and we know, all too well, the yetzeir hora's methods of encouraging us to rush through davening. We all realize that davening properly requires reading slowly and carefully, and that the power of tefillah is very great. Through tefillah one can save lives, bring people closer to Hashem, and overturn harsh decrees. We have to believe in this power. One should not think, "Who am I to daven to Hashem?" Rather, we must continually drive home the concept that Hashem wants our tefillos, and He listens to them! Man was created by Hashem as the only creation that has free choice. Therefore, our serving Hashem and our davening is unique in the entire spectrum of creation.

Understanding how much concern Chazal placed in the relatively minor aspects of davening should make us even more aware of the fact that davening is our attempt at building a relationship with Hashem. As the Kuzari notes, every day should have three high points – the three times that we daven. Certainly, one should do whatever one can to make sure to pay attention to the meaning of the words of one's Tefillah. We should gain our strength and inspiration for the rest of the day from these three prayers. Let us hope that Hashem will accept our tefillos, together with those of Klal Yisrael!

Parshas Chayei Sarah: The Slave's Mission

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Pursuant to Sarah's burial, we are told of the mission undertaken by Avraham's slave - to find a wife for Yitzhak:

"Avraham was now old and well advanced in years, and Hashem had blessed him in every way. He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had: '... I want you to swear by Hashem, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Yitzchak.' The servant asked him, 'What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?'. 'Make sure that you do not take my son back there,' Avraham said. '... If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there.'"(B'resheet 24:1-8).

The mission is clear - find a wife for Yitzhak from among Avraham's extended family who will come back to K'na'an (Eretz Yisra'el) and join the Avrahamic tribe. The one condition which is stressed by Avraham is not to bring Yitzhak back "there".

Upon arriving at the old family home (Aram Naharayim), the slave prays to God for help in completing his mission:

(Parenthetic note: from early Midrashim on, the unnamed slave is identified as "Eliezer"; indeed, in the famous dictum of Rav [BT Hulin 95b], the validity or taboo of divining is modeled after "Yonatan, son of Saul and Eliezer, the slave of Avraham". This identification is, prima facie, somewhat difficult. After all, the only time that Eliezer's name is mentioned is as Avraham's chief steward – hardly a slave – and he has already reached that powerful position in Avraham's household about 70 years earlier than this event. The likely reason that the Rabbis "assumed" Eliezer is that it is the only name of a member of Avraham's household that we can reference; there are other examples of this phenomenon in Midrashic literature but that is beyond the scope of this discussion).

"Then he prayed, 'O Hashem, God of my master Avraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Avraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, "Please let down your jar that I may have a drink," and she says, "Drink, and I'll water your camels too" - let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.'"

How does the slave's request of God conform to the stated goals of his mission? Avraham asked him to find a young woman who would come back to K'na'an to marry Yitzhak - and he set up a "hospitality test" for the local girls!

Before addressing this question, I'd like to pose a greater question about Yitzhak - one that is the focus of Midrashic and medieval commentary: From the time that Avraham is told to stay his hand from Yitzhak (B'resheet 22:12) until Rivkah is brought back with the slave as his fiancee, Yitzhak is nowhere to be found. He doesn't return to B'er Sheva with Avraham after the Akedah (ch. 22), nor is he present at his own mother's burial (chapter 23). (There are some who posit that he was present but not active - and therefore not mentioned - at both of these scenes; however, the simple reading of text implies that Yitzhak is not present at all).

The Akedah was undoubtedly the most critical point of Yitzchak's life - one which shaped the essential dimensions of his personality. The Midrash (B'resheet Rabbah 65:6) comments that as Avraham was looking down at his son on the altar, the angels were sobbing in heaven in anticipation of his death. At that time, the heavens opened and their angelic tears fell into the eyes of Yitzhak - leading to his early blindness (see B'resheet 27:1). The implication of this Midrash is that the events which took place on that mountaintop profoundly affected Yitzhak for the rest of his life.

What happened to Yitzhak atop the mountain, bound and lying on top of the altar, that changed him so deeply?

When we look back at God's original directive to Avraham regarding Yitzchak, we find an ambiguous command: v'Ha'alehu sham l'Olah (B'resheet 22:2) - which might be translated "take him up there as an Olah" - meaning "offer him up"; or it might be understood as "take him up there for an Olah" - meaning "show him how to perform an offering" (see Rashi and Ralbag). Indeed, according to some opinions, this was the "test" of Avraham - to see how he would respond to an ambiguous message with cataclysmic overtones

THE RESULT OF THE AKEDAH: YITZHAK BECOMES A LIVING OLAH

There is, however, a third way of understanding the phrase in question which may explain Yitzhak's "disappearance" in the subsequent narratives. Unlike the "Hatat", "Asham" (expiation offerings) and "Shlamim" (peace offering), the Olah is totally given over to God. No part of the Olah is eaten by people. Within the matrix of offerings, the Olah represents the dimension of our personalities which longs to be totally bound up with God, unconcerned with (and unfettered by) mundane concerns

Now, let's take a fresh look at the command: Take him up to be an Olah - in other words, do not offer him up (i.e. sacrifice him), but make him an Olah - an offering which is solely dedicated to God. Indeed, Avraham's hand is only stayed with reference to Yitzhak's physical life, but, following the ruling of the Mishnah (Zevahim 9:1), once an offering has been brought up to the altar, it can never lose that sense of sanctity. Yitzhak became, from the moment of his binding, the human, living Olah. His life was no longer one of earthly concerns and interactions - he became an other-worldly man. This may be the implication of his not returning from the mountain - because, in the greater

sense of things, he never "came down". He was no longer a child of Avraham and Sarah, but his own separate, sanctified being. This would explain the text's silence about his participation in Sarah's funeral. This also explains why Yitzhak, unlike Avraham and Yaakov, is not allowed to leave the holy land (see Gen. 26:3 and Rashi ad loc.) - he is, in the words of the Rabbis, an "Olah T'mimah" - a perfect Olah.

Back to our original question: Now that Sarah has died and Avraham turns his concerns to the continuity of the faith community, he appoints his slave to find the appropriate partner for Yitzhak. Avraham knows, from his own experience, that in order to carry on the mission of spreading God's word, it takes another Avraham - someone who knows how to reach out to others, who can interact with this world in a sanctified manner, someone who can keep one foot in the mundane and the other in the holy. This is no longer Yitzhak, as he is a separate being, dedicated to God and separated from this world.

He sends his loyal servant with a mission - to find someone who is willing to leave Aram/Charan, separate from family and move south, to the land of the future and the promise. This so strongly echoes Avraham's own beginnings, that the slave well understands that his master essentially wants another "Avraham" as a daughter-in-law. Avraham even points this out in his response to the slave's voiced concern that he may not be successful: "Hashem, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house, and from the land of my nativity, and who spoke to me, and who swore to me, saying: To your seed will I give this land; He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there." (Beresheet 24:7)

He must find someone who is not only willing to leave home, but someone who exemplifies Avraham's attributes and values. The trait which most typifies Avraham is kindness - and that is most obviously expressed by him in his hospitality. Therefore, the litmus test which any potential fiancee must pass, is the test of hospitality. Will this young woman be capable of carrying on the Avrahamic tradition of "Kiruv", bringing people closer to God's truth through kindness, love and hospitality? Fortunately, the young woman passed with flying colors - and our future was secured.

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PARSHAT CHAYEI SARA

A WIFE FROM 'TOLDOT TERACH'

'**Yichus**' [family lineage] has always been an important consideration when selecting one's spouse. Nevertheless, Avraham's insistence that his 'chosen' son marry specifically a descendant of his brother **Nachor** requires explanation.

In this week's shiur, we return to our discussion of the 'toldot' in Sefer Breishit in order to answer this question.

INTRODUCTION

As you surely must have noticed, the phrase 'eileh **toldot**...' appears numerous times in Sefer Breishit. In our shiur on Parshat Noach, we explained how these toldot [genealogies] form the 'backbone' of Sefer Breishit.

In that shiur, we also explained how Sefer Breishit divided into two distinct sections. The first eleven chapters included three units that began with toldot, each unit containing a primary story relating to God's dissatisfaction with mankind's behavior:

Adam's sin in Gan Eden (and Cain's sin) / chapters 2-4,
The corruption of dor ha-**mabul** / the Flood -chps. 5-9
The story of Migdal Bavel & their dispersion / chps 10-11.

After that incident - the Torah begins the 'second (and primary) section of Sefer Breishit - introduced by 'toldot Shem' (see 11:10). From this point and onward, the focus of the Sefer shifts to God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His model nation [what we refer to as the 'bechira' process]. Each unit of this section is introduced by toldot as well, be it 'toldot Yishmael' or 'toldot Yitzchak' etc, concluding with the story of Yosef and his brothers - introduced by 'eileh toldot Yaakov' (see 37:2). Sefer Breishit ends, as **all** of Yaakov's offspring are chosen to become Am Yisrael - God's special nation.

Our introduction as noted the rather obvious 'linear' progression of toldot in Sefer Breishit. We begin our shiur by noting the existence of a 'parallel' progression as well, which will highlight the significance of the pasuk that introduces 'toldot Terach'. Afterward, we will show how the nation of Israel stems not only from Avraham Avinu, but from Terach as well. [And we'll try to explain why.]

CHARTING THE TOLDOT

The following chart illustrates the progression of these toldot in Sefer Breishit. The chart lists the names that follow the phrase 'eileh toldot...' and highlights the parallel in their progression in each of the two sections described above. [The '*' star symbol represents the phrase 'eileh toldot'.]]

Study this chart carefully.

SEFER BREISHIT - UNITS OF 'EILEH TOLDOT...'

CHAPTERS 1-11	***CHAPTERS 11-50***
* ADAM (see 5:1)	* SHEM (see 11:10)
ten generations to:	*ten generations to:*
* NOACH (6:9)	* TERACH (11:27)
3 sons:	*3 sons:*
Shem, Cham, & Yefet	**AVRAHAM**, Haran, & Nachor
|	| *YISHMAEL (25:12 –rejected)
* BNEI NOACH (10:1)	* **YITZCHAK** (26:1)
|	| * ESAV (36:1) - rejected
|	***YAAKOV** (37:1-2)
|	|
70 nations (10:1-32)	'**70** nefesh become God's Nation

As you study this chart, note how the chart divides according to the two sections described above. Note also how the bechira process includes a 'dechiya' [rejection] stage together with each bechira stage. Finally, note how each section concludes with seventy! [Additional parallels will be noted as we continue.]

