

## Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 10 #5, November 18, 2022; 25 Cheshvan 5783; Chayeisara 5783; Mevarchim HaHodesh

**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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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

In my introductions to the Devrei Torah in this Torah cycle, I have been focusing frequently on legacy. This focus makes sense, because Sefer Bereishis repeatedly starts a new section with "Ayleh Toldot . . ." – here is the legacy of (various individuals). While the Torah does not introduce a section as "Ayleh Toldot Sarah," Chayeisara does focus on Sarah's legacy. (The entire parsha takes place after her death.)

When God changes Sarai's name to Sarah, He tells Avraham that the reason is that Sarah's descendants will include rulers of nations. A famous story recalls Rabbi Akiva asking his students what connects Sarah and Queen Esther. His answer is that while Sarah lives 100 plus 20 plus 7 years, Queen Esther rules over 100 plus 20 plus 7 provinces (Bereishis Rabbah 58:3). As Rashi famously states, Sarah is as beautiful at 20 as at 7 and as sinless at 100 as at 20. Sarah lives her life keeping her early qualities and adding the mitzvot, insights, and perspectives that she learns over her life. Esther, the first queen over an empire (Persia is the first empire to include most of the known world), connects the people from many dozen distinct empires the way that Sarah connects the various parts of her life. (This insight comes from Rabbi David Fohrman, alephbeta.org.)

We see a focus on legacy throughout Chayeisara. Rabbi Dov Linzer observes that Chayeisara in some ways is the opposite of Lech Lecha. While God tells Avraham to leave his family behind and move west to a place He will show him, when it becomes time to find a wife for Yitzhak, he tells his servant (Eliezer) to go to the Old Country (where his family lives) to choose an appropriate wife. As Rabbi Linzer states, Judaism is a family based religion. Christianity, in contrast, is a faith based religion. God's promise to the Avot to make a great nation from them requires a focus on Jews who connect back to Avraham. We are Ivri – people set apart, standing separate from other nations. This separation exists in life and in death. For example, Jewish law forbids a Jew and non-Jew to be buried together in the same cemetery. (The tradition is for cemeteries to have separate Jewish and non-Jewish sections with intermarried couples buried at the edges, next to each other but in separate sections.) While other nations can accept each other's faith and mingle, Judaism requires separation from other religions and a family connection among Jews to remain who we are and always have been.

Avraham's connection with his immediate family continues after Sarah's death. How does Ishmael know of Sarah's death and end up at Avraham's funeral? Rabbi Marc Angel connects various mentions in the Torah and deduces that Yitzhak returns to where God calls to Hagar, finds her, and brings her back to remarry Avraham, this time using the name Keturah. Hagar/Keturah keeps in contact with Ishmael. According to Midrash, Avraham visits Ishmael's home twice and meets his wives and children. Keturah informs Ishmael of Avraham's death so he can be with Yitzhak at their father's funeral. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes from the close adult relationship of Ishmael and Yitzhak that Jews and Moslems have a common origin and have reason to find common interests. Even so, Avraham sends all his children from Hagar and Keturah east to keep them separate from Yitzhak's (Jewish) family.

After Sarah's death, her legacy requires a strong, devoted woman to maintain the important customs and values of a Jewish wife and mother. Eliezer recognizes that the ideal wife for Yitzhak must embody chesed – Avraham's number one value. His test of a woman who will offer him a drink of water and also draw water for his camels is a strong test of chesed. Since a thirsty camel drinks between 50 and 100 liters of water, Rivka offers to draw more than 500 liters (more than 100 gallons) of well water to satisfy 10 camels. Rivka passes this test, and Eliezer knows that he has found the

perfect wife for Yitzhak. Rivka comes and re-establishes the rituals of a Jewish wife – rituals (such as lighting Shabbat candles) that we maintain today, nearly 3500 years since Yitzhak and Rivka's marriage.

A Rebbe is like a father, and my Rebbe/father figure for decades was Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, who earned my weekly dedication of these Devrei Torah to his memory – many times over during our friendship. He was my mentor for nearly fifty years. Rabbi Cahan and his beloved wife Elizabeth taught Hannah and me to find deeper appreciation for the many levels of insights in the Torah. Shabbas and Yom Tov with the Cahans was always special, something that we have tried to pass on to our children. Avraham and Sarah built a legacy that has lasted for more than 3500 years. Dedicated Jews like the Cahans renew and reinforce the Jewish legacy each generation – and that is why we Jews have survived so long and shall always be around, always fulfilling Hashem's promise to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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**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](http://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 Shlema for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah & Alan

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### **Dvar Torah: Chayei Sarah: The Life He Lived**

by Rabbi Label Lam © 2001

*And these are the days of the years of Avraham's life that he lived: one hundred years and seventy years and five years. (Breishis 25: 7)*

Here is the beginning of the Torah's obituary of one of the greatest people to ever walk on this planet, Avraham. There is a curiosity here that calls out for an explanation. A few words seem extra but we know that that cannot be. This is the Torah's reporting. Why does it say, "that he lived"? Doesn't everybody live life? Is that not a redundancy?

There are a few approaches but they start from the same premise. The Malbim asks and amplifies the question as follows; "The years that were not spent serving HASHEM are not called years of life, but rather years of living as an animal lives and Avraham did not recognize HASHEM immediately." How then can it be said about the life of Avraham "that he lived" concerning all 175 years of his life?

He spent many years thinking and researching until he finally became convinced that HASHEM is the Creator and the Constant Conductor of the Universe. So why are all those early years included in the count of "that he lived"?

The Malbim finds another model for this very same expression, 'that he lived,' by the account of Adam's life. We know that after eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in defiance of HASHEM's command not to, and bringing death to the world, he spent 130 years doing Teshuvah.

From the fact that we find Adam's life is crowned with those words, "that he lived," tells us that through his Teshuvah he recovered all that he had lost. Such is the power of Teshuvah. The same can be said about Avraham.

He spent the first three years of his life in a cave hidden away for his safety. Once he saw the world with his original eyes, he posited that there must be a single designer and a creator that is organizing the world. He examined 3,000 forms of idolatrous claims thoroughly and found them all lacking validity. At the age of 52 he became sufficiently convinced that there is One HASHEM Whose kindness spins and feeds a world that he began to share his findings with whoever would listen.

The approach of the Malbim is that once he realized TRUTH he did Teshuvah for the time he had lost in his youth. When one does Teshuvah from love then Aveiros are converted into Mitzvos. How does that work? Is it magical? No! It is a kindly opportunity afforded to us by the Creator but there is a valid logic to it. When a person realizes that the Aveira put him at a greater distance from his Creator, then the desire to come closer is stronger. It's the Aveira that drives the desire to overcome that distance. The Zohar states, "There is no light like the light that comes from darkness!"

Another approach is that those early years when Avraham was searching and researching are not at all discounted from the years "that he lived." What was he supposed to do? A young boy wakes up in a "non-observant" family setting. What is he supposed to do? He can't read Hebrew. He has no teachers. Can he be held accountable for wasting time from Torah until he discovers the Torah?! Of course not! All he can do is question and seek truth.

Avraham was doing exactly what he was meant to do in those early stages of his life. However, once he discovered TRUTH, he never looked back. He lived! All of the time he invested in the search was not time wasted. It was all one giant preparation for the life he lived.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5781-chayei-sarah/>

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## **"Rather to my land and to my birthplace you shall go" – A Religion based on Family**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer \* © 2010

Avraham, at the end of his life, is worried that Yitzchak find a proper wife, and sends his servant back to his homeland to find a wife from his country and his relatives. Thus, Parshat Chayei Sarah is, in a way, a reverse lekh lekha. In parshat Lekh Lekha, Avraham was told to leave his homeland, his relatives, and his father's home, and in Chayei Sarah he sends his servant back to his homeland and his birthplace. While this cannot become a true reversal of that journey ["Beware that you do not return my son to that place." (Gen. 24:6)], it is nevertheless demonstrating to us that Avraham has not divorced himself from his connection to his family. This was also the message at the end of parshat Vayeira. After the climax of the akeida, after having passed all his tests, Avraham comes back to Earth, comes back to the human world of relationships, and is informed about his family in Aram NaHarayim and their welfare.

One the one hand, these narratives are reminding us that no matter where we travel and where we roam, no matter how lofty our accomplishments, we can never forget our family and our birthplace. Even if we have physically distanced ourselves, even if we have rejected our family's values and adopted a different religion or a different ideology, our family is still our family. They are our strongest human ties, and we must always in some form return to them. When we have established our independent identity, it is true that on some level "You can never go home again." And at the same time, "There is no place like home."

However, there is also a larger message about Jewish identity. We spoke last week about a universalist ethos – about the path of God being one of tzedakkah u'mishpat – about fighting for righteousness and justice for all people. And yet, at the same time, Judaism is a story about a family. The brit that God made with Avraham was with Avraham and his descendants, and all the promises focused around children and land. Judaism is not a universalist religion. God "realized" at the end of Parshat Noach that a message to all mankind soon got lost – 10 generations after Adam mankind needed to be destroyed, and 10 generations after Noach mankind was again becoming corrupted. God then chose Avraham – to start with one man, with his family, his descendants, with a nation that would be the bearers of the true message, and through them the message would spread throughout the world. For this to happen, it is a religion that must be built on the strong ties of family.

Avraham, as father of this religion, knows that while he has strong ties to the people of Canaan, and some of them are his followers, his strongest ties are with his family, and this is only natural. His son, thus, must marry someone who is part of this family. While this may sound offensive to some, this is really nothing more than the first example of a Jewish parent's concern about intermarriage. Judaism is different than other religions in this way. Christians can marry people of other faiths, Jews may not. Christianity is only based on faith; Judaism is also based on family. Of course, it is possible for someone outside to join the family through conversion. Such a convert not only shares our faith, but is an equal member of our family, and can say "Lord who took my fathers out of Egypt," just like any other Jew. Fellow Jews are not only co-religionists, they are also members of the family, part of the nation.

This particularism is hard for some Jews, let alone non-Jews, to accept. But it is central to Jewish survival and to Jewish identity. Because we have rejected intermarriage, we have protected ourselves against assimilation and loss of identity. Because of our strong bonds of commitment – bonds that come naturally through family ties – we have ensured that the Jewish people have survived even through terrible oppression. Indeed, some historians have noted that of all the religions, it is only among the Jews that there is an idea of "Peoplehood," and that Jews feel an obligation to come to the aid of other Jews around the world. And, because we focus on the needs of our own family, we understand obligation and responsibility, and thus can also translate this to all people. To start as a universalist, to love everyone, can sometimes mean to love no one in particular. God is everywhere, but God must also be somewhere specific so that we can relate to Him. We must care for all humankind, but for care and love to mean something, we must start at home and then bring that care and concern to all. Because Avraham "will command his children and his household after him to follow the path of the Lord," (Gen. 18:19) because of his focus on his family and its values, he has the sensitivity and the strength to argue with God for the defense of the people of Sodom.

Avraham's concern for Yitzchak is his concern for family. He has never forgotten his family, he understands how strong those bonds are, and he understands how strong they must remain if his vision for the entire world is to succeed. By strengthening his family, he ensures the physical survival of the Jewish people, he ensures that his message is protected and sustained, and he ensures, ultimately, how this message will spread throughout the world.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School. I am posting an archive Dvar Torah, because I did not receive a new Dvar Torah from YCT in time for my deadline this week.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2010/10/rather-to-my-land-and-to-my-birthplace-you-shall-go-a-religion-based-on-family/>.

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## Who Invited Ishmael? – Thoughts for Parashat Hayyei Sarah

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

*"And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite..."*

Abraham was 175 years old when he died. He had eight sons: Ishmael, born to Hagar; Isaac, born to Sarah; and six sons born to Keturah. Ishmael was sent away when he and Isaac were still young children. The sons of Keturah were given gifts and sent away to the east. Isaac was Abraham's sole chosen successor.

When Abraham died, the Torah informs us that "Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah." How did Ishmael learn about Abraham's death? He had been banished many years earlier. Who invited him to the funeral?

A midrash speculates that Keturah was actually another name for Hagar. Thus, Hagar would have informed her son Ishmael about Abraham's passing.

Rashi comments that Ishmael repented from his past ways. If so, he may have maintained ongoing communication with Abraham and family.

But perhaps there is another way of understanding the presence of Ishmael at Abraham's funeral. His half-brother Isaac must have notified him and let him know he was welcome to attend. Isaac initiated a reconciliation with Ishmael! After years of separation and hard feelings, Isaac decided to heal the rift between brothers. They should come together for the

burial of their father; they should realize that they were both Abraham's sons, both beloved by him, both connected to each other by Abraham's genes. Isaac and Ishmael had different destinies, but they need not be in unending conflict with each other.

According to this interpretation, Isaac displayed amazing strength of character. He knew he was Abraham's sole spiritual and material heir; he didn't have to reach out to Ishmael...but he did!

Isaac was a sensitive and thoughtful person. Abraham and Jacob are depicted more elaborately in the Torah, and Isaac's quiet greatness might easily be overlooked. Isaac is mainly remembered as the potential victim in the Akeidah story. Perhaps his near brush with death imbued him with an extra appreciation of the value of life and its transience. A few of the Torah's references to Isaac underscore his uniqueness.

The Torah describes Isaac as he went "lasuah basadeh" — to meditate/pray in the fields. He was a spiritual soul seeking communion with God. Neither Abraham nor Jacob is depicted in silent, lonely and peaceful meditation.

The Torah describes Isaac as praying for the benefit of his barren wife. Neither Abraham nor Jacob is seen praying for their barren wives. Jacob actually rebuked Rachel when she complained of her inability to have a child.

And now, at the time of Abraham's death, Isaac once again demonstrates inner strength, sensitivity, and composure. He reached out to his step-brother Ishmael in an unexpected gesture of goodwill and inclusiveness.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik wrote about different kinds of greatness. Some people are like the Shabbat or Yom Tov — their holiness shines brightly and is obvious to all. Others are like Rosh Hodesh — their holiness is muted and easily missed.

By this model, Isaac was an Ish Rosh Hodesh whose greatness was quiet, thoughtful, and sensitive. In his own way, he earned his place as one of the forefathers of our People.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

**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](http://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 Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/who-invited-ishmael-thoughts-parashat-hayyei-sarah>

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## **Jewish Wisdom is Also Jewish Power: Guest Blog by David Suissa**

By David Suissa \*

What is the mainstream expression of Jewish power? When superstars with millions of followers like Kanye West and Kyrie Irving exhibit antisemitic behavior, more often than not, it revolves around a sinister view of Jewish power. Jews are the bosses. They own the record labels, the movie studios and the sports teams. They run the world.

These stereotypes are not just sinister and antisemitic, but they are also insultingly materialistic. They overlook a whole other view of Jewish power, one that has little to do with material wealth and everything to do with Jewish wisdom and universal values.

When Judaism teaches, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor" and that all of God's children are "created in the image of God," there is a special ethical power in those ideas, the kind of power that moves our hearts.

When Jews helped found some of our most important civil rights organizations, including the NAACP, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), that also was Jewish power.

When, between 1910 and 1940, more than 2,000 primary and secondary schools and 20 Black colleges were established in whole or in part by Jewish philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, that also was Jewish power.

When Jews made up half of the young people who participated in the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, and Jewish leaders were arrested with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. after a challenge to racial segregation, that also was Jewish power.

The power of Jewish wisdom during the era of racial upheaval was perhaps most evident when Rabbi Joachim Prinz spoke right before King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the Washington Mall in 1963. In front of one of the largest civil rights marches in our country's history, Prinz started by saying, "I speak to you as an American Jew."

Then, with brevity worthy of an Abraham Lincoln address, he shared the universal wisdom of his tradition:

*"We share the profound concern of millions of people about the shame and disgrace of inequality and injustice which make a mockery of the great American idea."*

*"As Jews we bring to this great demonstration, in which thousands of us proudly participate, a two-fold experience — one of the spirit and one of our history."*

*"In the realm of the spirit, our fathers taught us thousands of years ago that when God created man, he created him as everybody's neighbor. Neighbor is not a geographic term. It is a moral concept. It means our collective responsibility for the preservation of man's dignity and integrity."*

*"From our Jewish historic experience of three and a half thousand years we say:*

*"Our ancient history began with slavery and the yearning for freedom. During the Middle Ages my people lived for a thousand years in the ghettos of Europe. Our modern history begins with a proclamation of emancipation."*

*"It is for these reasons that it is not merely sympathy and compassion for the black people of America that motivates us. It is above all and beyond all such sympathies and emotions a sense of complete identification and solidarity born of our own painful historic experience."*

There is a profound, elevating power in those words and in the actions so many American Jews have taken to live up to them.

That's why it saddens me that this humanistic view of "Jewish power" gets totally lost in the modern media circus when power is measured in dollars and clicks, rather than values and wisdom.

I saw parts of the documentary, "Hebrews to Negroes: Wake Up Black America!" that Kyrie Irving posted on Twitter and that triggered his downward spiral. I saw in the film the demonizing of Jews and outrageous lies denying both Jewish biblical history and the Holocaust.

Someone should encourage Irving and West to watch another film: Rabbi Prinz's heartfelt solidarity speech from the 1963 march. These two megastars both say they want to share their "light" with the world and seek a higher level of understanding. They can start by learning more about a deeper power that is anything but sinister — the one rooted in the universal wisdom of the Jewish tradition.

Then they can tweet Rabbi Prinz's speech to their millions of followers.

\* Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of Tribe Media Corp and Jewish Journal. Davids@jewishjournal.com.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/jewish-wisdom-also-jewish-power-guest-blog-david-suissa>

## Chayei Sora – The Kindness Factor

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

Eliezer, the trusted servant of Avraham, was charged with finding a wife for Yitzchak. When he arrived in the town to which Avraham told him to go, he was challenged. How would he know which girl was the right one? He turned to Hashem in prayer and proposed a simple plan. The girl who shows me abundant kindness is the right one.

It is widely understood that Eliezer's plan was based on the kindness shown in the home of Avraham and Sara. A girl who has abundant kindness would fit right into their world of hospitality.

What is confusing is that Eliezer was a very wise person. He was a prime disciple of Avraham's and taught Avraham's Torah to others. Didn't he realize that as much as Avraham and Sara were paragons of kindness and hospitality, Yitzchak's strength was different. Yitzchak excelled in inner strength, in service, and in prayer. Yitzchak was the Akeida. In Kabbalistic terms, Avraham is Chesed (kindness) and Yitzchak is Gevura (inner strength). If Eliezer was looking for a wife for Yitzchak, wouldn't it make more sense to consider Yitzchak's needs and not just the particular qualities of Avraham and Sara?

The Talmud (Shabbos 31a) relates that a non-Jew came to Hillel and requested to convert to Judaism on the condition that Hillel would instruct him in Judaism in one quick sound bite. Hillel agreed and taught him, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The commentaries wonder how this one statement truly encapsulates Torah in just one phrase. They explain that the essence of Torah is to be able to see beyond yourself. To be able to see a friend's plight, to be able to see G-d's perspective, is the essence of Judaism. A person of kindness, who can be considerate of others, has the quality that is the underpinning for all of Judaism.

I suggest that when Eliezer proposed his plan to find a wife for Yitzchak, he was not just doing so to find a girl who would fit into the family. He was using a test that would identify the foundation of Jewish living. Although Yitzchak's uniqueness wasn't external kindness like his parents, kindness is the ingredient for all of Judaism. He was looking for someone who could see beyond her own schedule and task at hand, to recognize the needs of a traveler and his animals.

Indeed, the essence of Judaism is the ability to see another perspective.

When the Torah instructs us to listen to the Sages even when it doesn't make sense to us, the Torah phrases it as, "Even if they tell you that your right hand is your left." Which direction is the right and which is the left is a quintessential example of perspective taking. If I am facing you, and you are facing me, the direction that I insist is "right" you will insist is "left." The Torah is instructing us that when you encounter such differences it is probably a difference of perspective. The Sages are looking at the same situation but from a different perspective.

Indeed, whenever posing a question to a mentor we can anticipate a new and refreshing perspective. Perhaps we were focused on money or grandeur, and the mentor wisely focuses on family and other essential values. Or we may not be thinking of the financial ramifications because we are so passionate about the cause, while the mentor sees things from a different perspective and helps to keep us grounded. What is "right" to one person would indeed be quite "left" in another person's perspective.

In fact, the ability to recognize another person's perspective is essential in all relationships. Judging another person favorably is a secret ingredient in all long-lasting relationships. The ability to recognize when another person is stressed or overwhelmed and be more tolerant of them comes from recognizing that the world is not a simple, stable place, as any one person sees it. There are ups and downs for each of us. Even the same event and situation might mean different things to each of us.

Rivka was not destined to host an open house in the way that Avraham and Sara did. Hers was a different and awesome pillar which she would excel in together with her husband. Eliezer wasn't necessarily looking for the quality of kindness because of Avraham and Sara's open home. He was looking for kindness because that is the essential ingredient to be a Jew.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

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## Chayeis Sarah - Beyond Challenges

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos – *Ethics of the Fathers* (Chapter 5 Mishna 3) teaches that Avrohom had ten major tests in his life designed to show the world Avrohom's greatness. The commentaries agree that Avrohom had more than ten significant challenges in his life. Yet, ten were of particular significance showing Avrohom's unique greatness and character. The commentators differ as to which challenges the Mishna is referring to. However, all agree that Akeidas Yitzchak, the Binding of Isaac, was the greatest challenge that Avrohom faced. Nonetheless, Rabbeinu Yonah says that despite the greatness of the Akeidah, this was not the final test:

*"The ninth – the binding of his son Isaac, of which it is written, 'Now I know that you are G-d fearing,' and did G-d not know until now, is not everything revealed and seen before Him? Rather when the matter became known to people the Holy One, Blessed is He, says of him, "for now I know." And this is coming to teach us that reverence of Heaven is greater than all the mitzvos in the Torah, for in all of his tests He did not say to him, "for you are G-d fearing" except for this one, since it was the greatest test of them all, for he took his son to raise him up as a Burnt Offering. The tenth – the burial of Sarah, that it was said to him, "Arise, walk the land to its length and width for to you will I give it," and when his wife passed, he could not find a place to bury her until he had purchased it at a great cost, and he did not think on this matter." (Rabbeinu Yonah, Avos 5:3)*

Despite the fact that Avrohom had already shown the world that he was undeniably G-d fearing, G-d still sought to give Avrohom one more test. What was the purpose of this additional test? The Mishna explains that the purpose of these tests was to show the world Avrohom's greatness. Once Avrohom had passed the greatest challenge of all, it would seem superfluous and even callous to add another test.

Rabbeinu Yonah (ibid.) explains that there were two things Hashem wanted the world to know about Avrohom – that he was G-d fearing and that he was complete in all of his character traits. It seems that it is possible for someone to be as G-d fearing as Avrohom, yet still be lacking in their spirituality, due to a flaw of character. The ninth test had shown Avrohom to be undeniably G-d fearing, this last test showed his character.