'TEN GENERATIONS' - TWICE!

As the chart shows, each 'section' begins with a detailed listing of 'ten generations'

Section One: - 5:1-32 / from Adam to Noach)
Section Two - 11:10-26 / from Shem to Terach
[Technically speaking one may be 9 generations, but it's the overall pattern that is very similar. Note also how the mishna in Pirkei Avot 5:2-3 relates to this structure.]

This opening 'structural' parallel supports the thematic parallel between these two sections, which we discussed in our shiur on Parshat Breishit. In that shiur, we explained how the second section of Sefer Breishit begins with 'toldot **Shem'**, and hence the story of Avraham's bechira. As God's choice of his offspring was for the purpose of lead mankind in the direction of God - it was significant that this section began with the **'shem**', whose name reflects man's purpose - to call out 'be-'**shem Hashem'**.

Strikingly, this structural parallel extends beyond the similarity of these two 'ten-generation' units. Note from the above chart how the middle and conclusion of each list bear a remarkable resemblance as well: Most obvious is how we find the number 70 at the conclusion of each unit. But more intriguing is the parallel that emerges in the middle!

Note how:

*Toldot **Adam** concludes with **Noach**,
after which we find **toldot Noach**,
& the story of his 3 sons **Shem**, **Cham**, & **Yefet**.
(See 5:28-32; 6:9)

* **Toldot Shem** concludes with **Terach**,
after which we find **toldot Terach**,
& the story of his 3 sons **Avram**, **Nachor**, & **Haran**.
(See 11:24-26; 11:27)

Furthermore, the three sons of Noach, like the three sons of Terach receive either a special blessing or curse:

* Avraham, like Shem, is blessed with the privilege of representing God.
* Haran's son Lot, like Cham's son Canaan, is involved in a sin relating to incest.
* Nachor's offspring Rivka, Rachel & Leah return to 'dwell within the tent' of the children of Avraham, just as Yefet is destined to dwell within the 'tent of **Shem**'. [See 9:24-27 / 'yaft Elokim le-Yefet ve-yishkon be-ohalei Shem'.]

Even though the meaning of these parallels requires further elaboration, for our purposes here - the parallel itself calls our attention to the significance of 'toldot Terach'.

TOLDOT TERACH vs. TOLDOT AVRAHAM

In fact, the phrase 'toldot Terach' appears right where we may have expected to find a unit beginning with 'toldot Avraham'! To our surprise, even though we later find units that begin with 'toldot Yitzchak' and 'toldot Yaakov' [and even 'toldot Yishmael' & 'toldot Esav'], we never find a unit that begins with 'toldot Avraham'!

Instead, at the precise spot where we would expect to find a unit beginning with 'toldot Avraham', we find a unit that begins with 'toldot Terach'. This alone already hints to the fact that there must be something special about Terach.

This observation also explains why Sefer Breishit dedicates so much detail to the story of Lot. Since the phrase'"toldot Terach' forms the header for parshiot Lech Lecha, Vayera and Chayei Sara, this unit must include not only the story of Avraham, but the story of the children of Nachor and Haran (Lot), as well.

Thus, in addition to the life story of Avraham himself, these 'parshiot' also discuss:

- Lot's decision to leave Avraham Avinu, preferring the 'good life' in Sdom (13:1-18(
- Avraham's rescue of Lot from the four kings (14:1-24)
- God's sparing of Lot from destruction of Sdom (19:1-24)
- The birth of Lot's two sons - Ammon & Moav (19:30-38)
- The 12 children of Nachor (22:20-24) [8 sons from his wife and 4 from his pilegesh. (Sounds familiar?)]
- Avraham's marrying off his son to Nachor's granddaughter

Hence, Parshat Chayei Sarah forms a most appropriate conclusion for this unit that began with 'toldot Terach'. Avraham makes a point of selecting a daughter-in-law specifically from the family of his brother, Nachor, thus bringing the history of 'toldot Terach' full circle. As we will show in our shiur, all of Terach's offspring may have potential for bechira. Therefore, if Yitzchak is to be married, his wife should be chosen from the family in which this potential lies.

[This may also explain why Nachor and Avraham themselves married 'within the family' - the daughters of Haran (see 11:29 and Rashi's identification of Yiska as Sara).]

WHY TERACH?

What was so special about Terach that he 'deserves' his own toldot? It is really hard to know since the Torah tells us so little about him.

On the one hand, Sefer Yehoshua introduces Nachor as almost a paradigm for the life of an idolater (see Yehoshua 24:2). Yet, as the end of Parshat Noach teaches us, Terach was the first person to recognize the spiritual importance of Eretz Canaan. He set out to 'make aliya' even **before** God had commanded Avraham to do so (see 11:31 & Seforno's explanation).

Even though this may sound a bit too 'zionistic', considering that this is the **only** detail we find in the Torah concerning Terach - one could suggest that Terach's merit lay simply in his having been the first person to move his family towards Eretz Canaan.

[In the 'spirit' of 'ma'aseh avot siman la-banim' - Terach could actually be considered the first 'Zionist' (in a modern day sense). Like any good Zionist, Terach plans to 'make aliya' and even encourages his family to do so, but he himself never makes it there.]

We may suggest, however, a more thematically significant approach. Terach and his offspring may represent a certain aspect of the bechira process - wherein there lies a potential to be chosen - but only if worthy. Terach's initiative in this regard may have granted the possibility of becoming part of 'chosen family' to any of his offspring who prove themselves deserving of this distinction.

Avraham Avinu not only follows his father's lead and continues to Eretz Canaan, but also follows faithfully God's command throughout. He then becomes the progenitor of God's special nation. Nachor, however, stays behind. Lot (Haran's son) had the opportunity to remain with Avraham, but detaches himself by choosing the 'good life' in Kikar Ha-yarden (see shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha). However, Nachor's granddaughter, Rivka, and great-granddaughters, Rachel & Lea, prove themselves worthy of joining the distinctive nation, and work their way back into the family of Avraham.

In fact, this may explain the reason for the Torah's minute detail of Rivka's hospitality - in the story of how she was chosen to become the wife for Yitzchak.

Even though the bechira process at times may appear random and indiscriminate, the framework of 'toldot Terach' may reflect the importance of personal commitment in earning that bechira. These observations can serve as a 'reminder' that our nation was not chosen simply for the purpose that we are to receive divine privilege, but rather towards the purpose that we understand and internalize the eternal responsibility of our destiny.

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. See Ramban on 15:18 where he beautifully reviews each of God's promises to Avraham Avinu in Parshat Lech Lecha, and the nature of their progression, and most important - how each additional promise reflected some type of reward to Avraham for his idealistic behavior. Relate the underlying concept behind this Ramban to the main points of the above shiur. See also Seforno on 26:5 in relation to God's promise to Yitzchak, and the need of the Avot to 'prove' that they were worthy of their bechira.

2. 'Ten' generations - in our shiur, we noted that there were ten generations from Adam to Noach, and ten as well from Shem to Terach. To be more precise, there are really ten from Noach to Avraham (as Pirkei Avot mentions) and only eight from Shem to Terach, but we used the 'phrase' ten generations to reflect the common pattern of continuous list of a succession of toldot from one generation to the next beginning with one statement of 'eileh toldot' and ending with a final statement of 'eileh toldot'. The parallel remains the same; for the sake of uniformity, we simply refer to this pattern as 'ten' generations.

3. TOLDOT AVRAHAM

We saw earlier that every chosen individual in Sefer Breishit receives his own 'eileh toldot' **except** Avraham! If indeed the header toldot reflects this bechira process, then certainly Avraham himself deserves one. Yet, for some reason, the Torah includes the story of Avraham's bechira within the category of toldot Terach. This enigma may suggest something unique about either Avraham's own bechira or his ability to have children (or both). In other words, Avraham's lack of toldot [remember: literally, offspring] may relate to his infertility. He and Sarah have a child only after a long and exasperating process.

Avraham and Sarah's names must be changed and a miracle must be performed simply for the child to be born. Even then, the process has yet to be completed - the child must return to Hashem at the Akeida. Thus, the lack of any mention of 'toldot Avraham' could reflect the difficult travails Avraham must endure in order to father and raise his child. [This may also explain why 'Avraham **holid** et Yitzchak' is added to 'eileh toldot Yitzchak'.]

Nonetheless, the question still remains stronger than the answer.

PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH - 3 mini shiurim

SHIUR #1 - "HASHEM ELOKEI HA-SHAMAYIM"

How should one describe God?

In Parshat Chayei Sarah, we find that Avraham Avinu appears to contradict himself in this regard. First he describes Hashem as "the God of the Heavens and the God of the Earth" (see 24:3), and then only four psukim later he describes Him as just "the God of the Heavens" (see 24:7).

This apparent contradiction caught the attention of many commentators, and hence provides us with an excellent opportunity to take a quick peek into their world of 'parshanut'.

To better appreciate the various answers that they provide to the above question, we must first review the context of these two psukim.

In chapter 24, Avraham Avinu is sending his servant to his 'home-town' of Charan in search of a wife for his son Yitzchak.

[Most likely, 'his servant' refers to Eliezer, even though his name is never mentioned (even once) in this entire parshia! In our shiur, we rely on this assumption.]

To guarantee that Eliezer will faithfully fulfill that mission, Avraham makes his servant take an oath in the Name of:

"Hashem, **the God of the Heavens, and the God of the**

Earth (see 24:1-4).

However, two psukim later, when Avraham must allay Eliezer's worry that the wife he finds for Yitzchak may prefer to stay in Charan (see 24:5-6) - he promises his servant that:

"Hashem **the God of the Heavens**, who had taken him [Avraham] from his homeland..." will send an 'angel' to assist him (see 24:7).

The classical commentators are troubled by two problems. First of all, Avraham's description of God as "Hashem, the God of the Heavens AND the God of the Earth" (24:3) seems to imply that there may be multiple gods, i.e. one of the heavens AND one of the earth! Why couldn't Avraham simply have stated "Hashem, the God of 'heaven and earth", just like the first pasuk of Breishit implies.

Secondly, they are bothered by the question mentioned in our introduction, i.e.: Why does Avraham 'shorten' his second description of God to simply "the God of the Heavens", without mentioning 'the earth' at all?

In our shiur, we will discuss how the commentators deal with these two questions.

HEAVENS 'and' EARTH

In relation to the first question, most all of the commentators share one basic approach, i.e. Avraham's peculiar statement of 'the God of the Heavens AND the God of the Earth' - relates directly to his current predicament.

As we will see, each commentator will consider one of the following points:

[A] Avraham's is talking to his servant;
[who may have a over-simplistic understanding of God]
[B] He is administering an oath at this time;
[C] He is searching for a wife for his son; and
[D] He is sending his servant to his home-town of Charan.

A. RADAK - 'Helping his servant understand'

Radak offers a 'philosophical' explanation of Avraham's statement to Eliezer. He claims that Avraham may be worried that his servant - even though he surely believes in the existence of 'the God of the heavens' - may not believe that God's Providence extends over mundane matters down on earth as well. Therefore, Avraham emphasizes this point in his opening statement, that he is not only the God overseeing what happens in the Heavens, but He also oversees what happens on earth.

However, when Avraham later explains to Eliezer how God had earlier spoken to him (see 24:7), it is sufficient for Avraham to mention only 'Elokei Ha-shamayim' - the God of the Heavens.

B. SFORNO - 'Scare tactics'

Seforno explains that Avraham must impress upon his servant the severity of this oath. To assure that his servant will keep this oath, he reminds him that God controls not only the matters of the 'earth' - and hence his fate in 'this world' - but also the matters of 'heaven', which implies his fate in the 'world to come' (i.e. after death). By this statement, Avraham warns his servant that should he break this oath, he could expect not only a punishment in this world, but also in the world to come!

C. IBN EZRA - 'Finding one's beshert'

Ibn Ezra relates to the fact the Avraham is sending his servant on a mission to find a wife. Even though finding a spouse may appear to Eliezer as a mundane event taking place on 'earth', Avraham must convince Eliezer that this marriage has been decided upon in the 'heavens'. This commentary may actually be based on the Gemara in Moed Katan 18b ("Amar Shmuel..." - in the middle of the daf), that on each day a 'bat-kol' proclaims that the daughter of 'ploni' will be married to the 'ploni'.

D. RAMBAN - "Eretz Yisrael"

Finally, Ramban offers a very 'zionistic' explanation. Unlike the other commentators who understand 'aretz' as referring to the 'earth', i.e. to events taking place on earth or in this world, Ramban understands 'aretz' as referring to the 'land of Israel'. Because his servant is now leaving Eretz Yisrael (but must bring Yitzchak's future wife back to this land), Avraham adds the phrase 'Elokei ha-aretz' to the standard phrase of 'Elokei ha-shamayim' in his description of God at this time.

ELOKEI HA-SHAMAYIM

Rashi does not deal directly with our first question. However, he does answer our second question (i.e. why Avraham only mentions 'Elokei ha-shamayim' in 24:7); and while doing so, he provides a solution for the first question as well.

Rashi, based on a Midrash of R. Pinchas in Breishit Rabba 59:8, differentiates between Man's perception of God BEFORE Avraham was chosen (as reflected in 24:7), and Man's perception of God now (in 24:3).

When God had first commanded Avraham to leave his homeland (see 24:7), no one on earth recognized God; therefore His Kingdom was only in Heaven. However, once Avraham came to the Land and began to proclaim His Name to the public (see Breishit 12:8 and Ramban on that pasuk), His Kingdom is now known 'on earth' as well. Therefore, when Avraham now sends Eliezer on his mission, God can be referred to as both 'Elokei ha-shamayim' AND 'Elokei ha-aretz'.

Note that Rashi's explanation is definitely not the 'simple pshat' of these psukim. Clearly, the interpretations offered by the other commentators provide a more 'local' explanation for the specific use of this phrase. Nonetheless, this Midrash definitely reflects one of the primary themes of Sefer Breishit (as discussed at length in our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha), and hence may reflect the 'pshat' of the Sefer, rather than the 'pshat' of the pasuk.

[Here we find a beautiful example of the art of Midrash, taking the opportunity of an apparent problem in the 'pshat' of a pasuk to deliver an important message concerning the entire Sefer.]

In conclusion, it is important to note a common denominator to all the interpretations presented above. We find that - when referring to God - it is not necessary to always refer to Him by the same Name. Instead, we refer to God in the context of our relationship with Him.

For example, in the Ten Commandments, we speak of God as Hashem, Kel KANA (see Shmot 20:2-4), and when Moshe receives the Second Luchot he speaks of God as "Hashem, Kel RACHUM ve-CHANUN" (see Shmot 34:6-8). In other words, the appellation that we use for God relates to the specific situation we are in.

The best example is from daily tefilla, when we begin by describing God as "Hashem, Elokeinu ve-Elokei avoteinu…"; then in each of the 19 'brachot' that follow, we bless God based on one of various attributes in on our relationship with Him. Next time you 'daven', take note!

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SHIUR #2 - AVRAHAM AVINU & 'REAL' ESTATE

The beginning of this week's Parsha is well known for its detailed description of the bargaining between Avraham and Efron. Some claim that Efron's intention all along was to attain the highest price (see 23:16), explaining that his generous opening offer (to give Avraham the land gratis - see 23:5-6) was nothing more than a ploy. But if this assumption were correct, why would Sefer Breishit find it necessary to discuss this event in such minute detail?

If, on the other hand, we assume that the stories of Sefer Breishit help develop its theme of 'bechira', then perhaps we should view this narrative from the perspective of that theme. Let's give it a try.

TWO PERCEPTIONS

To better appreciate what's going on, let's examine both sides of the bargaining table - Bnei Chet and Avraham:

1) Bnei Chet's perception:

Efron and his people [Bnei Chet] reign sovereign in Chevron and the surrounding region. As their families had been living in those hills for generations, they have every reason to think that they would continue to do so for future generations as well. In their eyes, Avraham is simply a 'wandering Jew', posing no threat whatsoever to their sovereignty.

Recall as well that Avraham had lived in Mesopotamia until age 75, and, ever since his migration to Cannan he spent much of his time traveling - to and from cities - such as Shechem, Bet-El, Chevron, and Beer Sheva. Having never established permanent residence, Avraham represents no challenge to the sovereign government of the Chittim.

Furthermore, Avraham constantly 'called out in the Name of God' wherever he went. His teaching had earned him such a widespread reputation that Bnei Chet refer to him as "nasi Elokim ata betocheinu" - you are a prince a God in our midst (see 23:6). As his career sent him constantly 'on the road', Bnei Chet had no reason to believe that Avraham's offspring would one day return to attempt to gain sovereignty over their land.

Therefore, there is no need to doubt the sincerity of their original offer to grant Avraham [at no charge] any burial plot he desires (see 23:5-7). Even in our own time, many societies express their appreciation for individuals who preach morality and dedicate their entire life to God by offering various benefits [what we call a 'clergy discount'].

Their generous offer simply reflects their sympathetic understanding of Avraham's difficult situation - a wandering 'man of God' who needs a place to bury his wife. For Bnei Chet, this entire incident was of little significance - Avraham posed no threat to their future or permanent control of the land.

2) Avraham Avinu's perception:

In contrast, Avraham Avinu perceived his situation in an entirely different light. His wife's death and the need for a burial site awakened his realization that aside from a Divine Promise, he had no real 'hold' in the land. For him, the purchase of a family burial plot constituted the first step towards a permanent attachment to the land. He wants to ensure that his children and grandchildren will return to this site and feel a true connection to the land.

Therefore, Avraham insists on paying the full price, as he has no interest at this time for 'handouts' or presents. He wants it known that this burial plot and its surrounding field belong to his family. Therefore, not only does Avraham insist on paying full price, he also demands that it be purchased in the presence of all the community leaders ("le-chol baei sha'ar iro" / read 23:16-20 carefully). In Avraham Avinu's eyes, this is a momentous occasion - he has now purchased his first 'achuza' [inheritance] in 'Eretz Canaan' (note 23:19-20!).

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FOR FURTHER IYUN:

In the above shiur, we discussed how the purchase of 'ma'arat ha-machpela' may relate to Avraham Avinu's special connection to the land, as promised to him by God. To further appreciate this connection, review 23:16-20 and compare them to 17:7-8. Note especially 'achuza' and 'Eretz Canaan', and relate this to our shiur on 'brit mila'. Note as well 25:9-10, 49:29-30 & 50:13!

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SHIUR #3 "ZERA VA-ARETZ"
- A PROMISE, COVENANT, AND OATH

Just prior to sending his servant in search of a wife for his son, Avraham briefly reviews the various stages of his 'bechira':

> "Hashem Elokei ha-shamayim asher lekachani mI-BEIT AVI u-ME'ERETZ MOLADETI ve-asher DIBER li, ve-asher NISHBA li leimor - le-ZAR'ACHA ETeiN et ha-ARETZ ha-zot..." (24:7)

In the following mini-shiur we attempt to explain the meaning of each phrase in this pasuk.

Recall from Parshat Lech Lecha that Hashem had made three promises (see 12:1-3, 12:7, 13:15) and two covenants (see 15:18, 17:8) concerning the future of Avraham's offspring in the Promised Land. In each of these promises, the key words repeated over and over again were "era' [offspring] and 'aretz' [the Promised Land/ e.g. "le-zar'acha etein et ha-aretz ha-zot"].

In Avraham's opening statement to his servant, we find an obvious parallel to the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha, as:

"Asher lekachani mi-BEIT AVI ußMe'ERETZ MOLADETI"

clearly echoes God's opening command of:

> "Lech Lecha me-artzecha, u-mMOLADETECHA u-miBEIT AVICHA."

However, the continuation of this statement: "e-'asher DIBER li, ve-asher NISHBA li leimor ..." raises a question concerning the precise OATH ('nishba') to which Avraham refers.

This question sparked a controversy among the commentators. Rashi explains that this oath was made at Brit Bein Ha-betarim, while Radak contends that it refers to the Akeida.

The reason for this controversy is quite simple. The term 'shvu'a' - oath - appears only once throughout all of God's promises to Avraham - specifically in God's 'hitgalut' to Avraham after the Akeida:

"bi **nishbati** ne'um Hashem, ki ..." (see 22:16)

Thus, Radak cites the Akeida as the source for "nishba li." Rashi, however, rejects this contention, presumably because nowhere at the Akeida does God say anything similar to "le-zar'acha etein et ha-aretz ha-zot." Rashi therefore cites as the source of God's oath Brit Bein Ha-betarim, which includes this very promise:

> "ba-yom ha-hu karat Hashem [note Shem Havaya, as above in 24:7] et Avram brit leimor: **le-zar'acha natati et ha-aretz** ha-zot..." (15:18).