What was this test of character, though? While it is true that Hashem had promised Avrohom that he would inherit the land, this had not yet come to pass. Why would Avrohom expect to bury Sarah wherever he wanted to? Moreover, most commentators understand that Efron did not actually ask Avrohom to pay for the burial grounds, but only hinted that he wanted to be paid. Avrohom, in his great righteousness and piety, then insisted on paying in full. It was his own choice.

I believe that Rabbeinu Yonah is teaching us just how difficult great character is to achieve. Avrohom certainly understood that the land did not belong to him. This was not the challenge. The challenge was that life was not going as expected. Hashem had promised him the land of Israel, and even had him walk the entire land. This would normally lead a person to feel a certain sense of entitlement. Although, consciously Avrohom knew he would have to wait, he still might have felt that he had certain rights. If Avrohom had fallen prey to such feelings, then he would have been distraught at having to pay such a high price for what will be his in the end, anyway. Yet, the thought never occurred to Avrohom. As Rabbeinu Yonah says, "He did not think on the matter."

This is the mark of true character, and it goes beyond being G-d fearing. Fear of G-d enables us to overcome challenges. Developing character can remove some of those challenges before they even begin.

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\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, 5909 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda, MD 20814.

## Sarah's Diaries

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

### **Introduction:**

The Biblical story of the founder of our faith is fascinating and captivating, but I feel that we do not hear Sarah enough. Avraham has 450 words of dialog, whereas Sarah only has 38. Avraham is mentioned 192 times in Genesis and 44 times in the rest of Tanakh, while Sarah is mentioned only 55 times in Genesis and only once more in Isaiah. I thought it would be interesting to hear the stories of the family's travels and trials through the eyes of our Matriarch Sarah, and I present you here with what I imagine could have been her diary.

The way I present some of the events, and especially the Binding of Yitzhak, may be disputed by commentators, Midrashic authors, and theologians. You are invited to read the analysis of the two Piyutim about the Akedah, read the biblical story, and decide for yourselves.

### ***Haran, Spring of 367 AF (After Flood)***

Dear diary, in a few hours we will become nomads again, but this time permanently, not just for the trip from here to there. I should have complained and resisted. I, Sarai, born and raised in the greatest metropolis of all, Ur of the Chaldeans, had to travel to this Haran, a village in comparison. My father-in-law, Terah, decided one day that we should all, only God knows why, move to Canaan, and so we went, the old Terah with my husband Avram, his nephew Lot, and myself. Then, for some reason, the old man decided to settle in this corner of the world. I didn't mind because Haran was better than Canaan. Not that it would have mattered if I did mind, because no one cares much for a woman's opinion or concerns. But this new move, this is difficult. I don't know if I want to leave. I have made friends here, and I like my little house where I have my own room and privacy. It is true that when I came to Haran everything felt alien, but I really became attached to this place.

How am I supposed to be excited about living in tents, on the road, surrounded by flocks searching for grazing fields? There are no houses for nomads, only tents. A tent for Avram, a tent for me (privacy, yay!).

I can already see the announcements by the chroniclers of my husband's life: "Another divine test for the great man!"; "Avram abandons Haran for Canaan"; "Avram is chosen by an unknown deity!" And what am I? Chopped hay? Am I not asked to abandon my hometown? Am I not tested? Is a woman nothing more than a dangling participle at the end of her husband's important sentences? Don't get me wrong. I am ready to go because this is the divine commandment. I look up to Avram because I admire his courage and spirit, and I know very well why God chose him. He is an educator, a guide and a master. He walks the path of righteousness and justice, and he imparts his beliefs with all those who are willing to listen. So why am I so agitated? I guess it is because deep inside I always hoped that it will be our own child that Avram will educate. I wanted to believe that it will be through that product of our union that I will not only realize my potential as a mother but will take active part alongside my husband in the education of our future nation, as God has promised us. And now I am about to uproot myself and travel to Canaan, presumably to establish a new nation, with a 65 years old body which will never carry a child.

But enough ranting! Who knows, maybe moving to Canaan will bring me luck. I heard stories of barren women who were blessed after years of solitude, just because they moved to a new place, especially to Canaan (so they say...). I guess I should get going and shoulder this new task with my husband. Maybe we WILL be the progenitors of a numerous nation.

### ***Egypt, Summer of 369 AF***

Dear Diary, Sarai again. Sorry for not writing for so long. You know, it is a bit hard to write on the road, in tents, riding or walking, drawing water and watching over our flocks and servants. Bethel, Ai, Negev, I cannot keep track of all our stops. But now I have time to write because I am in a palace. Yes, you heard (or read) correctly – a palace. But it was not Avram who built it for me. No sir! I am a prisoner of Pharaoh. Abducted by a tyrant and separated from my husband, I am locked up in this palace. Strangely enough, no one comes near me. It seems as if everyone contracted some kind of disease, except for me, and they keep distance from me as if I were the source of their suffering... I am too tired to write now. I will continue tomorrow.

Dear Diary, I'm back in my quarters, and Avram is not far from me, still agitated and upset. Turns out it was me... God plagued them for abducting me... It's heartwarming to know that God cares so much for you, but I should not have been there in the first place. I told Avram, I told him: "see now, God told you to come to Canaan, so Canaan it is! Why go to Egypt? Let us stay here and God will take care of us," I said, but he wouldn't listen. I know he wanted to save us from the

famine, but we ended up in much greater danger. At least he asked for my opinion, which is something most men would never even think of nowadays.

### ***Plains of Bethel, Winter of 377 AF***

Time flies! Can you believe it? Ten years passed since we moved to Canaan.

Time crawls! Ten more years of unanswered prayers, tears shed secretly, envy of the careless young mothers and their toddlers. Ten more years of feeling abandoned by God. Is God trying me? Why is He doing this to me? Where are the promises He made to my husband?

I often reminisce about my wedding day. Such joy! Such innocence! I thought I would become a mother before I even knew it, that I would be holding a precious baby in my arms and caring for her all day. But with every passing year, cruel reality made the dream seem more remote and unreachable. While everyone was celebrating motherhood and parenthood, surrounded by sweet voices of children ringing with joy and happiness, I was left alienated and rejected by God and men (or should I say women?) alike. I could feel their furtive glances as I was passing by, as if I was carrying a curse, a terrible disease.

God alone can count the tears I shed, day after day, year after year, praying, yearning for a child who will redeem me from my solitude, from my agony and shame. When the Divine order came to leave Haran, it was very difficult to go and leave Mom behind, but I think that subconsciously I was glad to just go away and leave behind the pity and hypocrisy. Yes, let's go to a place where no one knows me and start all over. Maybe I will get lucky. Maybe the move will bring a change, a blessing. But I guess this is not what God wanted.

Avram says I am a righteous woman and that God enjoys my prayers and supplications. I appreciate that, but enough is enough. I don't want to be special and I promise that if God grants me a child I will pray and thank Him even more. If it is prayers He wants... I will pray for all barren women!

### ***Be'er Sheva desert, Spring of 377 AF***

I'm so excited! I have a solution! Surrogate mother! I know some very respectful families who have gone through this process successfully. All you need is assign one of your maids as a surrogate mother and have your husband marry her. We all sign a contract which clarifies that the baby will be mine and my husband's. I will finally be a mother, and I have the perfect candidate. Hagar, the Egyptian girl. She is so sweet and submissive, and she has tremendous respect for me. I cannot wait to talk to Avram tomorrow...

...that little snake! That tricky, treacherous, no-good maid suddenly thinks she is the lady of the tent just because she is pregnant. She taunts me with subtle comments and quips: I'm tired; I'd love to bring you some water, Mistress Sarai, but I woke up with nausea; My back, sorry I can't pick this for you; I shoot a glance to Avram, furious, but these things pass right over his head. As far as he is concerned, she should get some rest and maybe I should tend to her. He doesn't even feel that she harasses me! This is simply not the kind of things a man can understand. Is this my new trial? Am I being tested again?

I don't know what to do. I love and respect Avram. But why is his quest of justice reserved only for foreigners? If God told him tomorrow that He is destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, I know very well he will stand up and fight for them, arguing with the Almighty in favor of those wicked people. And I am right here in front of him, my daily abuse by this Hagar totally ignored. Do I not deserve justice?

Today I blew up. I couldn't take it anymore. "Justice," I told him, "I demand justice! Don't stand idly by while she spills my blood!" And he finally gave me permission. He waived his part in the contract and told me that she is all mine. So, that's it, the gloves are coming off.

### ***Be'er Sheva Desert, Day five of New World Order***

Now she knows my wrath. Made her worth her price in labor, and not the labor she was hoping for, no delivery for her. Let her fetch water and tend to the flocks and cook and wash my feet and know that she is the maidservant and I am the mistress. Justice is served!

### ***Be'er Sheva Desert, Day six of New World Order***

It's over; she's gone. We don't know where or when, but she has disappeared from Be'er Sheva. I should be happy, I should be celebrating, but I'm not. I feel terrible. I didn't mean it to happen like that. All I wanted was to have a child we could call our own, but things got out of hand. I got carried away on tidal waves of anger and frustration, years of sterility,

endless nights of crying and, worst of all, the notion that my husband doesn't understand me. I took it all on her and I am not so sure I did the right thing.

Dear diary, it's the middle of night but I must write. I am shaking. I just had a terrible nightmare. We both ended up having children who became nations, and now, my descendants were persecuted, tortured, exiled, and killed by her children. And that voice kept echoing in my mind "she is your maid servant. Do whatever you want..."

#### ENDNOTE:

(1) AND SARAI DEALT HARSHLY WITH HER, AND SHE FLED FROM BEFORE HER FACE. Our mother did transgress by this affliction, and Abraham also by his permitting her to do so. And so, G-d heard her [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be a *wild-ass of a man*, to afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all kinds of affliction. [Ramban on Genesis 16:6](#)

*[Ed.: Sarah's diary from later in her life has not yet been translated into English.]*

\* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

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## Sarah: Living Her Best Life

By Raffi Levi \*

How can we make our religious experience sustainable? In other words, how do we maintain a sense of connection with HaShem even when we are not doing a mitzvah? Often, our experience of Judaism can feel reserved. Whether it is reserved for the Shabbat table, for holidays, for the synagogue, or for prayer. Sometimes, it simply does not seem to move past those devoted spaces and times. But I find that if we do not have a way of bridging those explicit moments of Avodat HaShem — service of God — with those moments that feel mundane, we lose out on the goal of religious life: to infuse our entire lives with awareness, intentionality, and holiness. But what do we do on the day to day? What do we do at work or in a math class? Is there space for sacredness there too?

In the first verse of this week's parsha Chayei Sarah, we learn about the lifespan of Sarah.

*"And it was that Sarah's lifetime came to be: one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years were the years of Sarah's lifetime"* (Gen. 23:1).

So why is this description so wordy? There is a redundant use of the term "years" and the word "life." The Torah seems to have extra words.

The rabbis, clearly perplexed by this pasuk, offer the midrash that states the following: The reason the word shana is written in every term is to tell you that each term must be explained by itself as a complete number. At the age of one hundred, she was as a woman of twenty in regards to sin, as she was sinless. And when she was twenty, she was as beautiful as when she was seven (Gen. Rabbah 58:1).

The rabbis here know two aspects of Sarah's persona. One, she has no sins. Two, she's beautiful. But the Noam Elimelech offers a new interpretation on this ancient midrash. Rather than being a description, he offers that it is a prescription. He suggests there are two levels in which a person can create sanctity in their lives. One is to be like Sarah by being careful to avoid sin and do the commandments. But the second level the Noam Elimelech suggests is that of elevating the sanctity that exists in all things outside the commandments.

We, like Sarah, elevate the beauty in all things. Rather than seeing beauty as a description of Sarah's appearance, beauty is how Sarah acted in all the so called mundane aspects of her life. Sarah made the act of simply living into something holy.

At every turn, we have the opportunity to find the sacred in all that we do. When we eat, when we get dressed, when we read about a new and profound idea, we can find holiness. We do not have to reserve sacredness for mitzvot. Rather, the Noam Elimelech offers that it is a requirement of life to find the sacred beauty and holiness in all things throughout our whole lifetime.

By doing this, we can bridge the gap between one Shabbat in the next, between one holiday and the next, between one mitzvah and the next, because every moment and everything can and must be made holy.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Third-year semikha student at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2022/11/sarah-living-her-best-life/>

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## **Shavuon Chayei Sarah**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

My parents taught me that politics and religion should not be brought up in polite company due to their capacity for heated argument. In our days, I believe nutrition should be added to this list. People have lost friends not only over differing political alliances but also over different nutritional views. So even though I will be talking a little about nutrition in this essay, allow me to add a disclaimer that I am only here stating my opinion on a nutritional topic to make a more general point. So even if you don't agree with my nutritional statements, you may agree with the wider point being made.

Protein brought me to the South Island this week. A dairy company there requested that the Kosher Kiwi certify a product. Not a product that you would buy in stores, but a product that processed the pure protein from milk and sold it to companies to use in their "70g of Protein" energy bars. Whilst meeting them I (in a good natured jocular manner) related how out of hand I think this protein obsession has become. After all, we don't eat "protein." We eat food. Protein is there but it is only one ingredient working in a complex web of interactions with all the organic chemistry that serves our gastronomical needs. Dr Jocelyne Benatar, who spoke at the recent Hadassah meeting, echoed these sentiments that our mindset about food should be that we should eat food and not zero in on one ingredient and act like it's the end all be all of all things nutrition. Whole food in all its contextual glory is what we are built to thrive on.

The dairy company smiled and agreed with me but shrugged their shoulders and said, "It is what it is." And I certified their product because I do agree that it is what it is. Sometimes in the vast multitudes of people there are things that we may find silly about their actions, but as long as we're not hurting anybody there's no problem with giving in to them. The market does not judge our whims but simply provides, and if bars with massive amounts of protein processed from dairy is what people want, then by God, the market can and will provide it.

So I fulfilled my duties as a kosher certifier in the kosher market. Even if I would never buy such a bar, I'm not there to judge but to certify. If kashrut professionals only certified products they thought made sense nutritionally, what would be kosher?

And since our parsha this week talks about relationships, perhaps it's proper that we connect this protein-powered thought to the field of human relationships.

After all, in a marriage are we not confronted with habits that the other person has that we would consider irrational? Like maybe your spouse squeezes the toothpaste bottle in a way that seems inefficient and ill-conceived?

But whatever quirk we find in our friends, family, and/or spouses, we have the capacity to smile, accept and even provide them what they feel they need. When Eliezer was praying for a good match for Yitzchak, he didn't ask for someone who would be quirk-less and agree with Isaac in every case on the rationality of different behaviors, but rather someone who is kind, loving and had the capacity to give to others. Character is what drives our relationships. As long as there is that, quirks or faux pas can be forgiven and we can even enjoy them. Quirks can give a relationship the variety and spice that's needed to fill the day-ins and day-outs.

So if your spouse asks for a protein bar but you see those things as irrational, smile and give it to them anyway. And you can even be like Rebekah and give their camels some protein bars too.

Shabbat Shalom!

\* Rabbi Rube recently moved from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he is Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation.

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### **Rav Kook Torah** **Chayei Sarah: Rav Kook and Hebron**

*“Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, also known as Hebron, in the land of Canaan. Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her.” (Gen. 23:2)*

A somber gathering assembled in Jerusalem's Yeshurun synagogue. The large synagogue and its plaza were packed as crowds attended a memorial service for the Jews of Hebron who had been killed during the Arab riots six months earlier, on August 24th, 1929.

On that tragic Sabbath day, news of deadly rioting in Hebron reached the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Yitzchak Ben-Zvi, then director of the National Committee, hurried to Rav Kook's house. Together they hastened to meet with Harry Luke, the acting British high commissioner, to urge him to take action and protect the Jews of Hebron.

The Chief Rabbi demanded that the British take severe and immediate measures against the Arab rioters.

“What can be done?” Luke asked.

Rav Kook's response was to the point. “Shoot the murderers!”

“But I have received no such orders.”

“Then I am commanding you!” Rav Kook roared. “In the name of humanity's moral conscience, I demand this!”

Rav Kook held the acting commissioner responsible for British inaction during the subsequent massacre. Not long after this heated exchange, an official reception was held in Jerusalem, and Mr. Luke held out his hand to greet the Chief Rabbi. To the shock of many, Rav Kook refused to shake it.

With quiet fury, the rabbi explained, “I do not shake hands defiled with Jewish blood.”

**The day after the rioting in Hebron, the extent of the massacre was revealed. Arab mobs had slaughtered 67 Jews — yeshiva students, elderly rabbis, women, and children. The British police had done little to protect them. The Jewish community of Hebron was destroyed, and their property looted and stolen. The British shipped the survivors off to Jerusalem.**

The tzaddik Rabbi Arieh Levine accompanied Rav Kook that Sunday to Hadassah Hospital on HaNevi'im Street in order to hear news of the Hebron community by telephone. Rabbi Levine recalled the frightful memories that would be forever etched in his heart:

When [Rav Kook] heard about the murder of the holy martyrs, he fell backwards and fainted. After coming to, he cried bitterly and tore his clothes “over the house of Israel and God's people who have fallen by the sword.” He sat in the dust and recited the blessing, Baruch Dayan Ha'Emet (“Blessed is the True Judge”).

For some time after that, his bread was the bread of tears and he slept without a pillow. Old age suddenly befell him, and he began to suffer terrible pains. This tragedy brought about the illness from which the rabbi never recovered.

## The Memorial Service

Six months after the massacre, grieving crowds filled the Yeshurun synagogue in Jerusalem. A mourning atmosphere, like that on the fast of Tisha B'Av, lingered in the air as they assembled in pained silence. Survivors of the massacre, who had witnessed the atrocities before their eyes, recited Kaddish for family members murdered in the rioting.

Rabbi Jacob Joseph Slonim, who had lost his son (a member of the Hebron municipal council) and grandchildren in the massacre, opened the assembly in the name of the remnant of the Hebron community. "No healing has taken place during the past six months," he reported. "The murder and the theft have not been rectified. The British government and the Jewish leadership have done nothing to correct the situation. They have not worked to reclaim Jewish property and resettle Hebron."

Afterwards, the Chief Rabbi rose to speak:

*The holy martyrs of Hebron do not need a memorial service. The Jewish people can never forget the holy and pure souls who were slaughtered by murderers and vile thugs.*

*Rather, we must remember and remind the Jewish people not to forget the city of the Patriarchs. The people must know what Hebron means to us.*

*We have an ancient tradition that "The actions of the fathers are signposts for their descendants." When the weak-hearted spies arrived at Hebron, they were frightened by the fierce nations who lived in the land. But "Caleb quieted the people for Moses. He said, 'We must go forth and conquer the land. We can do it!' (Numbers 13:30)*

*Despite the terrible tragedy that took place in Hebron, we announce to the world, "Our strength is now like our strength was then." We will not abandon our holy places and sacred aspirations. Hebron is the city of our fathers, the city of the Machpeilah cave where our Patriarchs are buried. It is the city of David, the cradle of our sovereign monarchy.*

*Those who discourage the ones trying to rebuild the Jewish community in Hebron with arguments of political expedience; those who scorn and say, "What are those wretched Jews doing?"; those who refuse to help rebuild Hebron — they are attacking the very roots of our people. In the future, they will have to give account for their actions. If ruffians and hooligans have repaid our kindness with malice, we have only one eternal response: Jewish Hebron will once again be built, in honor and glory!*

*The inner meaning of Hebron is to draw strength and galvanize ourselves with the power of Netzach Yisrael, Eternal Israel.*

*That proud Jew, Caleb, announced years later, "I am still strong... As my strength was then, so is my strength now" (Joshua 14:11). We, too, announce to the world: our strength now is as our strength was then. We shall reestablish Hebron in even greater glory, with peace and security for every Jew. With God's help, we will merit to see Hebron completely rebuilt, speedily in our days.*

## Addendum

While some Jewish families did return to Hebron in 1931, they were evacuated by the British authorities at the start of the Arab revolt of 1936. For 34 years, there was no Jewish community in Hebron — until 1970, when the State of Israel once again permitted Jewish settlement in Hebron. This return to Hebron after the Six-Day War was spearheaded by former students of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, disciples of Rav Kook's son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook.

In 1992, Rav Kook's grandson, Rabbi Shlomo Ra'anana, moved to Hebron. Six years later, an Arab terrorist stabbed the 63-year-old rabbi to death. But soon after, his daughter — Rav Kook's great-granddaughter — together with her husband and children, moved to Hebron, thus continuing the special link between the Kook family and the city of the Patriarchs.

(Stories from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Malachim Kivnei Adam, pp. 155-157; 160; 164-165.)

*Ed. Note:* Rabbi Aharon Bernszweig, Rabbi in Hebron in 1929, and his wife, were away for Shabbat and thereby survived the massacre. He left a report of the events in Hebron and elsewhere in the country (in Yiddish). His grandson, Rabbi Meyer Greenberg (father of Saadia Greenberg, who compiles Likutei Devrei Torah), translated the letter into English. It is available at <http://hebron1929.info/>. I strongly recommend that everyone read this shocking and important historical document that discusses the same events that Rav Kook described in his Dvar Torah. Emphasis added to Rav Kook's Dvar.

[https://www.ravkooktorah.org/HAYA\\_65.htm](https://www.ravkooktorah.org/HAYA_65.htm)

## **Chayei Sarah: On Judaism and Islam (5779)**

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

The language of the Torah is, in Erich Auerbach's famous phrase, "fraught with background." Behind the events that are openly told are shadowy stories left for us to decipher. Hidden beneath the surface of Parshat Chayei Sarah, for example, is another story, alluded to only in a series of hints. There are three clues in the text.

The first occurs when Abraham's servant is returning with the woman who is to become Isaac's wife. As Rebecca sees Isaac in the distance, we are told that he is "coming from the way of Be'er-lachai-ro'i" (Genesis 24:62) to meditate in the field. The placement is surprising. Thus far we have situated the patriarchal family at Be'ersheva, to which Abraham returns after the binding of Isaac, and Hebron, where Sarah dies and is buried. What is this third location, Be'er-lachai-ro'i, and what is its significance?

The second is the extraordinary final stage of Abraham's life. In chapter after chapter we read of the love and faithfulness Abraham and Sarah had for one another. Together they embarked on a long journey to an unknown destination. Together, they stood against the idolatry of their time. Twice, Sarah saved Abraham's life by pretending to be his sister. They hoped and prayed for a child and endured the long years of childlessness until Isaac was born. Then Sarah's life draws to a close. She dies. Abraham mourns and weeps for her and buys a cave in which she is buried, and he is to be buried beside her. We then expect to read that Abraham lived out the rest of his years alone before being placed beside "Sarah his wife" (Gen. 25:10) in the "Cave of Machpelah" (Gen. 25:9).