Even though the actual word 'shvu'a' is never mentioned at Brit Bein Ha-Betarim, God's establishment of a covenant with Avraham may itself constitute a guarantee equivalent to a promise accompanied by an oath.

In truth, a closer look at the psukim relating to the Akeida may reveal that BOTH Rashi and Radak are correct: God had stated:

> "By myself I SWEAR ["bi nishba'ti"], the Lord declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son... I will bestow My blessing upon you ["barech avarechecha"] and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the heaven ["ke-kochvei ha-shamayim"] ... and your descendants will CONQUER the gates of their enemies ["ve-YIRASH zar'acha et sha'ar oyvav"]...(15:17).

Considering this context - i.e. the aftermath of the Akeida - we can well understand why this oath focuses primarily on Avraham's descendants '"zera'), who will evolve from Yitzchak. Hence, the promise regarding the Land emerges as less dominant a theme in God's vow in contrast to the promise of 'zera'.

Nonetheless, this oath does contain several expressions taken directly from God's earlier promises to Avraham concerning the 'aretz', especially Brit Bein Ha-betarim. The following table highlights the literary parallel between God's promise at the Akeida and previous promises to Avraham:

AKEIDA (22:17)	PREVIOUS PROMISES
ki barech avarechecha	va-avarechecha..ve-heye bracha (First Promise - 12:2)
ve-harbeh arbeh et zar'acha	habet na ha-shamayma – u-

ke-kochevei ha-shamayim	re'eh et ha-kochavim... ko yhiyeh zar'echa (Brit Bein Ha-Betarim - 15:5)
Ve-yirash zar'acha et sha'ar oyvav	lo yirashcha zeh, ki im asher yetzeh mi-mey'echa,hu yirashecha (Brit Bein Ha'Btarim - 15:4)
Ve-hitbarchu be-zar'acha kol goyei ha-aretz (15:18)	Ve-nivrchu becha kol mishpechot ha-adama (First Promise - 12:3)

This parallel demonstrates that God's oath after the Akeida reaffirms His previous promises and covenants.

Furthermore, Avraham's statement of "ve-asher nishba li leimor le-zar'acha etein et ha-aretz ha-zot," can be understood as his own understanding of God's promise BOTH in Brit Bein Ha-Betarim (shitat Rashi) AND the Akeida (shitat ha-Radak), as one essentially complements the other.

This interpretation also explains the redundancy in Avraham's statement: "asher DIBER li ve-'asher NISHBA li":

* "asher DIBER li" -
  most probably refers to Brit Bein Ha-Betarim, which begins with "haya DVAR Hashem el Avram..."
  (15:1, see also 15:4);
* while "asher NISHBA li"
  refers the oath of the Akeida (22:16).

THE OATH

Why is an oath necessary in ADDITION to God's original promise and covenant? Furthermore, why does God make this oath only after the Akeida?

The answer to these questions relates to the nature of the original promise and covenant, as explained in the last three shiurim.

Recall that in reaction to the events of Migdal Bavel (mankind's development into an anthropocentric society), God chose Avraham Avinu IN ORDER THAT his offspring become a special nation that would lead all nations toward a theocentric existence [our shiur on Noach]. Three promises and two covenants guaranteed Avraham Avinu a special Land ('aretz') to allow his offspring ('zera') to fulfill its destiny [our shiur on Lech Lecha]. This goal is to be achieved by this special nation's embodiment of the values of 'tzedek u-mishpat' [our shiur on Parshat Vayera].

One could suggest that in recognition of Avraham Avinu's display of complete faith in, and dedication to, God, as reflected specifically in the story of the Akeida, God elevates the status of His original promise from a 'brit' [covenant] to a 'shvu'a' [oath].

But what's the real difference between a covenant and an oath?

A covenantal arrangement is almost by definition bilateral; for it allows for one side to break his agreement should the other party break his. At the Akeida, God takes His obligation one step further for an oath reflects a unilateral commitment, binding regardless of what the other side does.

God now swears that even should Am Yisrael break their side of the covenant, He will never break His original promise. Although His nation may sin and consequently be punished, they will forever remain His people.

Herein may lie the primary significance of the Akeida, as it relates to the developing theme of Sefer Breishit. As the story of Avraham Avinu nears its conclusion, God brings His relationship with Bnei Yisrael to the level where He will never abandon us.

The Akeida, the greatest example of 'mesirut nefesh', symbolizes an indispensable prerequisite for Am Yisrael's development into God's special nation - their willingness to dedicate their entire life to the service of God. The site of the Akeida, Har Ha-Moriya, later becomes the site of the Bet Ha-mikdash (see II Chronicles 3:1), the most prominent symbol of that relationship.

shabbat shalom,
Menachem

Parshat Chayyei Sarah: A Place to Lie. . . Or a Place to Live

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT HAYYEI SARA:

The names of most parshiot usually tell us very little about the content of the parasha. This week's parasha raises this tendency to new heights: not only is the parasha not about the "Life of Sara," it is in fact all about the death, burial, and replacement of Sara (in several different ways).

The parasha tells at great length of the search for a mate for Yitzchak, in fact telling the story twice, once from the perspective of the omniscient narrator and once in the words of Avraham's servant as he describes his adventures to Rivka's family. However, since this part of the parasha usually gets lots of play in divrei Torah and parasha analyses, and I am a parasha-contrarian, we will be taking a close look at a different, more neglected story in the parasha: the story of Avraham's acquisition of a grave for Sara -- the Cave of Mahpela in Hevron.

THINK ABOUT IT:

1. The story of the purchase is told in excruciating detail. Read through the text slowly and carefully, unpacking every line. Imagine you are Avraham, telling your family or a few friends over the dinner table this story of a real estate purchase, and you'll see what I mean. Why is there so much detail? What is the message? And why is the whole story important enough to appear in the Torah?

2. The two parties to the conversation -- Avraham and the Hittites -- seem to be having trouble communicating, as each one repeatedly claims that the other side is not really listening. Why won't either side accept the kind generosity of the other side? Why are both sides trying to out-nice each other?

3. What other features of this section strike you as strange, and how do you account for them?

PARASHAT HAYYEI SARA:

This week's parasha begins with the death of Sara. It is characteristic of Jewish tradition to turn death into life, to call this parasha "The Life of Sara" rather than "The Death of Sara." Jewish tradition often refers to sad or evil things by their opposites:

1) When the Talmud and Midrash talk about sinful Jews, they often use the term, "The ENEMIES of Israel." We don't ever want to refer explicitly to our own people as sinful.

2) When the Talmud discusses the laws of one who curses God, the Gemara refers to the act of cursing God by its opposite: instead of calling it "cursing God," the Gemara refers to this evil act as "BLESSING God." Cursing God is something so terrible that we don't even want to refer to it as such, so we call it by its opposite.

3) When the Talmud refers to someone who is blind, it often uses the term, "One who has plenty of light." Of course, a blind person has no "light" at all, but instead of accenting the disability, the Gemara expresses the same thing by its opposite.

BURYING THE BODY:

Sara has dies; Avraham, seeking a grave in which to bury her, negotiates with the Bnei Het (Hittites) for a site. As you read the section, note the tremendous emphasis on the auditory -- hearing and listening:

BERESHIT 23:2-20 --
Sara died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hevron, in the Land of Cana'an. Avraham came to mourn for Sara and cry over her.

Avraham rose from before his dead and spoke to the children of Het, saying, "I am a stranger and temporary dweller among you; give me a holding of a grave ['ahuzat kever'] among you, and I will bury my dead from before me."

The children of Het answered Avraham, saying to him: "LISTEN TO US, master: you are a prince of God among us! Bury your dead in the choicest of our graves! Not one of us will withhold his grave from you, for you to bury your dead."

Avraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the children of Het. He spoke with them, saying, "If you really wish to [assist me in] bury[ing] my dead from before me, LISTEN TO ME, and let me meet with Efron, son of Tzohar; let him give to me the Cave of Mahpela which is his, which is at the end of his field; let him give it to me for full payment among you, as a holding of a grave ['ahuzat kever']."

Efron lived among the children of Het. Efron the Hiti answered Avraham IN THE HEARING of the children of Het, before all of the people in the gate of the city, saying, "No, master, LISTEN TO ME -- the field, I have given it to you, and the cave in it, to you I have given it! In the sight of the children of my nation I have given it to you; bury your dead!"

Avraham bowed to the people of the land. He spoke to Efron IN THE HEARING of the people of the land, saying, "But if you would only LISTEN TO ME, I have given the payment for the field -- take it from me, and I will bury my dead there."

Efron answered Avraham, saying to him, "Master, LISTEN TO ME -- what is a land of four hundred shekels of silver between me and you? Bury your dead!"

Avraham LISTENED to Efron, and Avraham weighed for Efron the money he had spoken of IN THE HEARING of the children of Het -- four hundred shekels of silver, acceptable to a merchant. The field of Efron, which was in Mahpela, before Mamre -- the field, and the cave in it, and all the trees of the field, in all its perimeter around -- arose to Avraham as a purchase, in sight of the children of Het, with all the people in the gate of the city. After this, Avraham buried Sara, his wife, in the cave of the field of Mahpela, before Mamre, which is Hevron, in the Land of Cana'an. The field and the cave in it arose to Avraham as a holding of a grave ['ahuzat kaver'], from the children of Het.

As usual, a significant word or phrase should jump out at us: "LISTEN TO ME" ["shema'eini"]. Except for the first time Avraham speaks, this word appears in *every* other instance in which someone speaks: pesukim (verses) 6, 8, 11, 12, 15, and 16. The Bnei Het say, "If you would only listen to us . . ."; Avraham responds by arguing his position and saying, "If you would only listen to me . . .", and so on.

When people are not just arguing, but keep insisting "If you would only listen to me!", it is clear that the parties are firm in their positions and unwilling to give in. "If you would only listen to me" means "Your proposal is unacceptable." If it's true that the two sides really are firm in their positions, what are their positions? What is the disagreement about in these negotiations? From a simple reading of the text, it appears that there is no disagreement at all! Avraham wants a place to bury Sara, and the Bnei Het generously offer him a place! Perhaps there is some disagreement over the money: Avraham wants to pay for a grave, while the Bnei Het want to give him one for free. But this only begs the question: why indeed does Avraham insist on paying for the grave? For now, let us hold this question.