Unexpectedly, however, once Isaac is married, Abraham marries a woman named Keturah and has six children by her. We are told nothing else about this woman, and the significance of the episode is unclear. The Torah does not include mere incidental details. We have no idea, for example, what Abraham looked like. We do not even know the name of the servant he sent to find a wife for Isaac. Tradition tells us that it was Eliezer, but the Torah itself does not. What then is the significance of Abraham's second marriage and how is it related to the rest of the narrative?

The third clue to the hidden story is revealed in the Torah's description of Abraham's death:

*And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the Cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased of the children of Het. There was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.* Gen. 25:8-10

Ishmael's presence at the funeral is surprising. After all, he had been sent away into the desert years before, when Isaac was young. Until now, we have assumed that the two half-brothers have lived in total isolation from one another. Yet the Torah places them together at the funeral without a word of explanation.

The Sages piece together these three puzzling details to form an enthralling story.

First, they point out that Be'er-lachai-ro'i, the place from which Isaac was coming when Rebecca saw him, is mentioned once before in Genesis: It is the spot where Hagar, pregnant and fleeing from Sarah, encountered an angel who told her to return. It is indeed she who gives the place its name, meaning "the well of the Living One who sees me" (Gen. 16:14).

The Midrash thus says that Isaac went to Be'er-lachai-ro'i in search of Hagar. When Isaac heard that his father was seeking a wife for him, he said, "Shall I be married while my father lives alone? I will go and return Hagar to him."<sup>1</sup>

Hence the Sages' answer to the second question: who was Keturah? She was, they said, none other than Hagar herself. It is not unusual for people in the Torah to have more than one name: Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, had seven. Hagar was called Keturah because "her acts gave forth fragrance like incense (ketoret)."<sup>2</sup> This indeed integrates Abraham's second marriage as an essential component of the narrative.

Hagar did not end her days as an outcast. She returned, at Isaac's prompting and with Abraham's consent, to become the wife of her former master. This also changes the painful story of the banishment of Ishmael.

We know that Abraham did not want to send him away – Sarah's demand was "very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son" (Gen. 21:11). Nonetheless, God told Abraham to listen to his wife. There is, however, an extraordinary Midrash, in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, which tells of how Abraham twice visited his son. On the first occasion, Ishmael was not at home. His wife, not knowing Abraham's identity, refused the stranger bread and water. Ishmael, continues the Midrash, divorced her and married a woman named Fatimah. This time, when Abraham visited, again not disclosing his identity, the woman gave him food and drink. The Midrash then says:

*"Abraham stood and prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He, and Ishmael's house became filled with all good things. When Ishmael returned, his wife told him about it, and Ishmael knew that his father still loved him."*<sup>3</sup>

Father and son were reconciled.

The name of Ishmael's second wife, Fatimah, is highly significant. In the Koran, Fatimah is the daughter of Mohammad. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer is an eighth-century work, and it is here making an explicit, and positive, reference to Islam.

The hidden story of Chayei Sarah has immense consequence for our time. Jews and Muslims both trace their descent from Abraham – Jews through Isaac, Muslims through Ishmael. The fact that both sons stood together at their father's funeral tells us that they too were reunited.

Beneath the surface of the narrative in Chayei Sarah, the Sages read the clues and pieced together a moving story of reconciliation between Abraham and Hagar on the one hand, Isaac and Ishmael on the other. Yes, there was conflict and separation; but that was the beginning, not the end. Between Judaism and Islam there can be friendship and mutual respect. Abraham loved both his sons, and was laid to rest by both. There is hope for the future in this story of the past.

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Bereishit Rabbah 60:14

2. Bereishit Rabbah 51:4

3. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer

#### **Around the Shabbas Table**

1. Do you think Abraham was right or wrong to send Hagar and Ishmael away?
2. From the way the Rabbis in the Midrash have read the story, what do you think Isaac thinks of the episode of Hagar and Ishmael?
3. Does the hidden story of our parsha that has been identified by the Rabbis help you read the story in the Torah?
4. Do you think sibling relationships are a good model to teach us other inter-human relationships?
5. Do you think the message of this week's Covenant & Conversation can help Islamic-Jewish relationships today?

## What Was Double About Me'arat Hamachpelah?

By Yossi Ives \* © Chabad 2022

When Abraham sought a fitting burial site for his beloved wife Sarah, he approached the local Hittite tribe to seek their approval for a particular plot he had his heart upon:

*If it is your will that I bury my dead from before me, listen to me and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Tzohar that he may give me the machpelah ("double") cave, which belongs to him, which is at the edge of his field ...1*

What exactly was double about this cave?

Rashi provides two explanations.

*The cave was "a two-story house."  
"On account of the couples buried there it is called double."*

Rashi's first explanation is broadly understood to mean that the cave held a lower cavern and upper cavern, making it somewhat similar to a two-story house. There are a variety of ways that a cave can be considered "double" – such as one cavern in front of, or next to, the other – and Rashi is saying that in this case it was in fact one above the other.

But there are several significant problems with this explanation. Firstly, how does Rashi know that it was one cave above the other? Logically, it would make more sense to say it was one cave in front of the other, because in that case the only way to get to the second cave would be through the first one, making it a true double cave. If, on the other hand, they were on top of each other, that would just make them two separate caves, each with its own entrance.

Even more confusing is Rashi's wording "a two-story house." We are discussing a cave, so why mention a house? Surely, Rashi could have easily avoided confusion by simply saying "a two-story cave"; why refer to a house altogether?

Rashi's second explanation, "On account of the couples buried there it is called double," refers to the fact that over time, it would become the burial place of several couples: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah.

This explanation is also problematic: the fact that this would eventually be the burial site for couples occurred years, even generations, later. When Abraham is speaking to the Hittites, how would referring to it as the "caves of the couples" make any sense? Surely they had no way of knowing what use those caves would have in generations to come!

The Rebbe provides an interpretation of Rashi's commentary that overturns nearly a thousand years of presumed understanding.

The Rebbe draws attention to an anomaly in the Biblical text. When Abraham finally completed the purchase of the burial site, the Torah says, "So the field of Ephron which was in machpelah, facing Mamre, was established (as Abraham's possession) ..."2 This wording implies that the cave and the field around it were in a place called machpelah.

Moreover, two verses later, the Torah says, "Afterwards, Abraham buried Sarah, his wife, in the cave of the field of machpelah..."3 Here again, the Torah says that the cave was situated in a field which was part of machpelah. So was the cave double, or the field double?

Hence, the Rebbe suggests a radical idea: Neither! Neither the cave was double, nor the place in which it was situated was double. Rather, on the field right next to the cave stood a two-story house – an actual house! Four thousand years

ago, during the times of Abraham, two-story houses were highly unusual. As this field had a two-story house built on it, it received the moniker machpelah. The cave also received that name because it was adjacent to the house.

When Rashi says "a two-story house" he means exactly that! He did not mean a two-story cave, or he would have said so explicitly. Indeed, Rashi does not say that the cave was one in front of the other, as in his view the cave was not double at all, but merely referred to as such because of the adjacent house. For the longest time, it had always been assumed that the cave was somehow double, and here in a stunning twist we discover within Rashi's brief commentary an entirely new possibility.

There remains, however, a small problem with this explanation. In the opening verse cited at the beginning of this article, Abraham added a second identifying feature: "... which is at the edge of his field." If, as we have established, the cave was next to this famous two-story house, why give additional markings?

For this reason, Rashi adds a second explanation: that it was suitable for the burial of couples. Abraham was not saying that the Hittites would know who would later be buried there, but merely pointing out that the cave was highly suited for twin burials. As Abraham was seeking to bury his cherished wife, it was entirely reasonable that he would want a site that would one day allow him to be buried alongside her.

As Abraham was seemingly only seeking a burial place for Sarah, it would have seemed strange to the Hittites that he was insisting on a site that had space to bury four couples. Rashi therefore favors the first explanation.

The treatment of this single short comment from Rashi is just one striking example of the Rebbe's uniquely brilliant way of analyzing the Biblical text, and his novel approach to interpreting Rashi's commentary.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, Parshat Chayei Sarah II.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 23:8.
2. Genesis 23:17.
3. Genesis 23:19.

\* rabbi of Congregation Ahavas Yisrael, Pomona, N.Y.; founder and Chief Executive of Tag International Development, a charitable organization that shares Israeli expertise with developing countries.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5282841/jewish/What-Was-Double-About-Mearat-Hamachpelah.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5282841/jewish/What-Was-Double-About-Mearat-Hamachpelah.htm)

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## Chayei Sarah: Paying Full Price

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

*"He raised his eyes and saw three men standing nearby. He took note and ran toward them from the entrance to the tent, and prostrated himself on the ground." Genesis 18:2*

Holy things cannot be acquired "for free," that is, without proper effort. This is why Abraham insisted on paying for the transfer of the property, thereby elevating it into the realm of holiness.

Similarly, each one of us has been assigned a portion of the world that we are responsible to make holy. We must do this at "full price," with hard work and effort. Even those of us who find it easy to study the Torah and observe the commandments must push ourselves beyond the boundaries of our natural inclinations. Only in this way can we achieve our purpose in the world.

– from *Daily Wisdom #3*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society  
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

\* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

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#### Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

#### Beginning the Journey

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 start seeing the door begin 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:

"Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebecca were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites." (Gen. 49:29-32)

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 fulfills 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

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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.

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

"And Abraham said unto his servant, the elder of his house, that ruled over all that he had: 'Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh... You shall go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son, even for Isaac.'" (Genesis 24: 2-4)

The portion of Chayei Sarah comprises two chapters of the Book of Genesis: Chapter 23 deals with the death and burial of the matriarch Sarah, and Chapter 24 deals with the selection of a suitable wife for her son, Isaac.

The connection between these two themes is clear: With the loss of his beloved life partner, a bereft Abraham understands the awesome responsibility that lies before him to find a suitable mate for his heir to the covenant, Isaac. For this formidable and momentous task he chooses "his trusted servant, the wise elder of his household, who controlled all that was his," Eliezer (Genesis 24: 2).

Eliezer demonstrates great skill in understanding what is required for the wife of Isaac. He understands that she must be a member of the Abrahamic family (Rebekah is indeed the granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Nahor), and must not dwell among the evil and accursed Canaanites. He further understands that the young woman must be willing to live with Isaac in Abraham's domain rather than removing Isaac to the home of her family; Rebekah must come under the influence of Abraham. Most of all, he understands Isaac's bride must have the character of Abrahamic hospitality, to the extent that she will not only draw water from the well for him, the messenger, but will also draw water for his camels. And of course, he must arrange for the young woman to make the journey to Isaac and live her life in the Land of Israel and under the tent of Abraham.

Eliezer arranges a match that will determine the destiny of God's covenantal nation with wisdom, tact and sensitivity.

The Bible states that Eliezer set out for his mission "with all the bounty [goodness] of his master in his hand" (Ibid 24:10). Rashi takes this to mean that Abraham gave Eliezer a blank check; he would pay any price for the right wife for Isaac. Rabbi Moshe Besdin gives the verse a very different thrust: All the bounty and goodness that had been expressed by Abraham was now placed in the hands of his most trusted servant because the future of Abraham was dependent upon Isaac, his heir apparent, and the future of Isaac depended on his future wife.

Strangely, throughout this lengthy biblical tale, Eliezer's name is not mentioned.

He is referred to as "eved" (the servant) 10 times and as "ish" (the personage) seven times, but never once by his name.

Wouldn't such an important individual, entrusted with such a significant mission, deserve to have his name in lights for everyone to see and remember? I believe that is exactly the point of the biblical record. Eliezer the individual has been completely overwhelmed by the immensity of this task: He is the servant of Abraham, committed to performing an act that will determine the continuity of the Abrahamic vision. A midrash even suggests that Eliezer had a daughter of marriageable age, whom he had expected to wed to Isaac, allowing his grandchildren to inherit the Abrahamic dream and wealth. But Eliezer forgets any of his personal ambitions or goals; he is the consummate servant of Abraham, using all of his wisdom and ingenuity to carry out his master's will (see Rashi on verse 24: 39 quoting Bereishit Rabbah 59: 9).

In this he is like Moses, who utilizes all of his spiritual and intellectual prowess in the service of his Master, the Lord, God of Universe.

Just as Moses was both an eved and an ish at the same time (See Deut. 33:1 and 34:5) – with his individual personality dedicated to God's will – so Eliezer was an ish and an eved simultaneously.

### **The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

#### **Mourning Sarah**

Grief is the most powerful and most painful of human emotions. Yet, it is an emotion which few human beings can avoid in their lifetime. We all face loss, and we all grieve.

Interestingly, the first death of which we read in detail in the Bible is a murder. And the reaction of the murderer is one of denial and, ultimately, guilt. I speak, of course, of Cain's slaying of Abel. We do not read of Cain's grief, nor do we know at all of the reaction of Abel's parents, Adam and Eve, to his death.

In this week's Torah portion, for the first time, we learn in detail of the reaction of a surviving relative to the death of a loved one. I speak, of course, of Abraham and his response to the death of his wife, Sarah.

Much has been written about the psychology of the emotion of grief. It is a complex emotion and is a very long, sometimes life-long, process.

It seems that there are at least two components to normal grief. There is an emotional component, consisting of feelings of great sadness and pervasive melancholy. There is also an intellectual component, as the mourner

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seeks to make some sense of his or her loss and to find purpose and meaning in the death of the loved one, to thus be able to move on in life.

So it is not surprising that when Abraham learned of Sarah's death, and he apparently was not in the vicinity of where she died, he came rushing to make the arrangements for her burial.

We read that he "came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her". Note the two components of his response. Crying, expressing feelings of loss through sobs and tears, bechi, was one component. The other component was much more cerebral and consisted of a well thought-out and carefully composed eulogy.

Abraham honored Sarah with his heart, his feelings, but also with his head, with his mind and intellect.

Both aspects of this dual response are necessary. Over the first, the emotional aspect, we have little control. Feelings burst forth even when we try to suppress them.

But the second aspect, the reasoned and verbally expressed eulogy, is one over which we have great control. We can plan intentionally what we will say and what we won't say in a eulogy, a hesped.

There is a beautiful eulogy in the homiletic writings of the great 18th century sage, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, author of the authoritative halachic work, Nodah B'Yehuda. In that eulogy, Rabbi Landau speaks about his wife, Leeba, and compares her to the matriarch Sarah.

He notes that in our text, Abraham cries "for her", the pronoun "her" being used instead of the proper name. However, he "eulogizes Sarah". No pronoun here, but her personal name — the name by which she was known to him and to all of her acquaintances.

Rabbi Landau insists that Abraham was setting an example for all eulogies to follow, for all time and eternity. A eulogy must be specific and speak in detail about the particular and unique qualities of the deceased. One should not just eulogize "her", one must eulogize "Sarah". Those listening to the eulogy must come away with a better sense of who the deceased was, with some details about what made the deceased special.

Too often at funerals, we hear clergymen make very impersonal remarks about death and eternity, and they do not leave us with even an impression of the biographical details and significance of the life that was just lost.

Abraham set the tone for a proper eulogy. He eulogized the Sarah that he knew. Not some abstract description which could fit any woman, but an exquisitely detailed portrait of

the real Sarah, from the perspective of one who shared his life with her.

There is so much that careful students of Torah have learned from the lives of Abraham and Sarah. One lesson that I personally cherish is the lesson of Abraham's eulogy for his life's companion. The actual words of this eulogy are not recorded, but the message is clear. It was not an anonymous "her" that he mourned, but a real, flesh and blood, deeply beloved life-long spouse, Sarah.

### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

#### **Eliezer Journeys from Arur to Baruch by Bypassing Negiyus**

The story of Eliezer making the shidduch between Yitzchak and Rivka is one of the longest narratives in the entire Chumash. The Torah seems very repetitious in relating this narrative. The 67 pesukim of Perek 24 could have been written in a far more succinct fashion. Chazal comment on this and say, "Preferable is the casual conversation of the slaves of the Patriarchs than the Torah of the descendants." (Bereshis Rabbah 60:8). The Medrash says that some of the basic laws of tumah and taharah are derived from an extra letter vov written in the Torah, while the Torah is very elaborate regarding the discussions between Eliezer and Rivkah's father and brother.

Rav Aharon Kotler, zt"l, once commented that the reason for this phenomenon is that "Torah we can expound upon (ken mir darshinen) but appropriate human behavior—how to act properly—we must learn (ober middos daf men oys lernen). That is why the Torah spends so much time here telling us the story of Rivkah and Eliezer and Lavan, etc.

There are many lessons to be learned from this narrative. I just want to share one observation: The pasuk states: "And Avraham said to his slave, the elder of his household, who controlled all that was his; 'Place now your hand under my thigh (which was a sign of taking an oath)." (Bereshis 24:2) Chazal expound upon the words "ha'moshel b'chol asher lo" (who controlled all that was his) by explaining that Eliezer controlled his evil inclination just as Avraham controlled his evil inclination. Eliezer was not just your average servant. He was one who ruled over all he had – he had total control over himself!

The Gemara expounds on the title the Torah gives to Eliezer – Damesek Eliezer (which on a simple reading means he came from Damascus) – to mean that he was doleh u'mashkeh m'toraso shel rabbo l'acheirim (he drew forth the Torah wisdom from his master and poured it out for others to drink). (Yoma 28b). Eliezer was a talmid muvhak (primary Torah disciple) of Avraham Avinu, and passed on Avraham Avinu's Torah teachings to others.

Most people are not moshel over themselves. They are subject to their tayvos and their passions. That was not Eliezer.

When Avraham gave Eliezer the mission to find a wife for his son Yitzchak from his ancestral home, Eliezer asked a question [Bereshis 24:5]: What if she does not want to come – am I allowed to take Yitzchak back to Padan Aram? Avraham responded in the negative – warning Eliezer not to take Yitzchak back to Padan Aram. Eliezer's question began with the word "U-lie" (Perhaps).

Regarding this pasuk, the Medrash shares a famous teaching of Chazal: Canaan has false scales... (Hoshea 12:8). Chazal expound regarding this pasuk in Trei Asar that Canaan here refers to Eliezer. Chazal relate the word 'ooh-lye' (Perhaps) to 'ai-lye' (to me) and suggest that Eliezer really had in mind that Yitzchak should marry his own daughter. He was measuring the chances of getting Avraham's son Yitzchak as his own son-in-law! He was hoping that Rivka would not agree to come and that Avraham would be stuck with taking Eliezer's daughter as his daughter-in-law! For this plan, Chazal indict Eliezer and associate him with the pasuk in Trei Asar which castigates Canaan as one who has false scales. Chazal say that Avraham responds to Eliezer in a brutally frank fashion: "You (as a descendant of Canaan (Bereshis 9:25)) are cursed and my son is blessed and a cursed one cannot become attached to one who is blessed."

There are two lessons in this Chazal.

Lesson #1: Even though Chazal say that Eliezer ruled over his own evil inclination as much as Avraham ruled over his evil inclination, and even though he was known as Damesek Eliezer – who shared his master's Torah with others – nevertheless, the Medrash indicts him as one who goes about with "false scales." How can these two ideas be reconciled?

The answer is—and this is one of the scariest things in life—that such is the power of negiyus (personal bias). When a person has an ulterior motive, it can warp his entire perspective of everything. Negiyus is such a powerful emotion. When someone has a personal agenda, it can blind the most noble of people! He simply cannot see straight.

The Alter from Kelm explains this is the idea of "false scales" (moznei mirmah). It was not a gross desire to be wicked; rather it was like his scale of values was slightly off. A scale whose balance is slightly skewed will not be able to give an accurate measure. This occurs even in a person who is moshel b'chol asher lo – even as much as Avraham Avinu.

I always say that whenever someone hears someone say "I may be nogeaya but..." forget the rest of the sentence. People are simply not

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capable of overcoming their personal biases. The only hope a person has to not be influenced by his negiyus is seeking advice and counsel from someone else. That is why it is essential to have a chaver, a Rabbi, someone in life who you can turn to and ask "Am I looking at this objectively or not?"

Lesson #2: When Eliezer arrives, Lavan says "Bo, Baruch Hashem (Come O Blessed of Hashem)" (Bereshis 24:31). Chazal infer from this blessing that Eliezer, in reward for his faithful service of Avraham, emerged from the status of being Arur (cursed) to the status of being Baruch (Blessed).

How did this metamorphosis take place? Consider the following: How would you react if someone told you: You are Cursed. Your daughter is Pasul. She cannot marry my son or anyone else who is Blessed. After having heard such a blunt message – how would you react if this same person told you: "And by the way, now I want you to go look for an appropriate shidduch for my son." How would most people react?

Fine, one could say that Eliezer was a faithful servant and he would do it anyway despite the insult. But – would he do it with an enthusiasm? Would he do it with alacrity, as efficiently as possible? The natural reaction is, "You have just insulted me. I will take my sweet time finding a wife for your son! I will do it because it is my job, but do not expect me to be enthusiastic about the assignment after hearing such a put down!"

And yet Eliezer went about this mission with great zerus, with great speed, diligence, and dedication. What happened to him? The answer is that he put his negiyus aside and he overcame that insult. "Okay. That is a fact of life. I am an Arur. But now you asked me to do a job and I will do that job to the best of my ability." Raising himself over his personal emotions and biases enabled Eliezer to leave the status of Arur and enter into the status of Baruch, as it is written "Bo, Baruch Hashem!"

### **Dvar Torah** **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

In this world, we're all only passing through. The commencement of Parshat Chayei Sara provides the sad details of the burial arrangements for Sara carried out by Avraham. Presenting himself before the Bnei Cheit, the children of Cheit and inhabitants of Canaan, Abraham introduced himself by saying (Bereishit 23:4), "Ger vetoshav anochi imachem," – "I am a stranger and a resident in your midst."

Isn't this the sad reality that repeats itself again and again throughout Jewish history? That Jewish people, having moved to a particular place, even though they might have lived there for a long time, are still considered the 'ger' – the outsider?

The Dubno Maggid gives added depth to this statement by Abraham. Abraham said, "Ger vetoshav anochi imachem," – "A stranger," – that's me, I'm the stranger – "and a permanent resident," – you are the permanent residents.

Abraham here was describing why it was important for him to have a choice piece of land with which to bury his wife. He was saying, "Your world view is so different from mine. As far as you're concerned, in this world you are permanent residents because you believe that you're not going anywhere else from here. But as far as I am concerned, I am only a temporary resident here. I'm a visitor on earth." That's why in tradition we call our cemeteries 'beit hachaim' – the home of the living – or 'beit olam' – the home of those who exist forever. That's something that Abraham appreciated and that's why he wanted to bury his wife appropriately.

There's a story about a man who travelled through many countries in Europe in order to reach Radin, a town in Belarus of today, where the Chofetz Chaim used to live. He had the privilege of being able to meet the Chofetz Chaim and discuss some issues with him. When he was brought into the Chofetz Chaim's home he noticed how modest it was, in fact the Chofetz Chaim found it difficult to find a chair for the man to sit on.