THE SWEETNESS OF THE BNEI HET:

The next point of disagreement is less obvious than the disagreement about the money: Avraham apparently wants one type of grave, but the Bnei Het subtly refuse and offer only a different type of grave: Avraham repeatedly requests an "AHUZAT kever," "a HOLDING of a grave," while the Bnei Het offer only a "kever." Avraham, it seems, wants his *own* burial ground, a permanent possession -- a "*holding* of a grave," an "ahuza"-- but the Bnei Het instead offer him only a *space* within one of their own burial grounds: "Bury your dead in the choicest of *our* graves." Their generous offer of a space withing their own burial grounds is actually a refusal of Avraham's request to acquire his own private burial ground. Avraham responds by insisting on an "ahuzat kaver"; he is not interested in a space in one of the Hittite gravesites.

This leads us to the next disagreement: what does Avraham say he wants to buy from Efron, and what does Efron want to give him? In pasuk 9, Avraham states clearly that he wants the cave at the edge of the field. But in pasuk 11, Efron says he will give him the cave *and* the field! In pasuk 13, Avraham 'gives in' on this point and agrees to take the cave along with the field. And in pasuk 16, Avraham seems to capitulate again: the "If you would only listen to me!" pattern ends with an apparent victory by Efron, as instead of another "Would you listen to me!", we hear that "Avraham listened to Efron." In this great struggle to be "heard," Avraham has apparently accepted Efron's terms -- Efron has been "heard," Avraham has capitulated.

To summarize, 3 different issues seem to divide Avraham and the Bnei Het:

1) Whether Avraham will acquire a gravesite through sale or as a gift.

2) Whether Avraham will receive an independent, permanent family burial place (an "ahuza"), or only a place within one of the gravesites of the Bnei Het.

3) Whether Avraham will receive the cave only (as he proposes), or the cave and the field next to it (as Efron proposes).

WHY BOTHER?

What is Avraham really after? Why is it so important to him to get a private gravesite for Sara? Why doesn't he accept the generosity of the Bnei Het when they offer him a grave for Sara among their best graves? And why does he so stubbornly insist on paying for the grave? Why not accept a free grave?

Let's look at one more interesting feature of the text. One way in which the Torah clues us in to subtleties is the way it refers to different people. With whom is Avraham negotiating? The Torah refers to Avraham's interlocutors using three different names:

1) "Bnei Het": Pasuk 3 refers to them as the "Bnei Het," the "Children of Het": this is who they are in the simple sense, and this is how they are referred to throughout this section.

2) "Am Ha-Aretz": Pesukim 7, 12, and 13 refer to Avraham's interlocutors as the "am ha-aretz," the "people of the land." Notice that this phrase is *always* used just before Avraham speaks, not when *they* themselves speak! This hints to us that the reason they are called "am ha-aretz" is because Avraham in particular relates to them as the "people of the land"; he sees them as the "am ha-aretz" because that's exactly what he wants from them -- land!

3) "Those within the gates of the city": Pesukim 10 and 18 refer to the crowd of Hittite observers as "all those within the gate of the city" [i.e., everyone in town]. This description of the Bnei Het emphasizes that the whole deal takes place publicly, in front of the entire crowd of Bnei Het who live in Hevron. We will soon see why this is important.

CLOSING THE DEAL:

Now let's look at the end of the sale. What is the order of events?

1) Avraham pays the money.
2) The field, cave, and trees (!) become his.
3) Avraham buries Sara.
4) The Torah tells us again that the field and the cave become Avraham's.

The Torah tells us twice that field and the cave become Avraham's. But this is not exactly a repetition: the first time the Torah tells us about Avraham's acquisition, it refers to the field and cave as a "mikna," a purchase; the second time, after Avraham has buried his wife there, the Torah calls the field and cave an "ahuza," a permanent holding. Apparently, the field and cave become Avraham's "purchase" as soon as he pays the money, but they become an "ahuza," a permanent holding, only once he has buried Sara. In other words, he has taken possession of the field in two different ways: 1) first by buying it with money and 2) then by actually establishing physical occupancy of the land by burying Sara there.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

Let us now take the evidence and put it together:

* We know that Avraham wants an "ahuzat kaver," a permanent burial ground, not just a space in someone else's burial ground.

* We know that he wants to pay for it and will not accept it as a gift.
* We know he views the Bnei Het as the "am ha-aretz," "the people of the land," from whom he wants land.

* We know that the Torah stresses that this event takes place publicly and is witnessed by everyone present.

* We know that Avraham performs two different "kinyanim" (acquisition procedures), by both paying for the property and also occupying it. Each of these procedures yields a different status of ownership -- one of title, one of occupancy.

What does all this add up to? What is Avraham really after in these negotiations?

Avraham wants a piece of Eretz Yisrael, an "ahuza," a permanent piece of land which he will pass down to his descendants.

We saw in Parashat Lekh Lekha that Avraham misunderstands Hashem's promise that he will inherit the land: Avraham understands that he himself will take possession of the land, and therefore questions Hashem's promise when time passes and the land has not become his. But Hashem tells him that he has misunderstood: Avraham himself will not take ownership of the land -- his descendants will, and only after they have emerged from enslavement in Egypt (and only once the current inhabitants of the land have descended to a state of evil which justifies their destruction.) This is part of the message of the "berit bein ha-betarim," the "covenant between the split pieces." Avraham understands this and accepts it -- but he still desperately wants a foothold of his own in Eretz Yisrael.

Avraham knows that the people of the land -- the "am ha-aretz" -- will never sell land to him if he simply visits the local Century 21 real estate office to ask about a homestead. He is an outsider, a foreigner. For the Bnei Het to sell land to him would be to admit him into their society as an equal with permanent membership. Avraham is, so to speak, the first black person to try to move into an upper-class, all-white suburban community. That first black man knows no one will sell him a house if he makes his approach directly, so he approaches indirectly: perhaps he hires a white man to go and buy it for him, and then he moves in with his family.

Avraham's stratgey is to take advantage of the immediate need for a grave for Sara to grab a permanent foothold in Eretz Yisrael. Avraham lowers himself and behaves humbly, positioning himself as the bereaved husband who needs a favor from powerful neighbors. Paradoxically, Avraham's is a position of power: the Torah stresses that the entire scene takes place in public, with everyone watching. Most people are capable of refusing to give charity to a poor person who approaches them privately, but to refuse a poor person who comes to you and begs you in front of everyone is just plain embarrassing. Avraham milks his situation for all it's worth, positioning himself as the powerless one, the rootless stranger who depends upon the kindness of the honorable inhabitants of the land. Every single time he speaks, Avraham mentions that he needs a gravesite in order to bury his wife (in pesukim 4, 8, and 13), driving home the image of a grieving mourner to prevent the Bnei Het from deflecting him as an ambitious member of a minority group eager to move into the neighborhood. He introduces himself (pasuk 4) as a wanderer and a stranger, a person with no status among the natives of the land. He is a "charity case." He repeatedly bows to the Bnei Het, manipulating the Bnei Het into capitulating by making a show of submission.

The Bnei Het, experienced negotiators, immediately see Avraham's show of humility for what it is -- a threat. The more charity-worthy Avraham appears, the more inappropriate it would be to turn away his request in public. They try to reduce some of his power as a charity case by insisting that he is no rootless, statusless wanderer, he is a "prince of God"! Superficially, the Bnei Het are comforting Avraham, showing respect for him; in truth, they attempt only to undercut his negotiating position. Whenever they address him, they call him "adoni," "master," attempting to dislodge Avraham from the position of least stature -- and therefore greatest power -- in this negotiation. A "prince of God" needs favors from no one.

We can now look again at these negotiations and read them in a new light:

Avraham first positions himself as the underdog, which gives him power. Next, he asks for an "ahuzat kaver," a permanent grave-possession. The Bnei Het first try to challenge Avraham's powerful underdog status by insisting that they consider him a "prince of God." But they know they cannot turn him down flat on his request of a grave for his wife, so instead they become super-generous. They insist that they cannot let someone as important as Avraham pay for a grave. Instead, they offer him a free spot in one of their own family gravesites: "Bury your dead in the choicest of our graves! Not one of us will withhold his grave from you, for you to bury your dead." This is a compromise for them; they will have to let the "black man" into the neighborhood in some small way, but on the other hand, they much prefer to let him bury his wife in one of their family graves than to sell him a family cemetery of his own, which would give him a permanent connection to the land (and the status which comes with being a landowner).

Indeed, the Bnei Het stress the *action* of burial ("kevor meitekha") over the owning of a grave; they want to help Avraham bury his wife, not purchase a place to do so. They respond to Avraham's first request for an ahuzat kever by cleverly demurring: "*Bury* *your* *dead* in the choicest of our graves; not one of us will withhold his grave from you, for you to *bury* *your* *dead*." Well, we all know a grave is for burying the dead, so when the Bnei Het offer Avraham a grave specifically "to bury your dead," what they mean is that if he wants a grave in order to bury his wife, they will help him, but if he wants it for some other reason -- which he does indeed -- they will not deal with him.

Avraham acknowledges the "generosity" of the Bnei Het in pasuk 7 with a bow. But then he pursues a new strategy. The Bnei Het have outsmarted him by appearing to generously offer him one of their own graves; to simply refuse this offer and insist on his own gravesite would appear ungrateful and impolite. So he puts Plan B into action. He will single out an individual among the Bnei Het and embarrass him into selling him a grave.

Clearly, Avraham has done his homework: he has planned for this possibility. He already knows that there is a cave of Mahpela which will serve nicely as a gravesite. He also knows who owns it. He repeats that he wants to pay instead of accepting a gravesite as a gift. When you accept a gift, you are a powerless recipient -- you cannot control what is given to you, only choose to accept or not. If Avraham had agreed to accept a gift, when they offered him a free grave among their own graves, to refuse this gift would have seemed ungrateful. So he continues to insist that he wants to pay for it. Also, he wants to establish very clear ownership of this land, as we will see, and a sale is always more powerful than a gift.

Efron, the Hittite singled out by Avraham in Plan B, is a clever negotiator. He offers not just the *cave* which Avraham had requested (". . . Let me meet with Efron, son of Tzohar; let him give to me the *Cave* of Mahpela which is his, which is at the end of his field"), but also the *field* next to it (". . . The *field,* I have given it to you, and the cave in it, to you I have given it!"). Efron is trying to get Avraham to back down from the deal by insisting that the deal will include not only the cave, but also the field.

Efron's tactic recalls a tactic of Boaz in the Book of Ruth: the fields of Naomi need to be redeemed, so Boaz, the local judge/leader, offers the opportunity to redeem the fields to an unnamed relative of hers -- "Ploni Almoni." "Ploni" is quite ready to redeem the fields until Boaz adds that by redeeming the fields, he is also taking Ruth, Naomi's Moabite daughter-in-law, as a wife! "Ploni," unwilling to marry a foreign woman and besmirch his lilly-white pedigree, gets cold feet in a hurry and backs down, clearing the way for Boaz himself to redeem the fields and marry Ruth). Even though Efron continues to call the offer a gift, he knows Avraham will not accept it a gift. He throws in the field hoping that Avraham will decide that it's too expensive to buy both the field and the cave.

Avraham calls Efron's bluff and accepts the deal: "I have given the payment for the *field.*" Efron responds by carrying on with the myth that it is all a gift -- "Master, listen to me, what is a land of *four* *hundred* *shekels* of silver between me and you?" -- but what he is really doing is naming the price of the field and the cave. This is his final effort to dissuade Avraham: making the field and cave so expensive that Avraham will back down.

AVRAHAM FINALLY "LISTENS":

Until now, this negotiation has been filled with people telling each other "Shema'eini" -- "Listen to me!" Each party rejects the other's proposal, asserting his own in its place. But finally, in response to Efron's final disuasive effort, the Torah tells us, "Va-yishma Avraham," that "Avraham listened." It seems that Avraham has given in; he "listens" to Efron. Here we have a double irony: on the surface, Efron has lost -- he wanted to give the field for free, and Avraham insists on paying and gets his way. The irony is that in truth, Efron has won, because he will be paid a lot of money for the field he said he would give for free. But on the most fundamental level, Efron loses the most important struggle, as Avraham calls his bluff once again and comes up with the money without a second's hesitation. Efron underestimates the importance of Eretz Yisrael to Avraham, and this mistake costs him victory in this polite struggle.

A PLACE TO ** L I V E **:

The Torah goes on to tell us that "the cave, the field, and all the trees in it" become Avraham's. If this whole story were really about buying a grave, it would make no sense to mention the trees, and even the field would be besides the point. But if Avraham's real goal was to gain a permanent personal foothold in the land in which his children would live with their God, then we can understand that the *grave* is what is besides the point, but the field, and the living trees in it are completely the point! Indeed, the Torah later confirms that Avraham and Yitzhak do live in Hevron:

BERESHIT 35:27 --
Ya'akov came to Yitzhak, his father, to Mamre, Kiryat Arba, which is Hevron, where Avraham and Yitzchak [had] lived.

Eretz Yisrael is important to Avraham as a place to live, not a place to be taken in a pine box in the cargo bay of an El-Al 747 once he is dead and needs a place to be buried. He sees Eretz Yisrael as a place to live, not a place to be dead. And he wants a piece of it.

The Torah then tells us that he buries Sara in the cave. And then it tells us again that the field and the cave become his, as burying Sara is another form of acquisition of the land. Now Avraham is not just the owner in a legal sense, he has also occupied the land, permanently, through the grave he has established there.

These are the two senses in which we are connected to Eretz Yisrael -- in the living, active, making-Aliyah-raising-children-there sense, and, when we cannot hold onto the land for one reason or another, then it remains our "ahuzat kaver" -- the place where the dead of so many of our generations are buried. In a fundamental (and quite literal) sense, we always occupy the land. We always return to it to bury the next generation, or, when Hashem smiles at us, to return to establish a state, to live in its fields with its trees, and not just in its burial caves.

BERESHIT 25:8-10 --
Avraham expired and died at a good old age, old and satisfied, and was gathered to his people. Yitzhak and Yishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Mahpela, in the **FIELD** of Efron, son of Tzohar the Hiti, which is before Mamre. [In] the **FIELD** which Avraham bought from the children of Het -- there were buried Avraham and Sara, his wife.

Shabbat Shalom

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Practice Makes Perfect

"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years..." (23:1)

Apparently, it takes at least 10,000 hours of practice to master an artisanal skill. That's a serous amount of time, and sometimes before you clock up those 10,000 hours, you may be tempted to think that you've got it down. I well remember putting a lot less than 10 hours into learning Chuck Berry's classic intro to Johnny B. Goode, in a pastiche version I wrote called "Yankie Levine" for the Ohr Somayach Simchat Beit HaShoeva the year before last (when masks where something that only surgeons wore).

Despite what I considered to be adequate practice, on the performance night I found that my fingers had not yet learned the notes that my brain thought they had, and under the pressure of performance, well, let's say, Chuck was rockin' and a'rolling in his grave.

On the other hand (*l'havdil*), this Rosh Hashana I got up to *daven* Pesukei d'Zimra in Ohr Somayach, (my privilege for more years that I can remember). I was feeling a little 'under-the-weather,' nothing terrible, but suffering from yet-undiagnosed COVID-19. Nevertheless, I got 'up to bat,' and thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman's relentless drumming the *nusach* into my head (and years of practice), I adequately completed my task.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe once remarked that being a Jew means being "a professional human being". To be professional at anything — especially being a human being — takes a lifetime of dedicated practice.

"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years..."

Why didn't the Torah just write, "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred and twenty-seven years"? Sarah never stopped growing. She never stopped practicing to be a professional human being — not at seven years, not at twenty, not at a hundred and not even on the day she left the world. That is what made her the mother of the Jewish People.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Eruvin 100-105

A Morality Trip to the Zoo

Rabbi Yochanan said, "Even if the Torah (which teaches us morality, integrity and positive character traits) had not been given to us, we would have been able to learn many important basic elements of proper human behavior and character traits from the behavior of animals."

Hashem created a world possessing a vast multitude of life forms aside from humans, many of which comprise the animal kingdom. Animals not only serve to fill the world with beauty, wonder and utility, but also to help instill in mankind a variety of positive life lessons — if we observe animals in the correct way. Presumably, any animal lover or pet owner is well aware of the positivity of being near to animals. In particular, the love one has for a pet will also hopefully help one express love and care for his fellow humans as well.

Rabbi Yochanan mentions on our *daf* specific examples of positive character traits and behavior that may be learned from specific animals. For example, from the cat we could learn the elementary rules of cleanliness and respect for other people's sensitivities. This lesson is expressed in the fact that a cat does not relieve itself in the presence of people and also makes an effort to cover its bodily waste. Another example is the lioness, which shows us self-control.

From the ant we could learn the importance of group cohesion and respect for one another's property. The Midrash speaks of an ant that was carrying a grain of wheat in its mouth for winter — and dropped it. Ant after ant came along to sniff the grain, and each sniffer left the grain of wheat in its place. They realized that the wheat already had an owner, and therefore left it there until the owner returned to retrieve it.

Other examples are noted as lessons we could learn from animals. These include: decency from a mule and fidelity from a dove, which mates for life. If you might ask: What causes these and other animals to behave in these particular ways? The commentaries explain that, unlike mankind, animals do not possess the moral compass or intellectual capacity for exhibiting such praiseworthy "human" forms of behavior. Rather, Hashem wanted us to learn certain behavioral patterns, and He therefore created certain animals with instincts to act in a way that communicates important positive lessons to human onlookers.

Our *gemara* cites a verse indicating how Hashem teaches us wisdom for living by means of the animal world. "He teaches us through the animals of the earth and makes us wiser through the birds of heaven." *(Iyov 35:11)* Hashem teaches us the path of correct behavior and character traits by His instilling in animals and birds a special nature to serve as an educational path for mankind.

Elsewhere in *Shas* we find four reasons why Hashem created all of the animals before He created mankind *(Sanhedrin 38a)*. In addition to those reasons, I once heard an additional reason, one that is in the theme of our discussion in this article. Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, *zatzal*, explains that each animal possesses a special trait that mankind can learn from. There are many other examples of these positive traits besides those listed by Rabbi Yochanan in our *sugya*. Mankind was created only after the animals, he explains, because a person

contains within him all of the good qualities of all of the animals. Our Sages taught this concept in a Midrash: "The Holy One... created the entire world, the heavens and the earth, the upper and lower worlds. Everything that He created in the world, He created within mankind." *(Avot d'Rabbi Natan 31:3)* When a person loses track of his unique moral role in the order of the Creation, turning to arrogance — he is reminded that all of animal life preceded him, even the lowly mosquito.

And in addition to learning positive character traits from animals, our Rabbis point out that there are other important lessons we are able to learn from the animal world. They can serve as a type of test for humanity, regarding how we treat living beings that are not our equals. Do we treat them with compassion? Do we think about their physical and emotional pain? These issues, and related ones, are discussed in detail in traditional Jewish sources. In fact, many of our mitzvahs deal with our relationship with the animal world.

- ***Eruvin 100b***

WHAT'S IN A WORD

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Chayei Sarah: Boys and Girls (Part 1)

The Torah uses three different words to refer to Rebecca as a "girl": *naarah* (Gen. 24:14; 24:16; 24:28; 24:55; 24:57), *betulah* (Gen. 24:16), and *almah* (Gen. 24:43). Of course, the most common Hebrew word for "girl" is *yaldah*. Each of these four words also has a masculine counterpart that means "boy" (*naar, bachur, elem*, and *yeled*). In this essay we will seek to understand the possible nuances expressed by these four sets of words, and show how they are not true synonyms.

Let's begin with the terms *naar/naarah*. The Talmud (*Kesuvos* 39a) defines *naarah* as a girl from the age of twelve until six months after she has reached physical maturity. This would suggest that the term *naar* for a "boy" likewise refers specifically to a boy at the age of thirteen. Indeed, Rashi (to Gen. 25:27) explains that when the Torah refers to Jacob and Esau as *ne'arim*, this means that they were thirteen. This also explains why Ishmael was called a *naar* when the angels visited Abraham (see Rashi to Gen. 18:7) — at that time he was thirteen years old (see Gen. 17:25).

Nonetheless, it is quite difficult to define *naar/naarah* as belonging to a certain age bracket because we find those words used in the Bible multiple times to refer to girls who were not twelve years old and boys who were not thirteen. Case in point: the Torah refers to Rebecca as a *naarah* when Eliezer chose her as Isaac's wife, yet none of the commentators explain that she was twelve years old. According to *Seder Olam* (ch. 1), she was three years old when she married Isaac, which is too young to fit our definition of *naarah*; and according to *Sifrei* (to Deut. 33:21), she was fourteen years old, which is too old.