This visitor asked the Chofetz Chaim, "Why don't you have much furniture here?" The Chofetz Chaim replied to the traveller, "Tell me – while travelling through Europe to see me, did you bring your lounge furniture with you?"

"No," said the man, "I'm only passing through."

"Me too," said the Chofetz Chaim, "I'm only passing through this world, until I reach the next."

This was the message that Abraham was giving to the Canaanites, and it brings us a lot of reassurance. We should never fear what is going to happen to us once our physical lives on earth end, because we're only passing through. As we are taught in Pirkei Avot, this world is the passageway which leads towards the great banqueting hall which is waiting for us.

But in the meantime, let's perform as many mitzvot as possible; let's build up credit through the merit of our deeds, in order to guarantee that in the course of time – we're not rushing – we will benefit from God's full blessing in the true and everlasting world.

#### **Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\***

#### **Is Being Good the Most Important Thing?**

In some religious circles today, when young men and women are ready to get married, they make long lists of absolute "necessities" and "requirements" that the potential spouse must possess. These sometimes include the

Yeshivot/Seminaries where they studied, the girl is asked "if you were a boy, what kind of hat would you wear?", who their siblings married, the type of Shabbat tablecloth at home, etc. etc. The model of a Jewish "Shidduch-process of selecting a marriage partner" comes from our Torah portion, where Eliezer was charged to find a suitable wife for his master Abraham's son, Isaac. We find that he had no lists, that he did not ask Rebecca any questions about her religiosity or beliefs, where she learned (in her evil father's house!), or anything resembling the "requirements" today's couples. Eliezer determined that the only trait that was important was Chesed-kindness, to Eliezer himself, a stranger, and to his animals (**Genesis 24:14-22**). Why is this the only important trait? First, Eliezer saw this in his master's home. Even though Abraham is known as the most faithful to God (**Nehemiah 9:8**) and the first one who passed on his values to his children (**Genesis 18:19**), the quintessential trait by which Abraham was known, then and today was his Chesed-kindness (**Micah 7:20, Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 58:9, 60:2, Maimonides, Hilchot Avel 14:2**). Is this, indeed, the most important Jewish trait in looking for a spouse? We will see that not only regarding spouses, but it is the essence of all of Judaism. Chesed-goodness is, indeed, the most important value for a Jew.

From a very young age, parents teach their children to be a "good boy" or "good girl". Everyone usually aspires to be a good person and almost every individual, according to studies that have been conducted, thinks of himself or herself as a "basically good person." We all basically want to do "the right thing" in every situation, and help others when possible. Yet, when these acts of goodness are pitted against other values that are highly regarded by society -- such as amassing money, attaining success and power, having fun or other, similar values -- goodness and acting ethically often take a back seat and fade from the forefront of priorities. We must remember that "being good" does not signify "doing nothing bad," but, rather, positive actions, sometimes in exceedingly difficult situations. As in every society, within Judaism there are competing Jewish values such as Torah learning and performing Mitzvot—Commandments, rituals and beliefs. How does "goodness" and proper behavior towards others stack up in the hierarchy of Jewish values? How much of a Jewish priority is being a good person and how important a goal is it for each Jew to attain?

#### **In Judaism, Acting Morally and Helping Others is The Highest Value**

Judaism places caring about others and acting benevolently towards other people as the absolute highest priority of the religion. From Scripture to the Talmud to the Midrash and beyond, the value of behaving ethically towards other human beings describes the essence of being Jewish. For example, when declaring which one principle epitomizes

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Judaism, Rabbi Akiva states it is the verse, known to many: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (**Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 30b**)" He mentions nothing about God, beliefs, or man-to-God Mitzvot in describing the essence of Judaism. In a similar vein, Hillel was forced to encapsulate all of Judaism to the potential convert standing on one foot. Hillel stated essentially the same thing as Rabbi Akiva, except he couched the idea in a more negative but practical manner: Do not do to your neighbor what you would not want to have done to you (**Shabbat 31a**). He continues and says that all the rest of Judaism is only commentary upon this one essential principle, and that the convert should now go learn all of the Torah.

The Torah itself also emphasizes this concept. It tells us (**Deuteronomy 16:20**) not merely to attain it, but to run after and pursue righteousness (sometimes mistranslated as "justice"). This is commonly understood to signify that each Jew should ensure that he or she should do the right thing in every situation, i.e., specifically between man and man. The Torah emphasizes the importance of this notion in the verse in two diverse ways: it repeats the word "righteousness" twice, and it also tells us to run after this concept. In no other place in the Torah (and in only one instance in the Psalms, about pursuing peace) does God use the term "run after it." Jews are not commanded to run after keeping Kosher or run after eating Matzah on Passover. Only with regard to treating others in the right manner must one actively pursue this goal. The prophet Micah also informs us exactly what God wants from each Jew: to do justice and kindness as one walks modestly with God. According to the commentaries (**Micah 6:8 and Ibn Ezra commentary**), this refers only to those commandments that pertain to our goodness and how well we treat our fellow man.

In addition to the many individual commandments mandating proper behavior between Jews and others, there is one overarching commandment, a general Mitzvah that covers all man-to-man situations not specifically enumerated in the rest of the Torah. This Mitzvah-commandment "to keep the straight path and do what is right" is given so that the Jew is aware all the time, in every situation, that Jewish behavior mandates doing what is good and right (**Deuteronomy 6:18 with Nachmanides commentary**). In another verse commanding the Jew to do the "straight and right thing" (**Exodus 15:26**), the Midrash (**Midrash Mechilta Beshalach 1**) explains that this refers specifically to how a Jew behaves towards others in business, and then states that any Jew who treats others properly in commerce, it is as if that person has fulfilled the entire Torah. The great Vilna Gaon states the importance of goodness in simple terms. He says (**Even Shlaima 1:2**) that the essential purpose of life is to constantly improve one's character and act morally towards others. If not, what is the purpose of living?

Another way to evaluate Judaism's hierarchy of values is to see how a person will be judged after one's life in this world is completed. All people who believe in God wish to enter heaven immediately after death. When determining which people are immediately let into the "gates of righteousness" and who is not, the Midrash states (**Midrash Tehillim 118:17**) that people who fed the poor, clothed the poor, and were generally kind are immediately let in. Not one word about Sabbath or Kashrut observance. The Talmud declares that a Jew will be asked a series of questions to assess his or her life (**Shabbat 31a**). The very first question a person will be asked after death will not be about Yom Kippur, proper feeling in prayer, or even about belief in God. The first question will be, "Were you honest in your business dealings?"

As generations of Jews began to decline morally after the Sinai experience, King David advised that Jews should concentrate on eleven specific virtues, all of them between man and man (**Makkot 24a**). That Talmudic passage continues and explains that as time passed, moral decline increased. The prophet Micah streamlined the focus from eleven Jewish principles down to three areas: to judge truthfully, to do acts of kindness, and to perform the Mitzvot-Commandments without ostentation before others. Seeing yet a further decline, the prophet Jeremiah encouraged the people to focus on just two aspects: to do justice and to give Tzedaka-Charity. All the prophets stressed what the quintessential element of Judaism entails -- behaving ethically with others. This quality of kindness is so crucial to Judaism that the Midrash says that anyone who denies the importance of kindness denies the entire Torah (**Midrash Yalkut Shimonim Shmuel Aleph 25:134, Midrash Shmuel 23:8**).

#### God As A Role Model

When the Torah commands the Jews to follow the ways of God, the Talmud asks (**Deuteronomy 13:5, 28:9, Sotah 14a**) how it is possible for a man of flesh and blood to be like the Creator of the Universe. It answers that Jews are commanded to imitate God's characteristics. Which characteristics of God are we meant to imitate? The answer is that we should perform His acts of kindness that show caring about other people, such as giving clothing to those that lack clothes, visiting the sick and comforting the mourner. Later on, that same Talmudic page says (**Sotah 14a**) that the beginning of the Torah has the story of God's kindness to man (when God gave clothing to an undeserving Adam and Eve) and also at the end of the Torah is an instance of God's kindness to a man (when God buried Moses), implying that everything in between these two stories should also be connected to kindness as this is the essence of God and the Torah. Thus, the Torah teaches us (the word "Torah" technically translates as "that which teaches us") to follow God's lead and be kind always. Chofetz Chaim summarizes all of the above

ideas and urges the Jew to imitate God (**Shemirat Halashon 1:7**) by practicing these traits shown to man by God.

#### When Goodness Conflicts with other Jewish Actions, Which wins out?

There are many important values in any system of law, every society and in every religion. Judaism is no different in this respect. It is when these values come into conflict with each other, in any society or system, that we can determine which are indeed the most important. This entire Parsha series deals with extremely important Jewish values that every Jew should highly respect, such as Torah study, fulfilling commandments, etc. What happens when Jews have to choose between being a good person and other positive Jewish values? For example, in Christianity, while being a good person is important, an overall belief in the religion's teachings is far more important and fundamental. Which values are the most important in the hierarchy of Jewish actions and Jewish thought?

Even when in conflict with other important values in Judaism, being good and helping other people seems to "win out." The most profound example of this idea occurs in the Torah. Abraham is ill following his circumcision at age 99, but, despite his weakness, he longs for strangers to visit him so that he can help them because that is his nature. God sends three angels disguised as people, while at the same time God Himself visits Abraham, teaching the world the importance of visiting the sick. In most religions, this "together time" alone with God would be considered the highest ideal possible. Yet, when the strangers arrive, Abraham asks God to wait for him, while he (Abraham) takes care of these guests (**Genesis 18:3 with Rashi commentary**)! Abraham felt that helping strangers was more important than togetherness with God! And Abraham is praised for this act, as he teaches the principle that inviting guests is indeed more important than being with God, according to the Midrash (**Midrash, Yalkut Shimonim 18:82**). This concept -- that inviting strangers is even more important than a private audience with the Almighty -- is not only a Midrashic suggestion but is brought down as part of normative Jewish law, both in the Sephardic (**Kaf HaChaim 5:6**) and Ashkenazic (**Rema, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 33:1, with Mishne Berurah commentary 8**) traditions.

Another apparent "conflict" between two fundamental issues occurs in the two stories described in the Torah portion of Noach. The first involves the sinning of the people as they committed unspeakable sins between themselves, resulting in the Flood and the destruction of the world. The second, at the end of the Torah reading (**Genesis 11:1-1**), describes a generation that rebelled against God and challenged Him for superiority in the world. Their punishment was the sudden emergence of seventy languages, which confused everyone and stifled the project.

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Rashi cites both stories and both punishments and asks (**Rashi commentary on Genesis 11:9**): it seems that the generation of the Tower of Babel committed the far more egregious sin of challenging God (rather than the man-to-man sins culminating in stealing by the generation of the Flood). Why, then, was the generation of the Flood destroyed, while the Babel generation was merely "slapped on the wrist" and allowed to live? Rashi answers that even though their sin was far worse, the Babel generation demonstrated unity and caring for each other as they challenged God. The generation of the Flood always fought with each other, and there is no hope to build a society once that occurs. While it is true that the Babel generation sinned and was misguided, a society that can unite has the hope of building for the future and correcting its mistakes.

There is another instance, described by the prophet (**Isaiah 58:5-7**), when a man wishes to act piously and adopts a fast to demonstrate that piety. If, however, he ignores the needs of the poor, God says that he prefers that the person not fast but instead he should feed the hungry and give clothing to whoever needs clothes. Similarly, God tells the person who thinks he can "fix" bad ethical behavior with ritual acts and prayer that he is mistaken (**Isaiah 1:15**). Based on the verse in Hosea where God states that He desires kindness and not sacrifices, the Midrash (**Hosea 6:6, Midrash Yalkut Shimonim 522**) says that God would rather see people helping other people than receive all the sacrifices that were brought to the First Temple by King Solomon.

\* This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at [nachum@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:nachum@jewishdestiny.com)

#### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

##### The Offering of Yitzhak; the Offering of Sarah - Yinon Ahiman

The Midrash offers two main explanations pertaining to the particular timing of Sarah's death.

The first is related to the birth of Rivka, which appears two verses prior to the mention of Sarah's death (Bereshit 22): "And Betuel begot Rivka." The following explanation is mentioned in Midrash Rabbah on Chayei Sarah (Chapter 2):

"The light of Sarah did not set before the light of Rivka rose. For this reason, we are first told of the children Milka bore and only then are we told that Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years..."

In other words, the rising of Rivka's "dawn" brought about Sarah's "sunset"; an heiress was ready to take over, as is written in Bereshit 24, 67: "And Yitzhak brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother." Sarah had completed her

task, it seems, and so she died and was gathered unto her forefathers.

However, the very same Midrash (chapter 5), offers a different approach altogether: “And Avraham came to mourn Sarah.” Whence did he come? From the mount of Moriah, as Sarah’s passing was a result of that same sorrow. For this reason, the binding of Yitzhak and the death of Sarah are mentioned in proximity.”

Or as Rashi puts it: “Because Yitzhak was bound to be offered as a sacrifice, her soul departed from her body.” Ultimately, Yitzhak was not offered as a sacrifice; however, the sorrow and worry Sarah experienced are what caused her death. One might go so far as to say that not only was the ram offered as sacrifice instead of Yitzhak – so was Sarah!

What’s more difficult to understand is the total lack of verbal communication between Avraham and Sarah regarding Yitzhak. Why is the topic enveloped by such silence?

As is known, Avraham and Sarah were full partners to all their endeavors as well as their departure from Charan. As the Midrash says: “Avraham was engaged in converting the men, while Sarah converted the women.”

Midrash Tanhuma on Chayei Sarah (2) says the following: “And Avraham was old”, of this [verse] it is said ‘A woman of valor is the crown of her husband.’ In other words, so long as Sarah was alive, she was “the crown of her husband” and preserved her husband’s strength.

In fact, the Midrash relates to the entire chapter of Eshet Chayil [Woman of Valor] from Proverbs as Avraham’s eulogy for Sarah. The Midrash goes on to say: “Avraham continued to bemoan her, saying: ‘Oh woman of valor, who shall find such a one.... Her husband’s heart trusted her...’ When was this? When he had said to her [in Egypt] ‘Say you are my sister.’ ‘She opened her hands to the poor’ – this refers to the fact that Sarah would give charity and clothes the naked.... ‘She opens her mouth with wisdom’ – this refers to the time she told Avraham to take her maidservant... ‘Many daughters have acted valiantly, but you have outdone them all.’ This is in keeping with the words of Isaiah (51, 2) who said: ‘Look unto Avraham your father, and unto Sarah that bore you.’”

It follows that Sarah was a loyal partner and a full ally to Avraham. There are even those who say that her degree of prophecy was higher than that of Avraham. On the verse in Bereshit (21, 12), “All that Sarah says unto you, hearken unto her”, the Midrash says: “Avraham was inferior to Sarah in prophecy.” (Shemot Rabbah 1, 1)

How then can we understand the utter silence between them when it comes to the issue of sacrificing Yitzhak?

An answer may be found in the commentary offered by Rabbi Riskin in his book “Ohr Torah” on the Book of Genesis. Rabbi Riskin asks the following question on the verse – “And Avraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her”: Why does Avraham first mourn for Sarah and only then weep? Surely when one hears of the death of a spouse, one weeps first and then mourns?

Rabbi Riskin explains that because of the long-standing relationship between Avraham and Sarah, and the shared ideologies and faith, it seems that the very close intimacy between them may have desensitized Avraham somewhat, in that he may have viewed his wife as a presence so natural, that she was ultimately taken for granted:

“He was so close to her that she became his alter ego, a flesh of his flesh, a bone of his bones. Thus, only when he had finished eulogizing her and recalling every deed and achievement of hers, did he start weeping; only when the realization hit him – that Sarah was his one and only – did he break out in a terrible cry; now that he was inconsolable, he realized all at once that his life, and even his Divine calling, would never be the same again.”

According to this explanation offered by Rabbi Riskin, we can understand the lack of verbal exchange between Avraham and Sarah as one emanating from the fact that Avraham saw Sarah as an integral part of him and, as such, as a woman who does not have her own exclusive voice, but a voice that blends and merges with his own.

In contrast to the lack of conversation between Avraham and Sarah, the Midrash (VaYikra Rabbah on Acharei Mot, 20, 2) relates a conversation between Sarah and Yitzhak: “...when Yitzhak returned to his mother, she asked him: ‘Where were you, my son?’ [He replied] ‘My father took me across mountains and hills etc.’ [And she said to him] ‘Woe to the son of this miserable woman. If it weren’t for the angel, would you have been slaughtered?’ [He replied] ‘Yes’. At that moment she uttered six cries against the six sounds of the Shofar. She had hardly finished, when her soul departed...”

According to this Midrash, there had been an exchange of words between Sarah and Yitzhak (and only between them), and Sarah’s soul departed because of the very possibility of Yitzhak being offered as a sacrifice. This means that unlike Avraham, who accepted God’s commandment to sacrifice his son, Sarah is shocked by the fact that such a possibility even exists; so much so – that her soul departs.

According to this Midrash, this is the sound of the Shofar on Rosh Hashana, which is meant to remind us of the binding of Yitzhak. The sound of the shofar is not only reminiscent of

### Likutei Divrei Torah

the wailing of Sisra’s mother but also of the cries uttered by Yitzhak’s mother, Sarah.

It may very well be that the void created by the silence of Sarah’s voice is, in fact, the sound of the voice itself, as if the Torah were creating the “sound of silence” – a sound enabling all future mothers to make their voices heard; be they voices identifying with Avraham or voices protesting against such a sacrifice.

In Midrash HaGadol on Chayei Sarah (23, 2) it is written thus:

“And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba’ – [Kiryat Arba = The City of Four] – because of the four things that transpired to her during the time of her death: she heard what had happened to her son; she cried for her son; her death was a bitter one; her happiness was not complete.”

The verse which sums up Sarah’s lifetime enumerates the number of years she lived. The words of our Sages on this verse are well known: When she was one hundred years, she was as beautiful as a twenty-year-old and as sinless as a seven-year-old. According to this Midrash, one might add and say that all of her one hundred and twenty-seven years are encapsulated not in twenty years nor in seven years but in the few moments of her death. A moment of weeping, a moment of bitterness, a moment void of joy. The deeds and accomplishments of our nation’s Matriarch, spanning her entire lifetime, are condensed into the place of her burial, Kiryat Arba, representing four expressions of sorrow and pain. This, too, is her legacy.

Let it be noted that throughout the generations, most of the exegetes and liturgists dealing with the Binding of Yitzhak relate solely to Avraham and Yitzhak. The voice of Sarah and her weeping are missing, and no mention of these is made, not only in the Torah verses themselves, but also in the exegesis written over the generations. When we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana, producing one hundred sounds, of which only six are compulsory by Torah Law – perhaps these six sounds are the cries emitted by Sarah. Thus, Sarah’s voice is sounded after all, even if we don’t always realize it.

### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

#### Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

#### Transmission of the Legacy of Avraham

The legacy of Avraham Avinu, who spent his entire life pursuing and performing acts of chessed, is highlighted in Parshas Chayey Sarah. The Torah concludes its account of Avraham’s life with two episodes whose central theme is chessed. The devotion Avraham demonstrates for Sarah after her death in his purchase of Me’oras Hamachpeilah to bury her therein is the paradigm of chessed shel emes - kindness that can never be repaid. Continuing with the theme of the centrality of chessed is the story of Eliezer searching for a wife for Yitzhak. Only one who personifies the trait of chessed would be worthy to join the

family of Avraham, and therefore it is the act of kindness of providing water for Eliezer and his camels that tests a potential wife's suitability for Yitzchak.

One of Avraham's great contributions to humanity is a proper understanding of the significance of interpersonal relations. In a world where these ideas were foreign, Avraham taught the world about kindness and justice, and planted the seeds in humanity of caring for our fellow man. There is another legacy Avraham left behind, i.e. that he taught monotheism to a world that only knew paganism. Rashi (24:7) comments that Avraham refers to Hashem as "Elokei Haaretz" only after Avraham taught the world of His existence. Prior to that, Hashem was only known as "Elokei Hashamayim."

These two legacies, monotheism and love and care for one's fellow man, are actually dependent upon one another. One of the sources which teaches us that we must behave to one another properly is the mitzva to emulate Hashem. Just as He is merciful and kind, so too we must follow in His ways be merciful and kind as well.

Measures of kindness and justness cannot be determined by human standards. Societies create various models which, according to their perceptions, are kind and just, but we measure our bein adam lachaveiro by the standards of kindness and justice defined by the Torah. Any other model can be abused and eventually becomes the antithesis of a kind and just society. Those who embraced Communism in the past century demonstrated what happens to bein adam lachaveiro in a world that denies Hashem.

The relationship between the two legacies of Avraham expresses itself in another manner as well: it is inconceivable to be a genuine servant of Hashem and not be a loving and kind person. A true ohev Hashem loves whomever Hashem loves. Just as Hashem bestows His love and kindness on His world, so too we must follow in His ways and do the same. Avraham taught his descendants and the entire world about bein adam lamakom and bein adam lachaveiro. Our bein adam lamakom enables us to properly fulfill bein adam lachaveiro, and likewise, our bein adam lachaveiro is a testimony to our bein adam lamakom.

What we have learned from Avraham in the past two parshiyos was transmitted to the next generation; Yitzchak and Rivka continued the duel legacy of Avraham and Sarah. In fact, these seeds of emuna baHashem and chessed continue to be nurtured, because we are the recipients of these two lofty legacies. May we continue to show the world the truth of the message of Avraham.

### **Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

#### **Rav Doron Perz:Proactive Kindness**

What is the essence of loving-kindness, chesed, from a Torah point of view? In the search for a wife for Yitzchak we see an insight into what it means to be kind and sensitive to others. Avraham sends his loyal servant Eliezer to his home town to find a wife, where he gives a test – he will be at the well when the young ladies come to draw water, and will ask someone for something to drink after his long journey. The woman who says she will not only give him to drink, but also his camels, to her will be offered Yitzchak's hand in marriage.

This is what kindness is about – it is not only somebody who is reactive in their kindness, but the type of kindness which Eliezer learnt about in the house of Avraham is one that is proactive. Kindness is a virtue and a quality which they go and seek out, not when they happen to see somebody in need that they respond and react. It is not something tangential, but rather essential.

We saw this quality also in last week's Parasha, when Avraham was actively seeking out guests in spite of the pain he was in and the heat of the day, because for Avraham you don't see a person and respond with kindness, you go and seek it out. The Shelah writes that not one day should pass when we are not looking actively for kindness.

### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah**

#### **by Rabbi Label Lam**

#### **Bigger FROM the Akeida**

And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; [these were] the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kiriath arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her. And Abraham arose from before his dead, and he spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, "I am a stranger and an inhabitant with you. Give me burial property with you, so that I may bury my dead from before me." (Breishis 23 1-4)

to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her: The account of Sarah's demise was juxtaposed to the binding of Yitzchok because as a result of the news of the "binding," that her son was prepared for slaughter and was almost slaughtered, her soul flew out of her, and she died. — Rashi

Avraham Avinu endured ten great tests in his lifetime and probably millions of micro tests as well. With each test he was challenged in an area that went directly against his good, generous, and loving nature, and each one was a more intense trial than the next. There are disputes amongst great scholars as to exactly what the specific tests were. Most everyone agrees, however, that the height of heights, the test of all tests, was when Avraham was told to bring his son, his only son, the son he loved, Yitzchok to be brought up for an offering at the

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Akeida. It's almost impossible to imagine a more profound inner and outer contest for any human being. Nobody ever had an everything in anybody like Avraham had in Yitzchok. He prayed his entire life that he and Sarah should have progeny together and finally he was granted a child miraculously at the age of 100 years old. He poured all his wisdom into this young man for 37 years. Yitzchok not only represented but actually was the entire future of all of HASHEM's promises about a great nation and the fulfillment of his ambition to crown the world with the knowledge of HASHEM. Also, Avraham had railed his whole life against the barbaric practice of child sacrifice and here he came within inches of deleting his reputation and everything, truly everything.

Finally, he was halted as he passed that test of being willing to offer everything to HASHEM. Here we are now 3600 years later still talking about it and noshing on the merits of that high point of human achievement. All that makes it hard to understand how anyone could rank a test even higher or harder, but Rabeinu Yona counts the purchase of a burial plot for Sara as the 10th test. How is that a test? How is it a tougher test?

To do an honest business deal is a profound test and a great accomplishment. Very nice! How was Avraham able to remain poised and calm when negotiating with Efron while his wife remains unburied before him!? The word for crying – LIVKOSA is written in the Torah with a small CHOF because Avraham's crying and expression of sorrow for Sara was minimized and muted for some reason. What could the reason be!?

We ask every evening in Maariv, after Shema and before the Shmona Esrei that HASHEM should remove the Yetzer Hora, the evil inclination, the Satan, the opposing force from in front of and from behind us. It seems reasonable to remove the imbedding force from in front of us. However, what could it mean to remove that force from behind us after we have made our last holy accomplishment!?

The Rambam writes that just as someone can erase a sin with regret, so too a person can erase a Mitzvah with regret. A wealthy businessman once told me (I suspect he was talking about himself) that he knows someone who gave away tens of millions of dollars to Tzedaka and then his fortunes reversed. He heard a little voice chirping in his head saying, "If only you had not given away all that money you would have plenty now!" He shouted at that voice, "QUIET!" He never gave it another thought. It would not bring his money back but it might erase the merit of all he had achieved through giving Tzedaka. So it was that Avraham lost Sarah because of the Akeida, Rashi tells us. He had to tell that voice chirping in his head, "QUIET". That was a test even bigger than and bigger FROM the Akeida.

**Weekly Parsha CHAYEI SARAH**

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

Our matriarchs of Israel were very strong personalities and were formidable women. The life experiences of our mother Sarah are an excellent example of this assessment of character and behavior. From the Torah narrative we are informed early on that she is infertile, unable to conceive and give birth naturally. Nevertheless, we do not hear despair from her. She is willing to bring another woman into her house and to share her husband, so to speak, with that woman in the hope that this would somehow facilitate her own becoming pregnant.

Having Hagar in her home and watching her arrogant behavior forces her to chastise Avraham's attitude towards this complex relationship. She takes action to bring Hagar in line and thus preserve the primacy of her relationship to Avraham. Having escaped from the clutches of the Pharaoh and being aware of the dangers facing a beautiful woman in a cruel and violent society, she nonetheless continues her life's mission of advancing monotheism and morality in a surrounding society that condones evil and violent paganism.

She is wondrously shocked, almost to disbelief, when informed by a stranger who appears as a Bedouin Arab that she will conceive and bear a son to Avraham. At that moment she realizes that she will not only become an "ordinary" mother but rather the matriarchal figure that will preside over an eternal people that will influence all future societies.

To protect and safeguard that eternity, she is forced to expel Yishamael from her home. She does not flinch at performing this distasteful task. In this respect, she is stronger than Avraham...and Heaven, so to speak, backs up her position. She is the woman of iron that acts to guarantee the future survival of the Jewish people.

Sarah serves as the paradigm for the matriarchs that follow her in the Torah narrative of the book of Bereshith. Rivka is certainly the strong force in the house of Yitzchak who recognizes the darkness of Eisav in comparison to the heavenly potential of Yaakov. She shows strength in having to do family triage, so to speak, and knowingly to accept the consequences of such a painful and agonizing decision. The ability and strength that she exhibits, in switching her husband's blessings from the older son to the younger one, is indicative of the certainty of commitment and clarity of vision that so characterized all of the matriarchs of the people of Israel.

Sarah lived on in Rivka and her life's decisions. The same thing is true regarding Rachel and Leah who are more aware of the nefarious and dangerous ways of their father Lavan than is their husband Yaakov. It is they who finally force Yaakov to heed the Heavenly voice that directs him to leave Aram and return home to the Land of Israel.

Again it is the strength of character and will that decides the ultimate issue, and it is that decision that tips the scales of eternity in favor of Jewish survival. If Chava is recorded as being the mother of all living things, it is Sarah who is the mother of the loving, vibrant and eternal people of Israel.

Shabbat shalom  
 Rabbi Berel Wein

**Parshas Chayei Sarah**

**Cheshvan 5783**

**Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim Talmudic University**

**Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig**

**This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Reb Yaakov Fefer ben Yisroel Yitzchak. "May his Neshama have an Aliyah!"**

**Effects of Affects**

Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her (23:2).

This week's parsha opens with the death of Sarah, the first matriarch of the Jewish people. The Torah relates that following her death her husband Avraham came to eulogize and weep for her. Rashi (ad loc) explains that Sarah's death is juxtaposed next to the story of the binding of Yitzchak because the shock of him being nearly slaughtered caused her soul to leave her body.

Many commentaries question the order of events in the verse: "Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and weep for her." But shouldn't weeping come before the actual eulogy?

The Talmud (Brachos 6b) states, "Rav Sheyshis says that the benefit of a eulogy is the wailing" and Rashi (ad loc) explains that when the speaker raises his voice and cries out to express his anguish it causes those listening to cry out as well, which is the ultimate purpose of a eulogy.

There is a fascinating field of study called social psychology. It is the study of how a person's environment can radically influence one's emotional state.

Ever wonder what compels sports fans to pay outrageous sums of money to sit in a frenzied, crowded stadium and suffer through the most severe weather and traffic jams merely to watch "their" team play a game? Viewed superficially it makes absolutely no sense.

Why don't these avid fans watch the game comfortably from their climate controlled home where they don't have to pay \$15 for a \$2 hotdog and beer? Not to mention the fact that they'll actually have a far better view of the game. Yet week after week, millions of fans suffer through boiling or freezing temperatures (or sit in the pouring rain) to watch "their" team from hard, uncomfortable stadium seats. It's simply illogical. Why do they do this?

The answer is that everyone at their very core wants to be connected to something larger than themselves. Thus, being a part of and in the midst of a frenzied crowd has an incredible and powerful emotional lift that one simply cannot achieve at home watching a game alone. There is a sense of being connected to something bigger and greater than oneself with the excitement of the crowd driving one's own excitement even further. This powerful effect on one's emotions is intoxicating and causes fans to act in this seemingly illogical manner.

Similarly, watching a bereaved mourner cry in pain causes others to cry as well. This in turn has a ripple effect and causes even more observers to break down weeping. It is this crying that allows us to identify and connect, thereby beginning the process of internalizing the loss to the greater whole with whom the mourner is now connected.

The possuk here isn't referring to Avraham's personal grieving and crying, which took place earlier and likely in private. Rather, the possuk is describing how Avraham made the loss of his wife palpable and relatable to all. His crying at the time of the eulogy allowed others to internalize and feel the loss of the great woman who was now missing from their lives.

**A Blessed Change**

Rather to my land and to my birthplace shall you go, and take a wife for my son Yitzchak (24:4).

In this week's parsha we find Avraham charging his faithful servant Eliezer with going and locating a wife for his son Yitzchak. Avraham makes Eliezer swear that he will not seek a suitable wife for Yitzchak from the Canaanite nation amongst whom they were dwelling. Rather, he was charged with going back to Avraham's ancestral lands to locate a mate for Yitzchak.

Eliezer peppers Avraham with questions regarding his mission and at what point is he supposed to pivot and find another possible source for a mate for Yitzchak. Rashi (24:39) explains that Eliezer himself had a daughter that he very much wanted to suggest as a possible match for Yitzchak and he attempted every pretext that might allow his daughter to qualify as a suitable candidate. But Avraham refused and dismissed it out of hand explaining, "My son is blessed and you are cursed, and one who is cursed cannot be attached to one who is blessed."

Avraham's statement is explained in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 59:9), which says that Eliezer is identified as a descendant of Canaan (the son of Cham) who was cursed by Noach. Why was he cursed?

In a breathtakingly selfish and brutal act, Cham ensured Noach would be unable to father any more children – for more siblings meant that the world would be divided among them and Cham's share would be further diluted. According to Chazal, Cham's son Canaan was the first to come

upon Noach and see him in a vulnerable, drunken state and suggested to his father that there was an opportunity to attack Noach (see 9:22-23 and Rashi ad loc).

Noach then curses Canaan and declares that they will be slaves forevermore. Avraham and Yitzchak were descendants of Noach's son Shem who was explicitly blessed by Noach (see 9:25-26). According to the Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel, Eliezer was the son of Nimrod who was the son of Cush who was the son of Canaan. Thus, Eliezer and his family were considered accursed.

How are we to understand this concept of being "cursed" and how is that a fitting retribution for the act that was perpetrated on Noach?

Canaan's perspective is uniquely self-serving and selfish. He was so greedy and narcissistic that he focused solely on making sure that he didn't lose any future assets, by any means necessary. In his mind, the world revolved around him and his needs.

This is why Noach cursed him to be a slave forevermore. A slave has nothing, can own nothing, and every minute of every day is about serving someone else's needs. He remains a slave because, at the end of the day, his selfishness remains – he just wants to be taken care of without any real responsibility for himself.

The reason that a cursed person cannot attach to a blessed one is because there is no relationship; the cursed one is totally selfish and the blessed one is forced into a black hole of giving. It becomes a one-way street and that is not a healthy attachment. This is why Eliezer instinctively understands that Yitzchak's future wife must be a person who is totally giving, even without being asked to do so.

Remarkably, when Lavan first sees Eliezer he says to him (24:31) "Come, O blessed of Hashem!" Chazal comment on this possuk that at this time Eliezer finally loses the classification of being "cursed." Why?

Imagine for a moment a couple that has been married for many, many years but have never been able to conceive a child. Every time any young couple gives birth, they must be wistfully wondering why they haven't been as fortunate. Similarly, parents of a daughter who is desperate to get married but has no prospects watch with a broken heart every time a younger girl seems to effortlessly find her matrimonial match, while they wonder when will it be their daughter's turn. In fact, in either case, no matter how hard they try it is hard to see how they could be completely happy for someone else's joy in such situations.

This was the case by Eliezer as well. As Rashi explained he was desperately trying to suggest his daughter for Yitzchak, but Avraham would not hear of it. This must have been very emotionally painful for Eliezer as it was a rejection at the most personal level and his heart cried out for his daughter as well.

Yet, even with all that baggage, he throws himself completely into finding a proper mate for Yitzchak. He beseeches Hashem to bring his quest to a successful conclusion and devises a test to find the appropriate match for Yitzchak. He negotiates with people who want to kill him and steal the goods he brought and he refuses to accept anything but the immediate return of Rifkah to his master Yitzchak. He could have made every excuse with good cause for being unsuccessful.

However, he set aside his personal feelings and interest in the matter and selflessly brought his quest to a successful conclusion. Eliezer broke the mold of his family's selfishness. This is why Lavan called him "blessed."

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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

**Dvar Torah Chayei Sarah: How can anyone have two lives on earth?**

**16 November 2022**

Parshat Chayei Sara commences as follows (Bereishit 23:1):

"Vayihi chayei Sara," – "And the life of Sarah was,"

"Meah shana v'esrim shana, vesheva shanim," – "a hundred years and twenty years and seven years," (i.e. a total of a hundred and twenty seven years)

"Shnei chayei Sara," – "the years of the life of Sarah."

The last three words seem to be totally redundant. Are they not included in everything that precedes them?

In a wonderful sefer, Doreish Lifrakim by Rav Mordechai Rubenstein, which is a commentary on Pirkei Avot, the introduction explains that the word 'shnei' can mean two things: it can mean 'the years of' and it can also mean 'two'. Therefore, "shnei chayei Sarah" does not only mean, "the years of the life of Sarah." It could mean, "Sarah had two lives!" Therefore these words are not redundant.

Rav Rubenstein explains that for the vast majority of people on earth, we're actually only active and properly alive for two thirds of our lives. That's because we're asleep for the other third.

With regard to Sarah, however, when she went to sleep it wasn't because she loved to take it easy and was looking forward to having that schluff. Rather, every moment of rest was an investment in the next day when she would be able to be active and alert, to perform as much chessed as possible, because Sara spent her life performing kindnesses for others.

In this way, Sarah lived two separate lives – the time when she was awake and also the time when she was asleep, because that was not wasted time; it was time when she energised herself and prepared herself to do great things. All of Sarah's 127 years were used for good causes; were used constructively. Even when she was asleep, she was using every precious moment for a good purpose.

From her we can learn how critically important it is to utilise every precious moment we have, and even when we rest, let's use that as an investment in all the future productive activities that we will achieve.

*Shabbat shalom.*

*Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.*

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### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Chayei Sarah**

#### **Charity Begins At Home**

Avraham Avinu was the archetypical "gomel chessed" (benefactor of kindness).

A Medrash in Parshas Noach comments on the pasuk (Mishlei 21:21) "One who pursues righteousness and kindness (Tzedaka v'Chessed) will find life, righteousness, and honor (Chaim, Tzedakah, v'Kavod)." The Medrash interprets: The one who pursues Tzedaka refers to Avraham, as it is written, "...He observes the way of Hashem to do Tzedaka..." (Bereshis 18:19). And who is considered the Ba'al Chessed? Again, it is Avraham who did Chessed to Sora (by burying her). The conclusion of the pasuk in Mishlei thus also refers to Avraham: He is going to live a long life (he lived for 175 years); and he found Tzedakah and Kavod. The Medrash comments that Hashem said, "I am one who bestows kindness. You, Avraham, have taken over my profession. Therefore, come and wear my uniform – as it is written, "And Avraham was old, coming in days, and Hashem blessed Avraham with all." (Bereshis 24:1) Apparently, the Medrash is saying that the uniform of the Ribono shel Olam is Ziknah (aged appearance).

And where, according to the Medrash, did Avraham demonstrate his great Chessed? It was through the burial of Sora. This Medrash is unfathomable! This is the example of the great attribute of kindness of Avraham Avinu? What kind of lowlife would not see to the appropriate burial of his wife upon her passing? Any decent human being would do no less. There are so many examples and Medrashim that could have been cited to demonstrate Avraham's attribute of Chessed! Consider the great hospitality he provided for the three visitors that came in the heat of the day after he had just undergone Bris Milah at an advanced age. What is the interpretation of this Medrash?

I saw in the sefer Darash Mordechai that the Torah is trying to teach us a very important lesson that is unfortunately lost on many people: There are people in society who are the nicest people in the world. They would give you the shirt off their back. They do this for everyone else, except for their own family members. On the outside, they will fix your flat tire. They will do literally anything for you. But at home, they won't take out the garbage. They won't wash the dishes. They won't vacuum when their wife is having a hard day. The Torah is saying that even though we all know that Avraham Avinu was a great Baal Chessed, what really

counts to Hashem more than anything else is how he treated his wife. It is the old maxim—charity begins at home.

Many years ago, I mentioned the words of Rav Chaim Vital, but they are worth repeating: There are people who do Chessed with all other types of people, however they do not do favors for their wives and family members. They are confident that when they come up to Heaven, the Gates of Gan Eden will open wide for them. Woe is to them and woe is to their souls, for they do not know and they do not understand that all their acts of kindness are Hevel u'Reus Ruach (nothingness and evil spirit). First and foremost, a person must do Chessed with his wife and children. 'Your own poor take precedence.' Only after charity has begun at home do the good deeds that a person has done for others count.

That is why this Medrash portrays the prototype of the Chessed of Avraham Avinu as the effort he expended in properly burying his wife. This is the most important type of Chessed.

I recently read about an incident during which a young man complained to Rav Schach: "No matter whether Shabbos starts at 4 PM or 8 PM, my wife is never ready. The house is always a turmoil those last twenty minutes before Shabbos. 'She always is just barely able to benth licht on time' he complained. Rav Schach responded, "Take the broom and sweep yourself! Help your wife!"

#### **For Someone Else, You Need to be an Apikores**

I very recently heard the following thought in a shiur from the Tolner Rebbe of Yerushalayim.

Rivka is coming with Eliezer to meet her future husband. The Torah says, "And Yitzchak came from having gone to Be'er L'Chai Roi, for he dwelt in the south country" (Bereshis 24:62).

Avraham Avinu had been married to Hagar. At one point, Sora told him to send Hagar away. Avraham made her leave. But now, after the death of Sora, Yitzchak went to bring Hagar back.

The Tolner Rebbe, in his inimitable fashion, makes the following observation: Yitzchak is forty years old. He is what we call 'an eltere bachur'. Why was he not married yet when he was forty years old? Didn't he go out? What was he doing? The answer is that Yitzchak was a Tzadik. He was a person who was removed from this world. Yitzchak presumably sat and learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, confident that 'my father will take care of my shidduch'. My job is to occupy myself in the Service of Hashem. What will be, will be. I leave the matters of Shidduchim to the Almighty and to my father.

If Yitzchak is so removed from matters of this world that the last thing on his mind is finding a shidduch, what is he suddenly doing now? He is trying to find a Shidduch—for his father! So, you do know how to drive, or to take the subway, or to travel to New York to find Shidduchim! So why don't you do it for yourself? The answer is that Yitzchak knew that he would be leaving the house. Sora is no longer here. Avraham Avinu would remain by himself, lonely and with no companion. Yitzchak determined: I need to remedy this situation. It is my responsibility to take charge of this matter.

Regarding me, I can rely on the Ribono shel Olam. I can have Bitachon. Regarding someone else, I can't say "The Ribono shel Olam will help." There is a famous quip attributed to Rav Yisrael Salanter: Regarding yourself, you need to be a Baal Bitachon (someone who has complete faith in the Almighty); Regarding someone else, you need to be an Apikores (a heretic, who denies the Almighty). Regarding someone else, a person must assume "Hashem will not take care of him". Ay – that is blasphemy? Regarding someone else, such an attitude is appropriate. My friend is in need. He requires sustenance, a Shidduch, or whatever it may be... I need to take care of him. Regarding me, I can sit back and say, "Somehow, it will happen."

That is why for Avraham's Shidduch, Yitzchak gets involved—he becomes proactive. But for his own Shidduch, Yitzchak relies on his Bitachon.

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#### **Ben-Tzion Spitz**

*The condition of an enlightened mind is a surrendered heart. - Alan Redpath*

Sarah has died, Abraham is getting older, and their son Isaac has yet to marry. According to the Midrash, Isaac is forbidden from leaving the land of Canaan, but none of the women of Canaan were considered suitable for Isaac.

Abraham sends his loyal servant, who the Midrash names as Eliezer, to return to Abraham's hometown, Haran, northeast of Canaan, and find a wife for Isaac. Eliezer dutifully goes to Haran and is immediately successful in finding Rebecca, who happens to be from Abraham's family (a granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Nachor – making Rebecca and Isaac first cousins once-removed). Thankfully, Eliezer convinces her resistant family to let her return with him to Canaan to marry Isaac.

The Torah is effusive in its description of Eliezer, calling him "the elder of his house and the one who rules everything that is his [Abraham's]." The Bat Ayin on Genesis 24:2 wonders as to how Eliezer achieved such distinction as a servant. He explains that Eliezer had such respect and awe for Abraham, that he completely identified with Abraham's mission and goals and annulled his own desires to the extent that he was the ultimate agent on Abraham's behalf. The Bat Ayin elaborates that when a servant of the king is so closely identified with the king, then the servant, in a certain respect, is comparable to the king, in his power and majesty.

Eliezer subsumed and annulled his own desires so thoroughly and took on Abraham's goals so devotedly that he became comparable to Abraham himself. That gave Abraham the confidence to send Eliezer on this most vital mission for the continuity of his family, to find a suitable match for Isaac. Hence, the Torah's description of Eliezer as "the elder of his house and the one who rules everything that is his."

By surrendering his own ego and fully accepting the role of a humble servant, Eliezer became the authoritative representative of the great Abraham and the master of Abraham's entire domain.

May we realize that to serve often means to lead.

*Dedication - To NASA's Artemis 1 launch to the moon.*

*Shabbat Shalom*

*Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.*

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#### **Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

#### **Parashat Chayei Sarah - Short, Courageous, and Practical**

Parashat Chayei Sarah includes two important stories. The first is the story of the death and burial of Sarah in the Cave of the Patriarchs, Me'arat Hamachpela, in Hebron. The second is the story of Abraham's servant going to Haran in Aram Naharayim to search for a bride for Isaac and bringing Rebecca back with him. The second story is particularly long, with a significant part of it consisting of the servant – identified by Chazal as Eliezer – speaking to Rebecca's family. He describes, and then reiterates, the background of his mission and what occurred when he got to Haran until the moment when he asks them for Rebecca as a wife for Isaac.

The midrash in Breishit Rabbah says about this long conversation: "More beloved is the chatter of the forefathers' servants than the minutiae of the children's laws." But we will focus on the conversation of Rebecca, on her voice that pipes up for one moment in the midst of this long story.

After Eliezer concludes with Rebecca's father – as was customary in those days – that she would come with him to the Land of Canaan and marry Isaac there, he distributes gifts to Rebecca and to her family and they sit down to a festive meal. But the following morning, when he wanted to take Rebecca and embark on their journey, sounds of hesitation are heard. Her brother and mother suggest that she remain at home for a year and go only after that. The servant is embarrassed by their backtracking and they suggest, "Let us call the maiden and ask her." When they ask Rebecca, "Will you go with this man?" they surely

expected a different answer from the one they got. Rebecca responded with one sure, secure, unhesitant response, “I will go!” This answer, conveying complete readiness, reminds us of the words with which the series of Abraham stories begins, “Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.” Rebecca, too, takes a step similar to that of Abraham. She is ready to leave her land, her birthplace, and her father’s house for an unknown destination.

This story reminds us of one of Abraham’s important traits. When Abraham was seeking a burial plot for Sarah, Ephron, the owner of what was to become the Tomb of the Patriarchs, said, “I have given you the field, and the cave that is in it, I have given it to you...bury your dead.” But when the deal was about to be sealed, it turned out that Ephron was not quite so generous when he asked for the exaggerated price of “four hundred shekels of silver” for the field and the cave.