This problem is compounded when we survey the various males referred to as a *naar* in the Bible, We find baby Moses called a *naar* when he was three-months old (Ex. 2:6). Furthermore, Ishmael was called a *naar* when he was thirteen years old, but he is also called a *naar* three years later when he was already 16 years old (see Gen. 21:12; 21:17-20). Similarly, Joseph is called a *naar* when he was seventeen years old (Gen. 37:2), and was still called a *naar* when he was thirty years old (Gen. 41:12). We similarly find Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, called a *naar* at the age of thirty-one (Gen. 44:22, 44:33); King David's son Absalom, at

the age of twenty-one (II Sam. 18:32); King Solomon's son Rehoboam, at the age of forty-one (II Chron. 13:7); and Moses' attendant Joshua, at the age of fifty-seven (Ex. 33:11).

Possibly, because of these questions, *Midrash Mishlei* (to Prov. 1:4) expands the age limit of the term *naar* to twenty, twenty-five, and even thirty years old. This resolves most of the difficulties we raised, but does not account for the cases of baby Moses, Rehoboam, and Joshua. Taken altogether, these passages suggest that the terms *naar/naarah* do not refer to a specific age group, but to something else.

When the Torah calls the seventeen-year old Joseph a *naar,* Rashi (to Gen. 37:2) comments that Joseph used to engage in seemingly immature childlike activities, like fixing his hair and tending to his eyes. Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (1455-1526) explains that the Torah did not mean to brand Joseph a *naar,* but to describe his behavior as *naar*-like. He doubles down on our assumption that *naar* refers to a boy specifically between the ages of thirteen, and thirteen-and-a-half, but adds that, depending on the context, the term *naar* can sometimes apply to a male outside of that age bracket if that person somehow resembles an actual *naar.**

For example, when baby Moses was called a *naar,* this either refers to the fact that Moses' voice sounded like the voice of an actual *naar,* or that his mother had enclosed him in the basket with a sort of mini-wedding canopy expected of an actual *naar* because she anticipated missing him getting married (see *Sotah* 12b).

In the case of Joseph, his immature behavior was enough of a reason for the Torah to brand him a *naar,* even as he was older than the age usually denoted by that term. Furthermore, Mizrachi explains that Rehoboam was called a *naar* as a forty-one year old because he was immature and had weak leadership skills, as if he were a young boy. When Joseph was again called a *naar* at the age of thirty (Gen. 41:12), this did not actually reflect anything immature about Joseph's behavior. Rather, as Rashi explains, the Pharaoh's butler called Joseph a *naar* in order to disparage him and imply that Joseph was not worthy of the greatness that awaited him.

Turning to the cases of Benjamin and Absalom, Rabbi Mizrachi explains why they were called *naar* at more advanced ages than that term suggests. Vis-à-vis their fathers, they are always going to be considered a "boy," even when they are in their twenties and thirties.

Finally, Rabbi Mizrachi explains that Joshua was called a *naar* in his late fifties because that verse was said in the context of his serving Moses, and anybody who functions as a servant in the service of others can be called a *naar,* regardless of their actual age (see also Radak to Joshua 6:23, who makes this point). Although Rabbi Mizrachi does not mention this, the Torah also calls Isaac a *naar* at the age of thirty-seven (Gen. 22:5) and Ishmael a *naar* (Gen. 22:3) at the age of fifty-one. We can account for both examples by explaining that they were both attending to Abraham, and essentially just following his lead, as a child might follow his father.

With this information in hand, we can now begin to consider why the Torah might refer to Rebecca as both a *naarah* and an *almah*. Ibn Ezra (to Song of Songs 1:3) explains that the word *almah* denotes a girl who is younger than a *naarah*. Accordingly, we may explain that Rebecca's physical age was that of an *almah* – younger than a *naarah* — but her emotional/intellectual maturity and/or her spiritual stature was on par with that of an older *naarah*. For this reason, both of those terms are appropriate in describing Rebecca. (This understanding works best if Rebecca was three years old when she was chosen as Isaac's mate.)

According to many commentators, the words *elem* and *almah* are related to the Hebrew words *eilum* and *ne'elam,* which mean "hidden." Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 13:15) explains the connection by noting that *elem* refers to a "young *naar*" who has not matured/developed yet, such that his potential remains "hidden" and "unrealized." *Peirush HaRokeach* points out that throughout the story of David and Jonathan's

secret pact, the lad who served as their go-between is called a *naar* (see I Sam. 20:1-42), but in one instance he is referred to as an *elem* (I Sam. 20:22), in allusion to their need to keep the agreement "hidden" from Jonathan's father, King Saul.

Based on this link, the commentators offer various ways of understanding the word *almah* as differing from the word *naarah*. For example, *Peirush HaRokeach* explains that the term *almah* refers to a girl who is less "outgoing" than the term *naarah* would indicate. Accordingly, Rebecca may have already reached the age of *naarah* and perhaps even advanced beyond that technical stage of development (if she was fourteen), yet she was still an *almah* because she was "hidden" from other people. *Peirush HaRokeach* adds that the term *almah* teaches us that Rebecca was such an innocent and sheltered damsel that she had never even been propositioned before, something apparently uncommon for a girl of her age at that time and place.

Rabbeinu Efrayim ben Shimshon (to Gen. 24:43) explains that the term *almah* said about Rebecca, and the word *elem* said about King David (I Sam. 17:56), imply a person who "hides" their words, which is typically a sign of someone wise. Thus, *naarah* might describe Rebecca's physical age, while *almah* speaks more about her intelligence.

Rabbi Shimon Dov Ber Analak of Siedlce (1848-1907) explains that the two terms in question refer to two qualities characteristic of people in the age of adolescence. The word *naar* relates to the young adult's tenacious industriousness, which gives them the resolve to "shake off" (*l'na'er*) anything that might get in their way and impede their ambitions. The term *elem*, on the other hand, does not refer to the adolescent's tenacity, but to their sheer power and strength. This meaning of *elem* in the sense of "energetic" is related to the word *alim* (with an ALEPH), which is the standard Targum rendering of *ometz/amitz* ("strong" or "resilient").

Chizkuni (to Gen. 24:44) contends that the words *naarah* and *almah* mean the exact same thing, but that *naarah* is a Hebrew word while *almah* is Aramaic. He explains that in the story at hand, the narrator first refers to the young lass as a *naarah* (in Genesis 24:16) because the Torah is written in Hebrew. Afterwards, in Eliezer's dialogue with the girl's family, Eliezer refers to her as an *almah* (to Gen. 24:43) because he thought that Rebecca's family understood only Aramaic (because they lived in Harran, which is in Aram, where Aramaic was spoken). Nonetheless, *Chizkuni* points out that Rebecca's family did actually speak Hebrew, because when the question of her leaving with Eliezer arose, her brother and mother referred to her as a *naarah* (Gen. 24:57).

Another female in the Bible referred to as an *almah* was Moses' sister Miriam, who watched over her younger brother as he was put into the Nile and was saved by the Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:8). In this case, she was six years old at the time (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:13). It seems that this age is too young to fit the technical definition of *almah* (*yaldah* is more appropriate), as the Talmud (*Sotah* 12b) felt the need to seek out exegetical explanations for the use of this appellation. The Talmud explains that Miriam was called an *almah* in this context because she "hid" the fact that she was Moses' sister, or because she acted with the "strength" and "vigor" expected of an older young lady.

In next week's essay we will expand on the idea that the term *naar/naarah* is related to the concept of "revealing," which contrasts very nicely with what we wrote above that *elem/almah* is connected to the idea of "hiding." We will also discuss the words *yeled/yaldah* and *betulah/bachur*.

To be continued...

***NOTE**: See also Rashi (to *Ketuvot* 44b), who explains that when the word *naarah* is spelled deficiently (i.e. sans the letter HEY as the ultimate letter), it could also include a girl younger than the age of twelve. However, when *naarah* appears in the plene form with the letter HEY at the end, it serves to *exclude* a girl younger than twelve.

Q & A

CHAYEI SARAH

Questions

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sarah hear that caused her death?
3. What title of honor did the *Bnei Chet* bestow upon Avraham?
4. Where was Avraham born?
5. How were Avraham's camels distinguished?
6. What is meant by "all the good of his master in his hand"?
7. What special character trait did Eliezer seek when choosing a wife for Yitzchak?
8. Why did Avraham's servant, Eliezer, run toward Rivka?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Eliezer?
10. When Lavan told Eliezer that the house was cleared out, what did he remove?
11. Who did Eliezer want Yitzchak to marry?
12. Aside from Eliezer, to which other people did Rivka offer to give water?
13. Lavan answered Eliezer before his father, Betuel, had a chance. What does this indicate about Lavan's character?
14. What did Rivka mean when she said "I will go?"
15. What blessing did Rivka's family give her before she departed?
16. Who was *Ketura*?
17. What gift did Avraham give to Yitzchak?
18. How old was Avraham when he died?
19. For how many years did Yaakov attend the Yeshiva of *Ever*?
20. How many times is Eliezer's name mentioned in this week's Parsha?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 23:2 - Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah.
2. 23:2 - That Yitzchak was almost slaughtered.
3. 23:6 - Prince of G-d.
4. 24:7 - Ur Kasdim.
5. 24:10 - They were muzzled, so they wouldn't graze in the fields of others.
6. 24:10 - Eliezer carried a document in which Avraham gave all he owned to Yitzchak so that people would want their daughter to marry him.
7. 24:14 - He sought someone who excelled in performing acts of kindness.
8. 24:17 - He saw that the waters of the well rose when she approached.
9. 24:29 - Lavan coveted his money.
10. 24:31 - Idols.
11. 24:39 - His own daughter.
12. 24:44 - To the men who accompanied Eliezer.
13. 24:50 - That he was wicked.
14. 24:58 - I will go even if you don't want me to go.
15. 24:60 - That the blessings given to Avraham would continue through her children.
16. 25:1 - Hagar.
17. 25:5 - The power of blessing.
18. 25:7 - 175 years old.
19. 25:17 - 14 years.
20. None.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Hand-Washing Upon Rising

"Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding washing the hands."