In another story we read last week, Abraham locates three passers-by and offers them hospitality, “And I will take a morsel of bread, and sustain your hearts;” and then he offers them a feast. “And Abraham hastened to the tent to Sarah, and he said, ‘Hasten three seah of meal [and] fine flour; knead and make cakes’. And to the cattle did Abraham run, and he took a calf, tender and good, and he gave it to the youth, and he hastened to prepare it. And he took cream and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and he placed [them] before them.” And he referred to this entire feast as “a morsel of bread.”

*The Babylonian Talmud compared these two stories and concluded: From here we learn that the righteous say little and do much, whereas the wicked say much and do not do even a little. (Tractate Baba Metziya, 87)*

One of the characteristics of a righteous person is that he does a lot but speaks a little. He does not show off his good deeds and does not emphasize them. On the contrary, an evil person speaks highly of himself but, in actuality, does nothing.

Rebecca was another link in the chain of the patriarchs’ family. Her short and courageous response of “I will go” shows how suitable she was to be part of Abraham’s family. She was prepared to embark on a long journey for an important purpose, but she does not talk too much. She makes a decision and acts on it.

*The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

## Rav Kook Torah

### Rav Kook on Mishpatim: An Eye for an Eye

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב לְשָׁמָן בְּשָׁמֶן עַל-

“Isaac went out to meditate (lasu’ach) in the field toward evening.” (Gen. 24:63)

The meaning of the word lasu’ach is unclear, and is the subject of a dispute among the Biblical commentators. The Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, twelfth-century scholar) wrote that it comes from the word si’ach, meaning “plant.” According to this interpretation, Isaac went to oversee his orchards and fields.

His grandfather Rashi, on the other hand, explained that lasuach comes from the word sichah, meaning “speech.” Isaac went to meditate in the field, thus establishing the afternoon prayer.

Why doesn’t the Torah use the usual Hebrew word for prayer? And is there a special significance to the fact that Isaac meditated in the afternoon?

#### The Soul’s Inner Prayer

Rav Kook often expanded concepts beyond the way they are usually understood. Thus, when describing the phenomenon of prayer, he made a startling observation: “The soul is always praying. It constantly seeks to fly away to its Beloved.”

This is certainly an original insight into the essence of prayer. But what about the act of prayer that we are familiar with? According to Rav Kook, what we call “prayer” is only an external expression of this inner prayer of the soul. In order to truly pray, we must be aware of the soul’s constant yearnings.

The word lasu’ach sheds a unique light on the concept of prayer. By using a word that also means “plant,” the Torah is associating the activity of prayer to the natural growth of plants and trees. Through prayer, the soul flowers with new strength; it branches out naturally with inner emotions. These are the natural effects of prayer, just as a tree naturally flowers and sends forth branches.

Why was Isaac’s meditative prayer said in the afternoon?

The hour that is particularly suitable for spiritual growth is the late afternoon, at the end of the working day. At this time of the day, we are able to put aside our mundane worries and concerns, and concentrate on our spiritual aspirations. Then the soul is free to elevate itself and blossom.

*(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 56-57. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 109)*

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## Shema Yisrael Torah Network

### Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Chayei Sarah

פרק ח' יי' שרה תשפ"ג

וַיָּהִי חִי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשֶׂר שָׁנָה שְׁבַע שָׁוִים

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

*Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 58:3) relate an intriguing story. Rabbi Akiva was giving a profound, intricate *shiur*, lecture. He noticed that his students were drifting off. In order to arouse them from their “slumber,” he presented them with a question (more like a riddle): Why did Esther merit to reign over 127 countries? He answered: She was a descendant of Sarah *Imeinu* who had lived 127 years. The question is rhetorical; the answer is beguiling. What does one have to do with the other? It is not as if Esther actually reigned over 127 countries. She was married to King Achashveirosh who ruled over these countries.

*Horav Tzadok HaKohen*, zl, m’Lublin, offers a riveting explanation which implies a lesson for us all. Esther took her life into her own hands when she went uninvited to meet Achashveirosh in the palace. Anyone who entered the palace uninvited was condemned to death. Hashem protected her, and she emerged unscathed. From where did she derive the courage to risk her life in this manner? *Chazal* teach that when Esther entered the royal chamber, she became ensconced with a holy presence, *ruach ha’kodesh*. It was this Divine Presence that catalyzed her captivation of the king’s heart, allowing her to live. How did she achieve such an elevated spiritual level to merit Divine protection?

*Rav Tzadok* posits that Esther used Sarah, her ancestress, as her role model. Sarah achieved spiritual distinction in her life such that has never been emulated. We must factor in the murky roots of Sarah’s early life. She was raised by her grandfather, Terach, an idolater of the lowest order, a man who was prepared to send his sons to their deaths, because Avraham had ridiculed him and his lifeless idols. Everywhere Sarah went, she was confronted by the cruelty and perversity associated with idol worship. She knew that she was destined for a greater, holier life. She bided her time, knowing that, one day, she would sever her relationship with them and move on to a better, more sanctified life. It took time, patience, intense yearning and commitment – but she made it.

Not only did Sarah leave her ignominious past, she was able to employ her murky past to enhance and enable her commitment to Hashem. Her humble background enabled her to nurture a sense of humility and diffidence, which led her to Hashem. She married and was now recognized as the wife of the most distinguished monotheistic theologian of his time – a man who literally stood alone against a world of falsehood and paganism. She fought every step of the way, never giving into hopelessness. Was she asking too much? Was she striving too high? When she married Avraham *Avinu*, the marriage did not go to her head. She maintained the submissive character that had always been her trademark.

Esther could have easily fallen into despair. She could have become despondent, thinking that Hashem had left her. She was no longer the same Esther. She was now married to a gentile, a cruel individual, an avowed enemy of the Jews. She could have pitied herself,

and, as a result, not imagined that Hashem would save her. She kept her chin up and went forward. After all, her role model/mentor, Sarah, would have done the same. If she was here in Shushan, married to the king, it must have been by Divine initiative. She would watch it play out.

Esther employed Sarah's approach of not permitting her somber past and present surroundings to cloud her future. On the contrary, it served as a springboard for spiritual growth. Nothing was going to hold her back from achieving her goals of sanctity and purity. Esther followed Sarah's lead and calmly walked into the king's chamber – come what may. She was on a mission to save Klal Yisrael. Her marriage to a gentile despot did not prevent her from going forward. Her firm commitment to Hashem was her lodestar with which she would navigate through the spiritual obstacles that stood in her way.

Esther's humility kicked in – as it did for Sarah. Never did she entertain thoughts of heroism, or seek credit and accolades for risking her life for her people. She was carrying out her mission. She was acutely aware that any of the talents and skills that she possessed were Divinely inspired to assist her in her duty to Hashem. She followed the course set forth by every past Jewish leader: to always act with humility.

When Rabbi Akiva noticed his students begin to wane, he attributed it to their viewing themselves as falling short in their ability to grasp the depth of the lesson. They felt that the new wisdom he was revealing was way above them. As a result, they suffered from a sense of unworthiness and malaise. Rabbi Akiva intimated: If Sarah and Esther could overcome the despondency that would have enveloped a lesser person – so could they. We do not give up when we are confronted by obstacles, we either step over or drive right through. We are on a mission. While humility should be part of our psyche, it should never hinder us from personal growth and achievement – it should never be an obstacle.

**ויקם אברהם מעל פניו מתו וידבר אל בני חתת**

**Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead and spoke to bnei Cheis. (23:3)**

The Torah is circumspect concerning its text, spelling of each word and overall locution. No word is superfluous, no spelling is ignored. *Chazal* derive volumes of *halachah* from every nuance, every seeming redundancy. As the message of its Divine Author, nothing in the Torah is to be taken capriciously. As such, it is intriguing to note that the words, *bnei Cheis* (children of Cheis), are mentioned nine times in our *parshah* and once in *Parashas Vayechi* (49:32). It is not as if these were laudable people. They were idolaters who were greedy and selfish – among other things. Yet, the Torah finds it important to underscore their negotiating with Avraham Avinu when he sought to purchase a plot of land to bury his wife.

*Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 58:8) intimate this question. Rabbi Eliezer said, "How much ink is spilled and how many quills are broken, in order to write 'bnei cheis'! Ten times, the Torah writes 'bnei cheis'. These ten citations correspond to the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, in order to teach that whoever assists in the business ventures of a *tzaddik*, righteous person, it is considered as if he has fulfilled the *Aseres HaDibros*."

*Chazal* ask the question, derive the lesson, convey the message, but what should we learn from it (other than the overriding importance of assisting a *tzaddik* in his financial affairs)? *Horav Noach Weinberg*, *z'l* (Wisdom for Living), explains that *Chazal* are teaching us that (even) one act can alter the course of history. *Bnei cheis* were far from respectable people. They were barbarians whose entire demeanor was the antithesis of that of Avraham Avinu. It was the furthest from the mind to imagine them sitting down to the table with our holy Patriarch to discuss a business enterprise – one which was not a long-term arrangement, but a one-time deal which would net them just so much. Yet, for once, they acted like *mentchen*, decent human beings, deferring respect to the *tzaddik* who stood before them, someone who was acknowledged as the *Nasi Elokim*, Prince of G-d. This godless people showed reverence to a representative of G-d who embodied spirituality at its apex. This one time, one act, singular performance of kindness and

decency, elevated them to the point that they are considered to have fulfilled the *Aseres HaDibros*. Their one-time achievement made their life worth living.

One deed, one achievement at the right time, in the right place, can impact the world in such a manner that it qualifies (and gives meaning to) one's existence and makes his name worthy of being perpetuated for all time. One well-placed act can enroll a person in the eternal book of history. Because he made a change, he made a difference. This does not mean that once one has successfully performed this life-altering act that he should go into retirement, live a reclusive life of abandon. No! It should serve as the springboard for a continued successful life – impactful living. While some live longer than others, it does not mean that the one with the shorter life span has a diminished opportunity for achievement. It is not how *long* one lives – it is *how* one lives that matters. If every G-d-given moment of life is recognized as just that – G-d-given, he will not waste it. He knows that he can achieve and influence a world in that moment.

The people that change the course of history, who leave an enduring impact, are not necessarily the well-known movers and shakers. Each and every one of us has the opportunity to leave our imprint for eternity. *Rav Weinberg* explains that by reaching out to our fellow Jew, who – for a number of reasons (many out of his control) – is alienated from the religion of his ancestors, whose understanding and appreciation of his heritage is at best minimal, superficial and often jaundiced, is drowning in a society whose culture is immoral and toxic, one can change the course of generations to come. If we throw him/her a line and succeed in reining him/her in, we have changed the world and made our mark for eternity.

The one good deed will pay out its investment in ways that one cannot imagine. I present two vignettes in which we see how this played out. *Rav Mendel Futerfas*, a *Lubavitcher chassid* emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* from Communist Russia after spending many years in the *gulag*, Russian prison, for the "treason" of teaching and inspiring Jews to *Yiddishkeit*. He also risked his life to help his fellow Jews escape from Russia.

When he emigrated in the 1970's, he first traveled to England where his wife was living. He then went to Crown Heights to meet with the *Lubavitcher Rebbe*, *z'l*. When he left New York, his first destination was to return to his wife in England, and together they would travel to *Eretz Yisrael*. He was sitting next to a man whose facial features identified him as Jewish. He could not prove it, but his gut feeling gravitated toward Jewish. The man was clearly not *frum*, observant. His soul was in a turmoil. After spending years reaching out to Jews of all stripes, in a country dedicated to denying the existence of a Supreme Being, saving Jews both physically and spiritually, how could he sit next to this man for six hours and ignore his apparent disconnect from Jewish observance? The problem was that he hardly spoke English. How could he interact with the man? On the other hand, the fact that they were sitting next to one another was surely Divinely preordained. He had an idea. He took out his *Tefillin* and pointed to them. He said to him, "I Jew, you Jew; I *Tefillin*, you *Tefillin*." His neighbor agreed to put on *Tefillin*. It was not the most eloquent oratory – but it was sincere. When words emanate from the heart – not just the mouth – they drive home a message: "I care about you." That one decision altered the trajectory of that man's life.

*Rabbi Yechiel Spero* (*To Light a Spark*) relates the story of a family in Bnei Brak who began to notice cracks in their son, Yossi's, spiritual armor. In the beginning, it was little nuances, the manner in which he would *daven*, his attitude toward *Shabbos*; *kashrus* was no longer observed in the strict manner in which he was raised. Their normally good relationship began to sour, as his failure to observe Torah and *mitzvos* became more obvious, evidencing a lack of respect for his parents' feelings and an almost rebellious attitude toward Torah and *halachah*. The clincher came when Yossi asked his father to buy him a car. It was not as if his parents could not afford the expenditure. They were well-to-do, and a car would not break the bank. Their concern was: Would he flagrantly drive on *Shabbos*? Were they assisting him in

*chillul Shabbos?* Perhaps they should purchase the car on the condition that he does not drive it on *Shabbos*? They decided that they knew only one address to hear *daas Torah*, the wisdom of Torah: The *Chazon Ish*. The sage was not well, but he made the effort to advise families that were going through challenges with their children.

The *Chazon Ish* met with the father and listened to his tale of woe. The father related his son's latest request and his suggestion that he buy him the car on the condition that he does not drive it on *Shabbos*. The *Chazon Ish* responded immediately, "Absolutely not! When a father buys a car for his son, no strings or conditions should be attached to the gift." The father was expecting/hoping to hear a different response from the sage, but the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, had spoken. He would adhere.

The next day Yossi received his new car – without strings attached. Surprisingly, when *Shabbos* began, the car was parked in its place. Yossi no longer observed *Shabbos*, but, apparently, he was not about to desecrate it with the new car that he had received. This went on for four weeks, until one *Shabbos*, Yossi sat down to partake in the *Shabbos* meal with the rest of his family. Words cannot describe the joy mixed with tears that coursed through his parents' heart. It was an inspiring meal, almost like a homecoming – which it was. Nonetheless, the father wanted to know what it was that had effected the change in Yossi's attitude.

Yossi explained, "When I asked you to buy me a car, I was certain there would be the condition of no driving on *Shabbos*. I had decided that if this would be the case, I would return the car, make a loan and purchase my own car, which I would drive all over – on *Shabbos*. I was going to do this to spite you. If you cannot accept me for who I am, then you do not really love me. When you bought me the car and gave it to me without strings attached, however, I realized that you were giving me the car because you loved me. I then asked myself, 'How can I drive the car when I know that it will hurt my parents and cause them severe pain?' I decided not to drive out of respect for you. After a few weeks, I realized how much *Shabbos* meant to me – and I returned.

One decision prompted by the *gadol hador* saved a young boy from the abyss of spiritual infamy.

**יגוע וימות אגדה בשייבת טבה זקן שנגע**

#### **And Avraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content. (25:8)**

The perfection and wholesomeness in life which Sarah *Imeina* achieved was also merited by Avraham *Avinu*. *Horav Yechezkel Levinstein*, *z'l*, would refer to Avraham *Avinu*'s life as *zate' teg*, days for which he was content and satisfied, knowing that he had lived every moment of his life in accordance with the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem. One hundred seventy-five years: thirty days a month, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. He did not waste a moment of his life. When one lives in such a manner, leaving this world is merely crossing over to the next world. The *Chafetz Chaim*, *z'l*, would weep copious tears as he rebuked himself when he was unable to account for half-an-hour. He was not completely certain what he did during this time. He would say, "Half an hour is thirty minutes, with each minute affording me the time to learn two hundred letters of Torah."

The *Ponovezher Rav*, *z'l*, spoke on *Shabbos mevorachim ha'chodesh*, when the blessing ushering in the forthcoming month is recited, to his *yeshivah* students. He began, "We pray, *V'sitein lanu chaim aruchim*, 'May You give us long life.' At present, we are praying for the following month. Why do we interject and ask for long life? How does 'long' life interplay with the blessing for the following thirty days?" The *Rav* explained that a moment saved and used for the correct purpose is *chaim aruchim*, long life, since by our actions we can transform one minute into *nitzchiyus*, eternity. Thus, we ask Hashem to grant us the ability and resolution to merit to convert the mundanity of life into purposeful living in accordance with the will of Hashem, thereby elevating it to eternity.

Unfortunately, we measure time by its generic value, rather than by its potential, i.e., what can be achieved in its duration. If we

would be able to perceive the idea of *nitzchiyus*, eternity, it might alter our attitude. *Horav Yosef Nendick*, *z'l*, *Mashgiach Yeshivas Kletz*, offered the following portrayal in an effort to make his students develop an understanding and appreciation of the concept of eternity. "Imagine, if you will," he began, "that our *bais hamedrash* was filled floor to ceiling with poppy seeds. Once every hundred years, a bird would eat one poppy seed. Can you even begin to imagine how long it would take until all the poppy seeds were gone? Now, imagine that our entire city (Yanov – a city in the Ukraine) was completely filled with poppy seeds, top to bottom, up to the sky. This time, the bird would visit once every thousand years. It would certainly take many lifetimes until the city would be left clean of its poppy seeds. One more example: if the entire world, ground to sky, were to be filled with poppy seeds, and the bird appeared every ten thousand years to take one seed, how long would it be before the world was emptied of its poppy seeds? At that point, the *Mashgiach* became animated and cried out, *Aber kein netzach is dos nisht*, "But eternity, it is not!" In other words, the word eternity, by its very definition, means without parameter, forever, until infinity. There is no cap on eternity. Likewise, we live a foreordained number of years. Some live longer than others, but all live a predestined, measured number of years. Hashem determines the length of our earthly visit. Regardless of its length, it is always too short. When we realize that with every moment of life used properly, we can acquire eternity, we would come to realize that to waste time would not only be sinful, it would be downright fatuous.

Having said this, we understand that stealing time, depriving one of using his time properly, is an unforgivable theft for which one cannot compensate. *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky*, *z'l*, explains that one can repay what he stole from someone. If he stole time, however, it cannot be repaid. Perhaps that person was destined to do something great, something exceptional at that very moment. Now, the moment is gone forever. The next moment is not the same as the present. Once it passes, it is lost for eternity.

When the *Ohr Sameach* was *niftar*, the *Rogatchover Gaon*, *z'l*, who was his colleague in *Dvinsk*, eulogized him. He bewailed the inestimable loss to *Klal Yisrael*. "Rav Meir Simcha learned Torah with such diligence, similar to a person who is rescuing his possessions from a raging fire. Under such overwhelming circumstances, one does not stop to look at the clock: Is it the middle of the night? Is it the afternoon, and I have things to do? Does rescuing my possessions involve difficulty? No! One rolls up his sleeves and acts, doing whatever he must do to save whatever he can. This was *Rav Meir Simcha*. Every minute that could be devoted to Torah he pulled out of the fire." He was salvaging that minute to learn Torah. Another minute, another minute; every minute was precious. How could he abandon it?"

**Va'ani Tefillah**

**asher yiyyoshei b'itech – Ashrei Yoshvei veisecha. Fortunate are those who dwell in Your house.**

As mentioned, reciting the *Tehillah l'David* (*Ashrei*) prayer provides the supplicant with amazing merit, to the point that *Chazal* (*Berachos* 4:b) teach that one who says this prayer three times daily is guaranteed a place in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. First and foremost, this merit is earned only after one recites the *tefillah* with great *kavanah*, intention, and sincerity. Otherwise, he is just saying words. Many reasons are given for this prayer's distinction. The *Machatzis HaShekel* (1:7) writes, "When one recites *Tehillah l'David* with the proper intention, he will come to realize that everything in life comes to us from Hashem. This prayer is comprised completely of praise to Hashem, lauding His attributes. When a person acknowledges the incredible kindness which Hashem provides him, he will be circumspect to distance himself from any negative activity which may lead to sin. This will engender within him a desire to repent and come closer to Hashem. He will, thus, be ensured a place in *Olam Habba*.

*In Memory of our beloved parents, grandparents, and great grandparents*

*Rabbi Justin Hofmann*

*הרבי יקוטיאל בן יוסף ז"ל – נפטר ל' חשוון תשע"ג  
and*

## Performing a Proper Hesped

### Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: I have heard eulogies where the speaker seemed more interested in demonstrating his ability as a speaker than in commemorating the departed. Is this the proper way to eulogize?

Question #2: Someone told me that sometimes one obeys the request of a person not to be eulogized, and sometimes one may ignore it. How can this be?

Question #3: Is it true that one may not schedule a hesped within thirty days of a Yom Tov?

#### Our Parsha

“And Sarah died in Kiryas Arba, which is Hebron, in the Land of Canaan. And Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry over her.” This is the earliest of many verses the Gemara cites when discussing the mitzvah of eulogizing. People often avoid writing halachic articles about hespedim in favor of more exciting or popular topics, leaving many unaware that there is much halachah on the subject. Are there rules to follow when organizing or delivering hespedim? Indeed, there are many, as we will soon see.

#### The Mitzvah

Most authorities do not count performing a eulogy as one of the 613 mitzvos of the Torah. Indeed, most consider it only a rabbinic mitzvah. Nonetheless, the hesped accomplishes the Torah mitzvah of *ve'ahavta le'rei'acha komocha*, loving one's fellow as oneself, since a properly delivered hesped is a very great chesed. To quote the Rambam: “It is a positive mitzvah of the Sages to check on the ill, to console mourners... to be involved in all aspects of the burial... to eulogize... Even though all of these mitzvos are rabbinic, they are all included in the mitzvah that one should love one's fellow as oneself. Anything that you want someone to do for you, you should do to someone else who also keeps Torah and observes mitzvos” (Hilchos Avail 14:1).

As the following passages demonstrate, our Sages strongly emphasized the importance of performing this mitzvah properly:

“When a Torah scholar passes away, the entire nation is obligated in his eulogy, as it states, ‘and Shmuel died, and all of Israel eulogized him’” (Mesechta Kallah Rabbasi Chapter 6).

“Whoever is idle in carrying out the hesped of a Torah scholar does not live long” (Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua 35).

“Whoever is idle in carrying out the hesped of a Torah scholar deserves to be buried alive” (Shabbos 105b)!

“A voice from above declared, ‘Whoever was not idle in participating in Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi’s eulogy is assured of life in the World to Come’” (Koheles Rabbah 7).

“If someone cries upon the passing of an adam kasher (a halachically observant person) Hashem counts his tears and then stores them (Shabbos 105b).”

From this we see that the responsibility of hesped applies both to the person saying the eulogy and to those in attendance, and that this obligation sometimes applies to each individual. Furthermore, we see that the reward for fulfilling this mitzvah properly is very significant, both physically and spiritually, and that the eulogy and the crying associated with mourning are both highly important.

#### A “Kosher” Person

Above, I cited the statement: “If someone cries upon the passing of an adam kasher, Hashem counts his tears and then stores them.” I translated adam kasher as a halachically observant person.

Who qualifies as an adam kasher?