Blessings usually begin with a standard formula: Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe.... Rabbi Shimon Schwab, in his seminal work titled *Iyun Tefillah*, proposes a novel and insightful understanding to the classic and timeless opening words of the blessings. Rabbi Schwab suggests that, in addition to the simple understanding of the first word, "blessed" can also be understood to mean "increase." The Hebrew word "*baruch*" is derived from the word "*ribui*," which means "more." "*Baruch Atah Hashem... Melech HaOlam*" can now be understood as a declaration that G-d's grandeur in the world should be increased. This means that the introductory words to a blessing are a form of a prayer that G-d's Majesty should be recognized and accepted by more and more people in the world.

"Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding washing the hands."

The function of washing our hands in the morning (as well as before any other spiritual undertaking) is the onset of preparing ourselves spiritually for the forthcoming day. In the same way that we must physically prepare ourselves for each day, so too must we begin the process of preparing to include a clearly discernable spiritual dimension throughout our daily lives. This is why we wash our hands at the beginning of the day. To emphasize that although there is a mundane nature to our daily life, we are nevertheless embarking on something that transcends the physical.

But why is this being done through the medium of washing our hands? Our hands symbolize our physical actions. Hashem has elevated the Jewish People to the status of His chosen nation. This means that every physical act we do in this world can be uplifted and turned into a corresponding spiritual deed. Therefore, the words of the blessing that we recite can be read as G-d commanding us to uplift our hands (see Isaiah 63:9 for the context of the word "*netilah*" as meaning to raise up).

Interestingly enough, the authorities in Jewish Law write that even if an abundance of water was used to wash one's hands and there is therefore absolutely no concern that any part of the hand might not have come into contact with the water, it is nevertheless *always* correct to raise one's hands immediately after washing them while they are still wet. It as if Hashem is exhorting us to raise ourselves above our physical existence and to emboss a spiritual hallmark on all that we do, through our actions here in this physical world.

THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 3 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

Shemini Atzeret or Simchat Torah?

Another interesting calendar quirk that distinguishes between Eretz Yisrael and *Chutz La'aretz* is that as Simchat Torah is on Shemini Atzeret in Eretz Yisrael, and this year it fell out on Shabbat, at Mincha the Torah reading of the upcoming *Parshat Bereishet* was read. This is an occurrence that is impossible in *Chutz La'aretz*. Since it was still Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah only started that evening, this meant that the Torah cycle had not yet concluded in *Chutz La'aretz.* Therefore, at that Shabbat Mincha Torah reading, the next *parshah* in the on-deck circle, *V'Zot HaBracha*, was read.

There was another potential distinction between Eretz Yisrael and *Chutz La'aretz* this year. In Eretz Yisrael, as Simchat Torah is Shemini Atzeret, it was observed on Shabbat this year, as opposed to *Chutz La'aretz*, where Shemini Atzeret was Shabbat, and Simchat Torah was on Sunday. Classically, on Simchat Torah, aside from certain halachic dispensations such as dancing and clapping, due to the tremendous *simcha of the* mitzvah engendered by the day, there have also been certain "*minhagim*" (or, more accurately, liberties taken) that have been tolerated over the generations in the name of "*simcha,*" ostensibly due to the Rabbinic nature of the Yom Tov. These include children burning down succahs and setting off firecrackers! Although there is no lack of admonishment in halachic literature discouraging such extreme forms of "merriment," extra vigilance is needed. However, this year in Eretz Yisrael many of these "*minhagim*" did not apply at all since Simchat Torah was on Shabbat, and, as opposed to a regular Yom Tov, transfer of a flame is strictly prohibited.

What to Use for *Kiddush*

A flip side of this: perhaps this year, the common *minhag* in Yeshivas to make *Kiddush* on *Mezonot* (as the '*Seudah*') on Simchat Torah Night as per the *Chazon Ish* may not have equally applied as it was Shabbat, since the *Leil Shabbos Kiddush* is mandated *m'Deorayta*, as opposed to *Leil Yom Tov Kiddush*, which is *d'Rabbanan*. Hence, many more were careful to make this *Kiddush* specifically with a full *Hamotzi Seudah*.

This issue is basically a dispute between the Magen Avraham and the Vilna Gaon as to whether or not the requirement of *Kiddush* being made *B'makom Seudah* can be fulfilled with *Mezonot* or if a full bread *seudah* (*Hamotzi*) is mandated. Although "*Minhag Yisrael*" is to be lenient, due to the strength of the opposition several Acharonim, including Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor and the Chazon Ish, maintained that when the *Kiddush* is mandated *m'Deorayta* (such as the Friday night *Kiddush*) it is preferable to be strict and make *Kiddush* only with *Hamotzi*, whereas when the *Kiddush* is *m'Derabbanan* (such as Shabbat Day *Kiddush* or *Leil Yom Tov Kiddush*) one may be lenient. Hence, many Yeshivas, following the Chazon Ish's precedent based on this approach, generally speaking do make *Kiddush* on *Simchat Torah* night on *Mezonot*, since the *Kiddush* on *Yom Tov*, even at night, is also *d'Rabbanan*. But this year, as in Eretz Yisrael Simchat Torah was on Shabbat, the night Yom Tov *Kiddush* is *Deorayta*, and so, perhaps, the general *Kiddush* custom changed.

Haftarat Miketz

This year, as the eight-day holiday of Chanuka will start on a Friday, it will end on a Friday as well, right before Miketz. This affords us a rare opportunity to read Miketz's actual haftarah, as the vast majority of the time it is Shabbat Chanuka, which pre-empts it for one of the special Shabbat Chanuka haftaras. This haftarah, last publicly read twenty years ago back in 5761, discusses the wisdom of Shlomo HaMelech, featuring the famous story of his ordering to cut the baby in half in order to determine its real mother. This is actually the second rarest haftarah that Ashkenazim read, just 24 times over the Tur's entire 247-year cycle.

To be continued...

Written l'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha l'yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad.

This author wishes to acknowledge Rabbi Shea Linder's excellent article on this topic.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Sarah, the mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum.

Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels (some 140 gallons)! This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother, Lavan, result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother.

Avraham remarries Hagar, who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Living Through The Days

Avraham ages — he is *zaken*, and the Torah records he had *come through the days*, and that G-d blessed him *in everything*. From this summary of Avraham's life in his old age, we learn a great deal about how to live.

A *zaken* is one who has acquired wisdom through his vast experience. This is contrasted with the word for youth — *na'ar* — which, in the verb form, means to shake off. A youth still shakes off impressions and does not absorb them permanently. He does not learn *from* life, but seeks to shape his world out for himself. While this allows for the idealism of openness to new experiences, it comes with the serious handicap of not absorbing the lessons and consequences of his and others' prior experiences.

The Torah's word for elderly — *zaken* – is phonetically related to the root *sachan/sakan*, whose various senses denote the basic concept of being sensitive to absorb external impressions. A *sochein* is an attendant, and one who cares for an ill person and looks out for harmful influences that might affect his charge. In doing so, the attendant *absorbs* the influences himself as he protects the other.

Sakanah, danger, also denotes the perception and absorption of external stimuli, and leads to a change in behavior as a result.

Indeed, our Sages relate that *zaken* is an acronym for "*Zeh KaNah*"– he who has *acquired* wisdom (*Kiddushin* 32b), or, alternatively, he who has *acquired* both this world and the world to come (*Ber. Rabbah* 59:6). To Jewish wisdom, a *zaken* is one who, in his life on earth, has conquered both worlds, this one for the next, by absorbing the impact of his life experience and impressing the stamp of G-dliness on his earthly life.

Thus, the description of Avraham as coming "through his days" is understood by our Sages to mean that he had lived his days *doubly*. This means that, although he lived out his days as earthly days, he really lived them as spiritual days. He lived "through" them, as they were a passageway leading him directly to the life of the world to come. (*Ber. Rabbah* 59:6). He was not overcome by his days, but, rather, each one was a milestone for him, an opportunity for him to absorb his experiences — on his way to eternity.

- *Sources: Commentary, Ber. 24:1*

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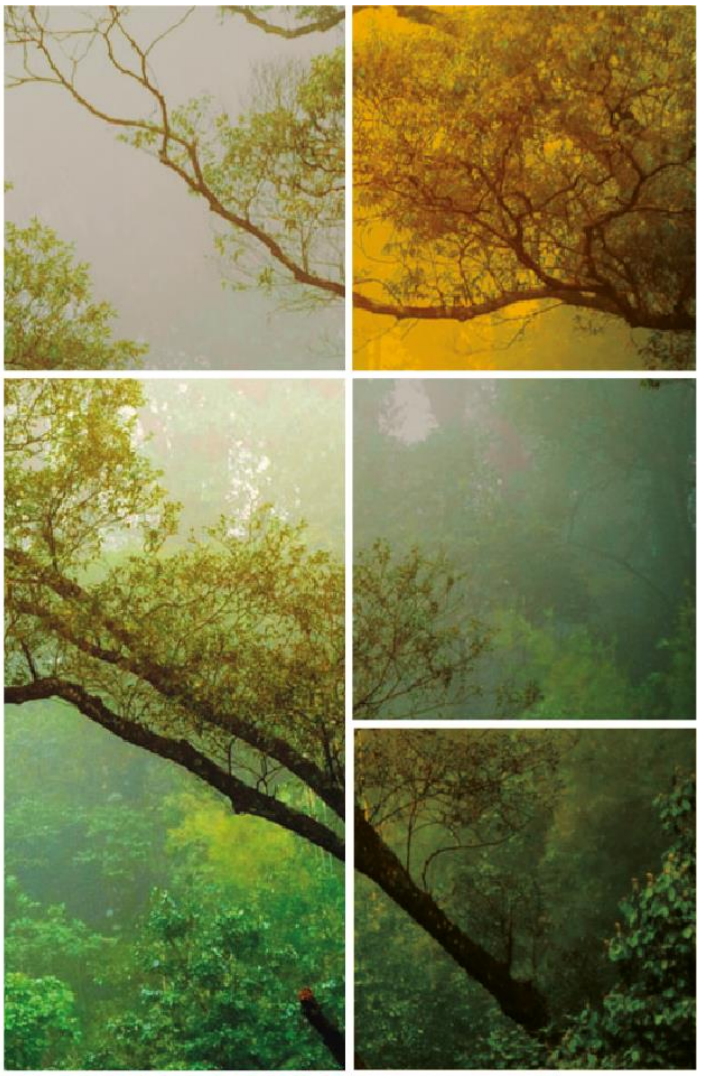

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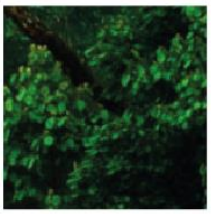

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