The rishonim discuss this question. Although the Rosh (Moed Katan 3:59) notes that his rebbe, the Maharam of Rottenberg, was uncertain what the term means, he himself concluded that it refers to someone who observes mitzvos properly, even if the person is not a talmid

chacham and one sees nothing particularly meticulous about his religiosity. The Shulchan Aruch follows this definition.

Others explain that this is not enough to qualify as an adam kasher. Rather, the title applies to someone who, in addition to observing mitzvos properly, also pursues opportunities to perform chesed (Shach, Yoreh Deah 340:11, quoting Rabbeinu Yonah, Ramban and Bach). According to either approach, one should cry at the funeral of an adam kasher.

What is a proper hesped?

“It is a great mitzvah to eulogize the deceased appropriately. The mitzvah is to raise one’s voice, saying about him things that break the heart, in order to increase crying and to commemorate his praise. However, it is prohibited to exaggerate his praise excessively. One mentions his good qualities and adds a little... If the person had no positive qualities, say nothing about him (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 444:1).” (I will soon discuss why one may exaggerate “a little bit,” even though, it would seem, a small lie is also a falsehood.) The eulogy should be appropriate to the purpose and extent of the tragedy. For example, one should eulogize more intensely for a young deceased than for an older one, and more for someone who left no surviving descendants than for someone who had children (Meiri, Moed Katan 27b). Also, the crying of any hesped should not be to excess (Meiri, ad loc.).

In summation, we see that the purpose of a hesped is to cause people to cry over the loss of a Jew who observed mitzvos properly. On the other hand, eulogizing inappropriately is sinful.

At this point, we can answer the first question: “I have heard eulogies where the speaker seemed more interested in demonstrating his ability as a speaker than in commemorating the departed. Is this the proper way to eulogize?”

Despite its frequency, such behavior is obviously wrong. I discovered that this sin of eulogizing in non-accordance with halachah, such as speaking for one’s own self-aggrandizement or exaggerating excessively, is so serious that in some places there was a custom to never eulogize and to forgo the mitzvah altogether, despite its importance (see Gesher Hachayim 1:13:4).

#### Why Do We Eulogize?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 46b) raises a halachic question: Do we eulogize out of respect for the deceased, or in order to honor the surviving family members? In other words, is the chesed of this mitzvah due to the posthumous dignity granted to the departed, or is it due to its inspiring people to realize the extent to which the surviving family members have been bereaved? The Gemara devotes a lengthy discussion in proving which option is correct.

Do any variations in observance result from this question?

The Gemara notes two such differences:

No Hespedim for Me!!

I. What happens if a person requests that no one eulogize him?

If the purpose of a eulogy is to honor the deceased, the deceased has a right to forgo the honor and request that no eulogies be recited. Since the hespedim are in his/her honor, he/she has the right to forgo the honor and we respect this request. However, if the purpose of a eulogy is to honor the surviving relatives, a request of the deceased does not forgo the honor of the survivors, and we will eulogize him/her anyway, if the family so desires.

Paying for a Speaker

II. A second halachic difference resulting from the above question (whether the mitzvah is to respect the deceased or to honor the surviving family members) is whether one may obligate the heirs to pay for the eulogy.

In many circles and/or eras, it is or was a common practice to hire a rabbi or other professional speaker to provide the eulogy. May one hire such a speaker and obligate the heirs to pay his fee? If the mitzvah is to honor the deceased and hiring a professional speaker is standard procedure, then one can obligate the heirs to hire a speaker, just as they are required to pay for the funeral. If eulogizing is for the sake of the

bereaved, one cannot obligate them to pay for professional eulogizers if they prefer to forgo the honor.

The Gemara rallies proof from this week's parsha that the mitzvah is in honor of the deceased. As the pasuk clearly mentions, Avraham Avinu was not present when his wife Sarah died. The Gemara asks why did they wait until Avraham arrived to eulogize her. If the reason for the hesped is indeed to honor the living, Sarah should not have been left unburied until Avraham arrived. On the other hand, if the mitzvah is to honor the deceased, then Sarah was left unburied so that Avraham could honor her with his hesped.

Although the Gemara rejects this proof, it ultimately concludes that the purpose of a hesped is to honor the deceased. Therefore, if the deceased requested no eulogies, we honor his/her request, and heirs are obligated to pay for eulogies, where appropriate.

#### Pre-Torah

You might ask, how can we derive halachos from events that predate the Torah? Didn't the mitzvos change when the Torah was given?

The answer is that since this mitzvah fulfills the concept of *ve'ahavata le'rei'acha kamocha*, love your fellow as yourself, we can derive from its mode of performance whether its purpose is to honor the deceased or, alternatively, the surviving family members.

Exaggerate a little

The hesped should be appropriate to the deceased; one may exaggerate very slightly (Rosh, Moed Katan 3:63). You might ask, how can any exaggerating be permitted? Isn't the smallest exaggeration an untruth? What difference is there between a small lie and a big one?

The answer is that there is usually a bit more to praise about the person than we necessarily know, so that, on the contrary, adding a bit makes the tribute closer to the truth (based on Taz, Yoreh Deah 344:1).

#### Ignoring a Request

I mentioned above that the Gemara concludes that if the deceased requested no eulogies, we honor his/her request. However, this ruling is not always followed. When the Penei Yehoshua, one of the greatest Torah scholars of the mid-eighteenth century, passed away, the Noda Biyehudah eulogized him, even though the Penei Yehoshua had expressly instructed that no eulogies be recited. How could the Noda Biyehudah ignore the Penei Yehoshua's express request?

The answer, as explained by the Noda Biyehudah's disciple, is that for a gadol hador to be buried without proper eulogy is not simply a lack of the deceased's honor, which he has a right to forgo, but also a disgrace to the Torah. Even though a talmid chacham may (in general) forgo the honor due him as a Torah scholar (talmid chacham shemachal al kevodo, kevodo machul [Kiddushin 32b]), this applies only to forgoing honor. He cannot allow himself to be disgraced, since this disgraces not only him but also the Torah itself (*Shu't Teshuvah Mei'ahavah*, Volume I #174; see also *Pischei Teshuvah*, Yoreh Deah 444:1).

We now understand why there are times when one obeys the request of a person to omit his hesped, and times when one may ignore it. Usually, we obey his/her request because of the general principle *retzono shel adam zehu kevodo*, the fulfillment of someone's desire is his honor. However, if a gadol hador requests omission of eulogies, and major authorities consider this a breach of respect for the Torah itself, they may overrule the gadol's request out of kavod for the Torah. (Of course, this implies that the departed gadol felt that the absence of hesped would not be a disgrace to the Torah, and that his halachic opinion is being overruled.)

We now address the third question raised above: Is it true that one may not schedule a hesped within thirty days of a Yom Tov?

#### Hesped before Yom Tov

The Mishnah (Moed Katan 8a) forbids scheduling a hesped within thirty days before Yom Tov for someone who died over thirty days before Yom Tov (as explained by Rosh ad loc. and Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 447:1). What is wrong with scheduling this hesped, particularly since performing a proper hesped is such a big mitzvah?

The Gemara cites two reasons for this ruling, both explaining that some form of Yom Tov desecration may result from such a eulogy. Rav

(according to our version of the text) explained the reason with an anecdote:

"A man once saved money in order to fulfill the mitzvah of aliyah la'regel, traveling to the Beis Hamikdash for Yom Tov. A professional eulogizer then showed up at his door and convinced the wife that her recently departed relative deserved another eulogy. She took the money her husband had saved for aliyah la'regel and gave it to the eulogizer. (This indicates that ambulance chasing is a time-hallowed profession.) At that time, Chazal decreed that one should not make a post-funeral hesped during the thirty day period before Yom Tov."

The Gemara then quotes Shemuel, who cited a different reason for the ban: Usually, thirty days after someone's death, he or she is sufficiently forgotten for people to not discuss the death during Yom Tov, which would diminish the festival joy. However, performing a eulogy during these thirty days refreshes people's memories, and as a result, they discuss the passing during Yom Tov and disturb the Yom Tov joy (Moeid Katan 8b).

The Gemara notes that there is a practical difference between the two approaches. According to the first approach, our concern only applies if someone hires a professional speaker, and there is no stricture against conducting voluntary eulogies. However, according to Shemuel, one may not conduct even an unpaid eulogy, since this may revive the loss for the close family and result in a desecration of Yom Tov.

#### Contemporary Problem or Not?

Some raise the following question: Why doesn't the Gemara point out yet another difference that results from the dispute? According to the first approach, the prohibition would only exist when the Beis HaMikdash stood and there was a mitzvah of aliyah la'regel. Today, however, when we unfortunately cannot fulfill this mitzvah, one should be permitted to hire a professional speaker to eulogize within a month of Yom Tov even after the funeral (Ritz Gayus, quoted by Ramban and Rosh). Obviously, according to Shemuel's approach the same concern exists today that existed when the Beis Hamikdash still stood. Yet the Gemara does not mention such a halachic difference between the two opinions.

The Ramban explains that, indeed, even the first opinion agrees that the prohibition exists also today. Since the story mentioned in the Gemara happened during the time of the Beis Hamikdash, the Gemara cites a case of someone saving up for aliyah la'regel. However, the same idea applies to any funds that are to be used for Yom Tov. Thus, even though we have no Beis Hamikdash, the reason for the prohibition still applies, since celebrating Yom Tov in general is an expense people save for in advance. Thus, the concern still exists that in order to pay for the eulogy one might dip into one's Yom Tov savings.

Does this law apply even within thirty days of Rosh Hashanah, or only before the festivals of Sukkos, Pesach, and Shavuos?

Since the Gemara mentions that the person spent the money set aside for aliyah la'regel, a mitzvah that applies only to Sukkos, Pesach, and Shavuos, this implies that our concern is only about the special Yom Tov expenses associated with the three regalim festivities, and not Rosh Hashanah (*Yeshuos Yaakov*, *Orach Chayim* 547:1).

#### Eulogizing Children

Does one recite eulogies for children?

Theoretically, one could argue that since the purpose of a hesped is to honor the deceased, perhaps children do not require this type of honor. Nevertheless, the Gemara states that one does perform a eulogy for children of a certain age.

For which age does one perform a hesped?

"Rabbi Meir, quoting Rabbi Yishmael, said that the children of poor people should be eulogized when they are only three years old, whereas the children of wealthy people are eulogized only if they are five. Rabbi Yehudah quoted Rabbi Yishmael differently: the children of poor people at five, and the children of wealthy people at six. The halachah is according to the last opinion quoted (Moed Katan 24b).

Both opinions agree that the age is earlier for the child of a poor family than for the child of a wealthy family. What is the reason for this difference?

Rashi explains that a poor person, who has nothing in the world but his children, suffers the loss of his children more intensely and the need for a hesped is greater. One might challenge that explanation, since the hesped is for the honor of the departed, and therefore what difference does it make if the family suffers more? The hesped is not for their benefit, but to honor the departed. I have not found this question discussed, although one later authority notes that the custom (at least in his time and place) was not to eulogize children at all (Beis Hillel to Yoreh Deah 444:4).

#### Conclusion

The Torah begins and ends by describing acts of chesed that Hashem performed, the last one entailing His burying of Moshe Rabbeinu. Our purpose in life is to imitate Hashem in all activities, until our personality develops to the point that we instinctively behave like Hashem. Fulfilling the mitzvah of hesped correctly, whether as a speaker or as a listener, develops our personality appropriately, and thus fulfills another highly important role in our Jewish lives.

#### The Vienna conversion affair

##### Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

*In the year 1969, the Jewish Agency succeeded in rescuing a few Jews from the USSR. Read what happened to them in Vienna.*

The Vienna conversion affair, most of which took place in the winter of 1969, was one of the most difficult polemics on the subject of conversions. Many members of the Haredi public and their rabbis opposed the religious Aliyah activists in the Jewish Agency, accusing them of wholesale conversions in violation of Halakha. The rabbis who supported these converts also received threats and were persistently attacked. From then on, any rabbi who wanted to support conversions according to the lenient halakhic opinion, had to take into account that the Haredi world would denounce him, and his good name would be irreparably slandered.

In 1969, the Iron Curtain that separated the Soviet Union from the free world was partially removed, and little by little, Jews were allowed to leave. After that, the gate was more widely opened, and for about ten years, about 200,000 new immigrants immigrated to the State of Israel. On their way to Israel, the immigrants first arrived in Vienna, the capital of Austria, and were accommodated for a while in a hotel rented by the Jewish Agency to receive them, and confirm their immigration.

With the arrival of the first immigrants to Vienna, members of the religious department of the Jewish Agency witnessed the phenomenon of mixed marriages, and consequently, also children who were not Jewish according to Halakha. It was impossible to separate the Jewish couples from their non-Jewish partners, therefore the clear policy of the Jewish Agency was to bring to Israel every Jew with his family members, even if they were not Jewish. Immediately upon their arrival in Israel, the Jews received Israeli citizenship, along with their family members. Following appeals to this policy, in 1970, the law of rights of Jewish family members was passed, including the section concerning grandchildren, and since then the Jewish Agency has been obligated to uphold this policy according to the law.

Since at this time, these were family members of Jews who decided to tie their fate with the fate of the Jewish people and immigrate to Israel, the members of the religious department at the Agency tried to convert them before they arrived in Israel. To this end, their stay in Vienna was extended, they were taught Judaism, and at the end of the process, converted.

The leaders of this plan were Rabbi Mordechai Kirschblum, Associate Chairman of the Aliyah Department at the Jewish Agency and the representative of the Mafdal religious party, together with Rabbi Shmuel Ginzburg, one of the Torah luminaries of the generation. They received tacit approval for their initiative from the Chief Rabbinate, and instructed Reb Alter Meir Steinmetz to organize in the transit camp in Vienna, the study and conversion of those interested. The conversion abroad was essential, because upon coming to Israel, the immigrants were expected to assimilate into the country, without any need for conversion. In addition to this, the time spent in the transit camp was an

ideal time for studying Judaism, without worries about earning a living, and other distractions.

#### Establishment of the Beit Din for Conversion in Vienna

Reb Alter Steinmetz acted effectively. He turned to Rabbi Dr. Akiva Eisenberg, the official Rabbi of Vienna and a Zionist activist in Austria, who was of a modern nature, and convinced him to head the conversion Beit Din. As a second judge, he recruited Rabbi Yosef Bruner, director of the Torah Talmud for boys and Beit Yaacov for girls of the Agudat Yisrael community in Vienna. He himself, was the third judge. At times, other judges participated. For any question they had, they turned to Rabbi Chaim Grinfeld, who was the rabbi of Agudat Yisrael in the city, who guided them, and supported their actions. In this way, 54 men and women were converted in Vienna between the spring of 1969, and the summer of 1970.

#### The Severe Attacks against the Beit Din and its subsequent closure

These conversions were done in a serious manner. The converts learned a lot of Judaism, accepted upon themselves the mitzvot, and in practice, they could even be expected to maintain a traditional lifestyle. However, according to the strict halakhic arbiters, who are of the opinion that one should not convert someone who is not expected to maintain a religious lifestyle, it was forbidden to convert them. In other words, these conversions were better than most of the conversions that were conducted in Jewish communities by the eminent rabbis who followed the lenient approach.

Despite this, the most serious claims were made against the conversions in Vienna. It was claimed that a "factory for conversions" was established there, and it was run by religious askanim (movers and shakers) from the Jewish Agency who surrendered to the secularists, and converted there "in wholesale", in a "conveyor belt", and that "hundreds of converts" who are nothing more than complete non-Jews, had already immigrated to Israel.

It was further claimed that after a few days of preparation, the non-Jews were begged and enticed to convert, without understanding the meaning of the matter, since the converts did not understand the language of those converting them. It was further claimed that the dayanim (judges) were frivolous, or innovators and reform who disdained halakha, or laymen who were not qualified to be rabbis but only kosher overseers who had never specialized in halakha in general, or the laws of conversion, in particular.

For months, these and other claims were made and written by famous Rabbis, Rebbes, and Heads of yeshivas. They were published in posters that were distributed in thousands of copies, and printed on the front pages of the most important newspapers in Israel, in selected brochures and books, in recorded conversations, and in radio interviews. Following this, most of the Rebbes in Israel and heads of famous yeshivas signed the most serious pashquevillim (billboard posters) against the "conversion scandal in Vienna". Finally, the Council of the Chief Rabbinate determined that all the conversions were questionable, and would be examined by the Rabbis of the Land of Israel.

The Beit Din for conversion in Vienna was closed, and from then on, men and women married to a non-Jewish spouse and their children, immigrated to Israel without conversion.

#### Who is the 'Infamous' Alter Steinmetz?

When I read the serious allegations against the Vienna converts and the harsh insults against Reb Alter Steinmetz, that he was a layman an ignoramus, and without authority, decided to establish a fictitious conversion factory, deep down I got the impression that he was a Zionist religious teacher and an idealist, and that the Haredim didn't understand that his intention was for the sake of Heaven. Recently, I told the members of the Har Bracha Institute, Rabbi Dr. Boaz Huttner and Rabbi Tzuriel Halamish, who specialize in history, that they must find out who this Alter Steinmetz was, who, since that affair, had disappeared from the public scene.

#### By the Grace of God, the Treasure was Found

With the help of Heaven, the descendants of Reb Alter were located. They had established fine religious families, for example, one of his grandsons serves in a senior educational position. It turned out that from

that episode until his last day, Reb Alter had been offended. Towards the end of his life, after he passed the age of eighty, he bought himself a computer, typed his life stories, attached the numerous documents and letters in his possession, and described the case of the Vienna converts in full.

The book has five hundred pages. He had planned to print it privately. In the month of July 1997, after the draft of the book had been printed in three copies, Reb Alter passed away, in a merciful death. Following that, during the troubles of moving, the computer on which the book was written was lost, as well as two printed copies. By the grace of God, the last copy remained with his daughter for some twenty-five years, and about a week ago, Rabbi Dr. Boaz Hutterer photographed the majority of it. Rabbi Tzuriel Halamish checked, and found that the documents he brought were accurate, as copies of them were found in the State Treasury, and other persons who were involved in the affair, confirmed his words.

With God's help, I will continue to tell the story of the great controversy about the conversions of Vienna.

#### A Few Words about Rabbi Alter Meir Steinmetz

Rabbi Alter Meir Steinmetz ztz'l (1909-1997) was born in the town of Borsa in the district of Maramaros in Transylvania. His family was wealthy, and connected to the Vizhnitz Hasidism. He himself studied under Rabbi Menachem Mendel Hager, the Grand Rebbe of Vishuv, and was even ordained by him as a rabbi. During his studies with the Rebbe, he lived for about a year in his home, and studied with his son in a chevruta (fellowship). He also studied in yeshivot with Rabbi Mordechai Brisk in Tushand, and Rabbi Eliezer David Greenwald (the 'Keren L'David') in Satmar.

To help with his family's business, he moved to Germany and continued studying Torah there in a modern Haredi community, and at the same time, he studied economics. Due to his great talent, he was fluent in six languages. After the Nazis came to power, he left Germany and returned to his parents' home. There he continued in Zionist activity, and was one of the leaders of Hapoel Mizrachi, founded the Bnei Akiva branch, and was a member of the Torah and Avodah movement in Siget and Oradea (Grossverdein). In 1935, thanks to his resourcefulness, he was a partner in the Sitkov immigration organization, within the framework of which hundreds of families immigrated to Israel, some of them from the Maramaros district. He wrote at length about the Holocaust period in his book, beginning with the summer of 1944 when he was in the Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and other camps, and suffered severe torture. Being a German speaker, he was appointed by the Nazis, may the name be erased, to be in charge of the camp in Mertzbachtel, and with cleverness and dedication, he managed to save hundreds of Jews from death. Forty-two members of his immediate family were murdered in the Holocaust but he survived, emaciated and sickly, and two years passed before he recovered. After the Holocaust, he was persecuted by the Communist government for being a property owner, and for being a Zionist member of the board of the Mizrahi movement in Arad. In the end, all of his family's property was confiscated, and with great efforts, he managed to immigrate to Israel in 1950, without anything in his possession.

For more than twenty years (1952-1973) he worked as the person in charge of kashrut and religious needs in the Jewish Agency's Immigration Department. He was the father of three children, and lived in Bnei Brak until his death. Recognizing his righteousness, and knowing the truth of the facts in the case, the Rebbe of Viznitz, Rabbi Chaim Meir Hagar ztz'l, refused to agree to join his fellow Rebbe, who signed letters against the Vienna converts.

#### A Little about his Dedication to Saving his Brother

When the Germans were about to retreat, the deputy director of the Mertzbachthal camp revealed to him that an order had arrived to liquidate the camp, and to march all the Jews on foot, 15 kilometers a day with all their luggage, and to shoot anyone who could not walk, and leave them on the side of the road. He also revealed that anyone who was in the clinic, which was intended for people who were about to die and was located in a small nearby village, would not be taken to the

march. The Wehrmacht man warned that if they found out that he had told him about the liquidation of the camp, they would kill them both. That night, Reb Alter gathered the doctors in the camp, and at great risk to their lives, evacuated more than 400 weak people to the clinic village, and thus saved their lives.

In his book there are photographs of letters written to him after the war by Jews he saved. One wrote: "Every time, you took me out by force, and I didn't understand why... therefore, glory to the Most High, and to you as a mitzvah messenger of the Merciful, I was saved from the gas chambers... I will never forget you." Another person wrote to Reb Alter that he was similar to "one of the police officers of the Israelites... who were struck by the Egyptians for not torturing the Israelites, and I remember very well that you, may you live long and well, were very much in danger, blessed is your share and righteousness in this world, and in the next."

#### **Zionist visionary Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote in 1911 "Go to Hell!"**

##### *Jabotinsky's proud words still resonate today*

"Who are we, to make excuses to them; who are they to interrogate us? What is the purpose of this mock trial over the entire people where the sentence is known in advance? Our habit of constantly and zealously answering to any rabble has already done us a lot of harm and will do much more. The situation that has been created as a result, tragically confirms a well-known saying: 'Qui s'excuse s'accuse' (He who apologizes condemns himself).

"We think that our constant readiness to undergo a search without hesitation and to turn out our pockets will eventually convince mankind of our nobility; look what gentlemen we are—we do not have anything to hide! This is a terrible mistake. The real gentlemen are the people who will not allow anyone for any reason to search their apartments, their pockets or their souls. Only a person under surveillance is ready for a search at every moment. This is the only inevitable conclusion from our maniacal reaction to every reproach, to accept responsibility as a people for every action of a Jew, and to make excuses in front of everybody.

"I consider this system to be false at its very root. We are hated not because we are blamed for everything, but we are blamed for everything because we are not loved. We do not have to apologize for anything. We are a people as all other peoples; we do not have any intentions to be better than the rest. We do not have to account to anybody; we are not to sit for anybody's examination and nobody is old enough to call on us to answer. We came before them. We are what we are, we are good for ourselves, we will not change and we do not want to."

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[Adding a few that just came out. CS:

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#### **Rabbi Daniel Stein**

#### **My Spouse, My Friend**

Under the chuppah, and throughout the week of sheva berachos that follows, we repeatedly bless the chosson and kallah, "Sameach te'samach reiyim ha'ahuvim ke'samechacha yetzircha be'gan eden mi'kedem" - "Let the beloved friends be happy just as You made Your creation happy in the garden of Eden, long ago." The comparison of marriage to friendship is rooted in the Gemara (Kiddushin 41a) which states, "It is forbidden for a man to betroth a woman until he sees her, lest he find something distasteful in her afterwards, which will cause him to resent her and violate that which the Torah says, 'And you shall love your friend as yourself' (Vayikra 19:18)." The assertion of the Gemara that the mandate to establish and maintain marital harmony is dictated by the pasuk, "And you shall love 'le'reiyacha - your friend' as yourself," implies that there is a substantive similarity between the spousal relationship and the bonds of friendship. Other than the superficial comparisons, how are marriage and friendship supposed to be

alike? In what way is the familiar modality of friendship meant to guide a young couple that is aspiring to build a new life together? There are two features of friendship, specifically implied by the term "reiyim ha'ahuvim" - "beloved friends," that every couple must adopt and embrace in order to create a successful marriage. A generic friend can be described as a "chaver," derived from the word "chibbur" - "connection", which connotes two individuals who have a shared history or common interest. However, a friend who is "reiyacha" refers to an intimate companion and partner with whom one shares more than just a casual association or occasional conversation.

Rav Hutner z"l, (Pachad Yitzchak, Michtavim 87) notes that the word "reiyah" is related to the word "teruah" - the broken sound of the shofar, and always signifies a smaller piece broken off from a larger whole. In the intervening generations between Noach and Avraham, Peleg begot a son named Re'u (Breishis 11:18). Just like "peleg" means "a faction", one party in a larger political system and population, so too the word "re'u" signifies a fragment of a bigger unit. In the pasuk, "And you shall love your friend as yourself," a fellow Jew is called "reiyacha", to convey that we should consider all Jews as satellites of ourselves. This theme flows from the first half of that very same pasuk (Vayikra 19, 18) which prohibits taking revenge or bearing a grudge against another Jew. The Yerushalmi (Nedarim 9, 4) explains that just as it is obviously asinine for the left hand to take revenge against the right hand for cutting it accidentally with a knife, so too it is equally absurd and unproductive for one Jew to take revenge against his fellow Jew, since they are essentially two limbs of the same torso.

This notion serves as the basis for the principle of collective responsibility amongst Jews known as "kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba'zeh" (Sanhedrin 27b, Shavuos 39a). If one Jew sins or performs a mitzvah it is as if all Jews have sinned or performed a mitzvah. Rav Yosef Bloch z"l (Shiurei Daas, Vol. 1 Page 155) comments that the language of the Gemara is deliberate and precise. Chazal do not say "kol Yisrael areivim zeh la'zeh" - "all Jews are responsible for one another" but rather "kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba'zeh" - "all Jews are responsible in one another", because each Jew is imbedded in his friend and part of the larger organism called Klal Yisrael[1]. The paradigm for this kind of arrangement goes all the way back to the marriage between Adam and Chava in Gan Eden where they were initially created and contained within the same physical body. Even after they were split into two separate beings the intention remained the same, for them to function as two parts of the same entity. In our blessing to the chosson and kallah to rejoice as "reiyim ha'ahuvim" - "beloved friends" we are reminding them that while they might have entered the chuppah as two individuals they should exit as one team, united in the spirit of mutual concern and responsibility and modeled after the template of Adam and Chava in their original iteration in Gan Eden - ke'samechacha yetzircha be'gan eden mi'kedem", where they were literally one person.

Presumably, the word "reiyacha" is also linked to the word "ra" - "bad", because the role of a friend is to be supportive during the good times as well as the bad. The concept of a friend is first mentioned in the Torah in Parshas Vayeishev. After Yehudah cast the deciding vote condemning Yosef, he was demoted in the eyes of his brothers, at which point "Chirah reiy'ehu ha'adulami" - "Chirah his Adullamite friend" appeared at his side. Subsequently, when Yehudah's wife passed away and he himself became entangled with his daughter in law Tamar, Chirah emerged again, to accompany and assist Yehudah at every step along the way. Rav Simchah Bunim of Peshischa z"l (Siach Sarfei Kodesh, Parshas Vayeishev) concludes from the timing and context of Chirah's entrance that a true friend is a confidant who is sympathetic and encouraging even during the darkest hour of personal failures and frustrations.

Every person should strive to be and acquire this kind of friend, as the Mishnah in Avos (1:6) advises "acquire for yourself a friend and judge all men favorably". The Rambam (ad loc.) defines one aspect of friendship as "when a man has a friend to whom he can confide his soul, not keeping anything from him - not in action and not in speech. And he will make him know all his affairs - the good ones and the disgraceful -

without fearing from him that any loss will come to him as a result." In order to become this kind of friend it is necessary to "judge all men favorably", that is to discover and reinforce the positive qualities that reside within every individual. Similarly, when we wish the chosson and kallah, "sameach te'samach reiyim ha'ahuvim", we are instructing them to be supportive of each other even in the face of adversity and failure, when times are "ra" - "bad". Again, the language here is deliberate and precise. "Reiyim ha'ahuvim" means "beloved friends", not "loving friends", because each spouse must be made to feel loved and cherished despite their shortcomings, as if they have a personal cheerleader who always has their back even after a loss or when times are tough.

On Thursday nights, Rabbi Shimon Kalish z"l, the Rebbe of Skernowitz, would venture into slums of Warsaw to distribute tzedakah. However, as he crouched down to put the money into each eager and needy hand, he would whisper into the ear of every recipient, "I would love to give you this as a gift but unfortunately I am only able to give it to you as a loan which I fully expect you to repay." If they hesitated upon hearing the terms, the Rebbe would add, "Do you accept? I am trusting you. I have confidence you will pay me back." One week, upon overhearing this exchange, the chasidim challenged the Rebbe, "Why did the Rebbe give it to them as a loan? There is no chance that they will pay the Rebbe back, and now, aside from their other troubles, they will likely also be delinquent on the debt and in arrears." The Rebbe responded, "If I were to give them a gift, they might have some money in their pocket for a day or two, but they would still have a broken spirit. By giving them a loan, and informing them that I fully expect to be paid back, I am repairing their perception of themselves. Wherever they go, my words will accompany them, whispering into their ear, "I relied on you, because I trust you and I believe in you." Nothing is more valuable than a friendly voice whispering in our ear words of encouragement and reassurance.

If we recognize that we are all part of a larger network united in the service of Hashem, may we all be blessed to build and maintain healthy marriages and families where every member of the home feels loved and supported even when times are challenging.

[1] Cf. Medrash Tehillim (8:4) and Breishis Rabasi (38:12) where the language of "zeh la'zeh" is used.

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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiiy@theyeshiva.net>

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### **What Comes First: Love or Marriage?**

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: The Morning, Dusk, and Night of Judaism  
Isaac and Rebecca

The first act of marriage described in the Torah is the one between Isaac and Rebecca, in this week's portion, Chaye Sarah. It is also the first time the Torah depicts the love between a man and a woman. "And Isaac took Rebecca, she became his wife, and he loved her."<sup>[1]</sup>

In the beginning of Genesis, after creating the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, G-d says:<sup>[2]</sup> "Therefore man should leave his father and mother and cleave (v'davak) to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Yet this implies primarily a physical relationship, as the verse concludes, "they shall become one flesh." Love, on the other hand, is an intense emotional bond. It is mentioned for the first time first not by Adam and Eve, not by Abraham and Sarah, but by Isaac and Rebecca.

To be sure, Abraham and Sarah enjoyed a profoundly loving relationship. Married for many decades without children, they trailblazed together a new trail in history. They heeded the voice of G-d to leave behind their families and chart a new path to change the world. Sarah risked her life twice for Abraham when she maintained she was his sister, not his wife. Abraham refused to cohabit with her maid Hagar, but after she insisted that he does, "Abraham heeded the voice of Sarah."<sup>[3]</sup> Abraham listened to Sarah's advice to expel Ishmael from their home, even when he personally disagreed.<sup>[4]</sup> After Sarah's death one senses the depth of Abraham's grief and his intricate negotiations to

grant his wife her final honor by burying her in the cave where he too would one day be interred.

Yet the Torah's first usage of the term love between spouses is reserved for Isaac and Rebecca: "And Isaac took Rebecca, she became his wife, and he loved her."<sup>[5]</sup>

What is unique about their marriage? And why is this sort of description never repeated in the Torah?

Jacob loves Rachel, the Torah tells us.<sup>[6]</sup> But that's before he married her: "And Jacob Loved Rachel, and he said [to her father]: "I will work for you for seven years for your youngest daughter Rachel." With Jacob and Rachel, the love precedes the marriage. With Isaac and Rebecca, the love follows the marriage. Why the difference?

#### No Friction

What is more, with our other patriarchs and matriarchs we observe moments of tension (of course relative to their lofty and sacred stature). Sarah tells Abraham, "I am angry at you."<sup>[7]</sup> Rachel too complains to Jacob about her childlessness; "and Jacob became angry at Rachel, saying, 'Am I in the place of G-d?'"<sup>[8]</sup>

In contrast, between Isaac and Rebecca, no friction is ever recorded.

This was not because they never disagreed. To the contrary, the Torah states, that Rebecca loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esau. While Isaac wishes to bless Esau, Rebecca instructs Jacob to dress up like his brother and obtain the blessings for himself.<sup>[9]</sup> That could have easily resulted in a quarrel—but it did not.

#### Dawn and Darkness

The sages in the Talmud present a fascinating tradition about the three daily prayers in Judaism.<sup>[10]</sup> Abraham instituted the morning prayer, shacharis; Isaac instituted the afternoon prayer—mincha; and Jacob initiated the evening prayer, maariv.<sup>[11]</sup>

The Talmud derives this from the biblical verses. But what is the thematic connection between our three forefathers and these particular prayers? And why do we have three daily prayers? (Mohammed instituted five daily prayers for Muslims, mimicking our Yom Kippur model; yet on a daily basis we have three.)

Morning brings with it a fresh and exhilarating energy. As a new day emerges, we have this sense (at least till we check our phone) that new possibilities are beaconing upon us. As the first rays of light cast their glow on our horizon, a new dawn breaks our imagination as well. Morning brings with it new frontiers to conquer and fresh glimmers of hope.<sup>[12]</sup> One of the great spiritual masters, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) writes, that when a person awakes, he or she feels instinctively a sense of happiness and promise.<sup>[13]</sup> We press the restart button.

This is the story of Abraham. He embodied the morning of Judaism, bringing the dawn of a new era to earth. He opened humanity to a new reality, a new vision. He heralded a novel, message. The world is not a hopeless jungle; it is a Divine palace. We are not an insignificant speck of dust on the surface of infinity; we matter. Humanity is not a helpless folk subjected to the whims of competing gods, but part of a single narrative, united in the image of a moral and loving Creator. Abraham taught that there was purpose in history and meaning in life.

Who was Abraham? "Abraham woke up early in the morning to the place where he stood previously," the Torah states.<sup>[14]</sup> Then again, when he is instructed to bring his son to Mt. Moriah, "Abraham woke up in the morning." The Torah rarely presents the details of daily life, unless they convey an important theme. Following a long and dark night, Abraham ushers in the morning for civilization.<sup>[15]</sup> Abraham instituted the morning (shacharis) prayer, topping into the unique spiritual energy of daybreak, when you stretch out your arms and embrace the new day.

Jacob, in contrast, embodies the night of Judaism. The kingdom of night is full of mystique, solitude, darkness, drama and romance. Jacob's life is riddled with darkness, uncertainty, loneliness, struggle and trauma, fraught with drama and mystery. In the words of the prophet Isaiah:<sup>[16]</sup> "Why do you say, O Jacob, why declare, O Israel, 'My way is hid from the Lord, my cause is ignored by my G-d'?"

No personality in the Torah is so connected with night as Jacob. In the middle of the night, the Torah relates, "Jacob remained alone, and a man fought with him till dawn broke."<sup>[17]</sup> Jacob tells his father-in-law Laban: "Twenty years I have been with you... scorching heat ravaged me by day, and frost by night; sleep eluded my eyes."<sup>[18]</sup> Jacob, says the Torah, "came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place."<sup>[19]</sup> He then dreams of a "ladder standing on the ground, but its top reaches heaven."<sup>[20]</sup>

Jacob taught the Jewish people and the world how to encounter the Divine during the turbulence and obscurity of night. "And Jacob woke up from his sleep and he said, 'Indeed! G-d is present in this space, even if I did not know it.'"<sup>[21]</sup> Jacob feels the presence of G-d even in a space of darkness and adversity, even if his brain can't always figure out how. Jacob created the evening prayer—the connection to G-d amidst the mystery and drama of nightfall. As the sun set again and yet again in his life, he traveled internally to discover the source of light from within.

#### The Monotony of Afternoons

How about the vibe of afternoon? Smack in the middle of a long and arduous day, lacking the freshness of morning and the mystery of evening, afternoons are often characterized by monotony. The day in the office is dragging on, and I am drained. If I am lucky enough to be a house mom or dad, afternoon comes with its own stress: The children are returning from school, dinner is not made, the house is a mess, and I am in a bad mood; it's been a long day.

What is the energy that beacons to us during those dull afternoons? What is the spiritual heartbeat of the flat hours in the day, when I'm just waiting to go home?

It is the story of Isaac.

Isaac's life was—superficially speaking—not as colorful as his father's or son's life. Unlike his father Abraham he did not wage and win wars, nor did he travel extensively and change the vocabulary of humanity.<sup>[22]</sup> He was never a world celebrity, titled by the Hittites as "a prince of G-d."<sup>[23]</sup> He was not a founder of a new religion, or the progenitor of a new nation. He was not the "revolutionary" that his father was.

Nor did his life contain the drama of his son Jacob. Isaac did not flee his brother's wrath; he did not fight in the middle of the night; he did not fall in love with Rachel, and then experience deceit; he did not lose his son to a wild animal only to discover 22 years later that his beloved child became the Prime Minister of the superpower of the time. He did not relocate his entire family to a new country at an old ripe age.

Isaac lived in one location, and he never left it. His was more of a simple life. The only thing the Torah really tells us about his vocation is that he grew grain and dug many a well.<sup>[24]</sup> Isaac represents the long<sup>[25]</sup> and seemingly tedious "afternoon" of Jewish history.

Therein lies his singular uniqueness.

Isaac's life might lack the grandeur, excitement, challenge and mystique of Abraham and Jacob, yet he embodies the essence and foundation of Judaism: The daily consistent and unwavering commitment to G-d and His work. Abraham was a revolutionary; he cast a new light on the world, but it was Isaac who created the vessels to contain and internalize the light. Isaac dug the wells of Judaism: he went deeply into himself and the world around him and revealed the subterranean living wellsprings of faith and commitment, ensuring that the flow never ceases. Isaac's relative silence in the book of Genesis ought not to be confused with passivity; it was rather a silence that comes with internalization. Isaac knew that revolutions can last for a few decades, but if you do not create solid containers for the energy (represented by the wells in the ground) the energy will fade away.

Isaac at one point of his life lay on an altar, ready to become an offering for G-d. This became the hallmark of his life: He embodied absolute dedication and resilience, consistent, unwavering, and unbending.

Isaac is the founder of the afternoon prayer, the "mincha" of Judaism. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at dusk," the Torah states in this week's portion.<sup>[26]</sup> Isaac tapped into the spiritual energy of the "boring afternoons", showing us that a relationship with G-d does not

consist only of the spontaneous exuberant morning inspiration, or of the drama and romance of night. A relationship with G-d is expressed even more profoundly in the daily commitment and sacrifices we make for truth, love, goodness, and holiness. He bequeathed us with the internal resilience and strength to bring G-d into the dull and tedious journeys of life.

It is afternoon in your office. You need to respond to dozens of emails, catch the bank, return many a call, and still field a few annoying appointments. But you stand up to daven "mincha," to connect with G-d. You are busy, stressed, and tired; yet you leave everything behind, and you take time out and try to break out of the routine to focus on truth, on G-d, on eternity. Here is where the power of Isaac lay, the still voice of dedication that never falters.[27]

#### A Tale of Three Marriages

Marriage, too, has three components: the morning, the night—and the period of afternoon and dusk.

When we meet our soulmate, a new dawn overwhelms our heart's horizon. We are overtaken by the newness and freshness of the experience. We are excited, inspired, full of hope of what our joined future might look like. This is the "Abraham" of marriage, the morning—shacharis—of a relationship.

Marriage also has those special moments of moonlight mystery and drama. The passion and electricity that comes from the unknown, from discovering the untold layers of depth in our spouse's soul; the special awareness that is born from dealing with darkness and uncertainty. This is the "Jacob" element of marriage, the evening—"maariv"—of a relationship.

But then there is the "mincha" of marriage—the simple, unromantic, non-dramatic, commitment of two people to each other, during the boring and flat days of life. Two souls holding hands together through the vicissitudes of life, in difficult times, in serene times, in monotonous moments and in thrilling moments. It is the loyalty and trust built over years of supporting each other.

This creates a unique type of love. There is the love born out of thrill, drama, and exhilaration. This is the love that precedes marriage. You fall in love with your new partner, you are swept off your feet by the sunrise in your life. But there is another type of love that is born out of the daily commitment and dedication to each other. This love can never be experienced before marriage, only afterward.

This was Isaac's love. It's the "mincha" love, the one that comes from an ongoing, consistent bond in the daily grind of life. It is why the Torah states: "And Isaac took Rebecca, she became his wife, and he loved her." First Isaac marries her, and only then does he come to love her.

#### A Tale of Two Loves

What is the difference between the two loves?

In the first love, born out of the ecstasy of a new passionate relationship, the shorter we are married, the more the love; the longer we are married, the more difficult to love. As the thrill wanes, boredom sets in, and we sometimes grow disinterested. In the latter Isaac-type love, it is the reverse: the longer we are married, the deeper we grow in love. We don't fall in love; we climb in love. The love becomes like a deep well, discovered in the depths of the earth, and its life-sustaining waters never cease to flow.

The first marriage described in Torah is the one of Isaac and Rebecca, in order to teach us one of the most important principles in marriage: Passion and romance are awesome, but as our circumstances change, they can fade away. A marriage must be built on good judgment, sound reason, an appreciation of the inner, enduring qualities and values of the other person, and it must possess the enduring commitment of a couple

to each other, day-in day-out, in a bond of steadfast and simple faithfulness and trust.

Parenthetically, this is the reason Jewish law insists on no physical relations before marriage. This ensures that the couple decides to get married not based on physical attraction alone, because this may change with time, but with an appreciation of the character traits, inner personality and values of the other person, for these will not change. Often, when men or women get physically involved, they become intoxicated by the pleasure and their blind spots cause them to overlook crucial information which might come to the surface a few years down the line and sadly sever the connection.

Our culture knows, perhaps, how to pray "shacharis" and "maariv." We desperately need the discover the enduring secret of "mincha."

[1] Genesis 24:67

[2] Ibid. 2:24

[3] Genesis 16:2

[4] Genesis chapter 21

[5] Genesis 24:67

[6] Ibid. 29:18

[7] Ibid. 16:5

[8] Ibid. 30:2

[9] Ibid. 25:28, and chapter 27.

[10] Berachot 26b

[11] See Talmud ibid. Rabbi Yossi son of Rabbi Chanina said: The prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices... It has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Yossi ben Chanina: Avraham instituted the morning prayer, as it says, "Avraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood." Yitzchak instituted the afternoon prayer, as it says, "Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field at dusk." Yaakov instituted the evening prayer, as it says, "He encountered [vayifga] the place," and "pegiah" means prayer.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zaler, in his commentary Minchas Yitzchak to the Talmud ibid. adds a nice hint in their names: The second letter of our three forefathers are 'ב' (צִחָק), 'ע' (עֲבָרָהּמֶן), and 'ב' (עֲקָבָעָה), alluding to the Hebrew terms: "בֹּרֶק" (morning), "צָהָרָיִם" (afternoon), and "עָרְבָּה" (evening). These correspond to the time of day at that which each one instituted a different prayer.

[12] See Beis Yosef Orach Chaim Chapter 4: A man upon awakening in the morning is like a new creature, as it is written: "The souls are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:23). Cf. Likkutei Torah Behaaloscha Maamar Miksha.

[13] Maamarei Admir Hazaken Haktzarim p. 553.

[14] Genesis 19: 27

[15] See Ethics of the Fathers ch. 5

[16] 40:27

[17] Genesis 32:24

[18] Ibid. 31:38;40

[19] Gen 28:11

[20] Ibid. 12

[21] Genesis 28:16

[22] See Rambam Laws of Avodah Zarah chapter 1. Rashi Genesis 24:7. Introduction of Meiri to Pirkei Avos.

[23] Genesis 23:6

[24] Genesis chapter 26

[25] He also lives longer than his father and child: 180, not 175 or 147.

[26] Ibid. 24:63

[27] See Talmud Berachos 6b: One should always be careful to pray the Mincha prayer for Elijah was only answered (when he prayed for a fire to come down and consume his sacrifice) during the Mincha prayer. Rabbi Moshe ibn Machir, in Seder Hayom, Page 32, explains: The prayer of Mincha deserves to be answered because it is a time that everyone is busy in their work and carried away with their doings and needs. Hence, when during such a time one instead runs after the needs of G-d and prays and beseeches before the Master of the world—thus recognizing his Master's greatness, while seeing himself only as a dedicated servant devoted to His service—it is appropriate to recognize this humble man who is careful with the word of G-d whom it is fit to look at him.

לע"ז

שרה מישא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
בָּנָיָה בָּת (אֲרִיָּה) לִיבָּעָה  
אנָ מַלְכָה בָּת יִשְׂרָאֵל ע"ה

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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**

\* ADAM (see 5:1)  
*ten generations to:*  
 \* NOACH (6:9)  
*3 sons:*  
**Shem**, Cham, & Yefet  
 |  
 \* BNEI NOACH (10:1)  
 |  
 |  
**70** nations (10:1-32)

**CHAPTERS 11-50**

\* SHEM (see 11:10)  
*ten generations to:*  
 \* TERACH (11:27)  
*3 sons:*  
**AVRAHAM**, Haran, & Nachor  
 | \*YISHMAEL (25:12 –rejected)  
 \* YITZCHAK (26:1)  
 | \* ESAV (36:1) - rejected  
**\*YAAKOV** (37:1-2)  
 |  
**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 aliyah' 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 aliyah' 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

### =====

### 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 parshah! 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'

Seferno 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!

## 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 u-ME'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 oyav"]..." (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 mishpehot 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

## 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:

(Parenthetical 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 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 died; 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 within 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 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 strategy 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 dissuasive 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

