

## Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 11 #5, November 10-11, 2023; 26-27 Chesvan, 5784; Chayei Sara; 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.**

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**Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.**

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**We mourn three more IDF soldiers killed fighting Hamas in Northern Gaza in recent days: Major (res.) Yaacov Ozeri, age 28, and Major Jonathan Chazor, age 22 (announced on Wednesday), and IDF Maj. (res.) Eliahou Benjamin Elmakayes, age 29 (announced on Thursday). May we see the day when we no longer need to fight those who murder and maim our fellow Jews in Israel and elsewhere in the world.**

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Chayei Sarah opens with Avraham meeting with all the local people, seeking to purchase permanent title to a burial spot for Sarah. He approaches the local Canaanite tribe, B'Nai Het, and asks to purchase a spot. B'Nai Het do not want Avraham to own any property in their area, so they offer to give him a grave site but not to sell him any space. Avraham refuses. He identifies Efron and asks to purchase a small part of his property. After more negotiation, Avraham shames Efron into offering to sell a cave at the end of his property. To deflect Avraham, Efron adds a field and trees to the cave and asks for a huge price. Avraham accepts and counts out the money. How does this story relate to the history of relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel for approximately 3600 years of history?

Perhaps the earliest encounter involves Sarah's problems with Hagar, her Egyptian handmaid and the mother of Ishmael. In Lech Lecha, Sarah forces Avraham to send away Hagar and Ishmael (16:6). Hagar runs out of water in the desert and calls to God. An angel replies. As Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky relates in a piece that I included the past two weeks:

The angel prophesies, "Behold, you will conceive, and give birth to a son; you shall name him Ishmael, for Hashem has heard your prayer. And he shall be a wild man – his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and over all his brothers shall he dwell." (Genesis 16:11-12) Powerful words. Predictions of a fate that dooms Ishmael to a violent life, one that the commentaries interpret as "Ishmael being a highwayman and bandit, everyone will hate him, fear him, and battle him." Yet Hagar's response to this bestowing is as incomprehensibly baffling. **She**

**lauds the angel and “she called the Name of Hashem Who spoke to her ‘You are the G-d of Vision.’” (Genesis 16:13).**

Imagine. **Hagar is told that her son will be a wild man who attacks and terrorizes, yet she does not protest nor pray that his fate should be altered. Rather, she responds with praise and exaltation for a “G-d of Vision.”** It sounds like she is content, even proud, and frankly I just don't get it. And though I'm clueless about Hagar's attitude, perhaps now I know why so many of her descendants don't think much differently.

Amalek, a grandson of Esav, attacks B'Nai Yisrael, going after the weak and elderly, at numerous times in our history. Edom (a later term for Esav) refuses to let B'Nai Yisrael pass through its land or to sell them water (Bemidbar 20:18-21). Rome is by tradition a later descendant of Esav. The long history of persecution by the Romans and related people in Europe is also part of this history.

There are two strands in this history. Ishmael's line becomes the Arabs (and Moslems). Hamas is a later development from Ishmael, Hagar, and the Arabs. From the beginning, Ishmael is unable to live in peace with Yitzhak, although the brothers do come together for Avraham's funeral. I am not an expert in Arab history, but I believe that other tribes in the area surrounding Israel merged with the descendants of Ishmael over time and that therefore the Arabs today share in the genetic pool from Ishmael. In contrast, Esav's descendants are primarily the Christian nations, primarily in Europe.

Even if my genetic assumptions are incorrect, I do see a pattern. The attempts to permit Jews to live near the Arabs in Canaan and Israel go back to Hagar, Efron, and Ishmael. B'Nai Het do all they can to prevent Avraham from purchasing land in Canaan. The history continues in modern history. Rav Kook discusses the Arab massacre of the Jews of Hebron in August 1929. I am attaching by E-mail a personal history of this attack by the great grandfather of Saadia Greenberg, who compiles Likutei Devrei Torah each week. Saadia's father translated his grandfather's account from Yiddish, and it is now available on line (as well as attached here). Even in 1929 and subsequent to that date, the Arabs did everything they could to prevent Jews from owning land and living in Israel.

Hamas continues this tradition today. The Hamas charter, and its public statements, make clear that Hamas stands for preventing Jews from living anywhere in Israel. Public statements by Hamas leaders emphasize that the October 7 attacks are the beginning of a permanent drive to attack Israel from every border and to kill all Jews so there end up being no Jews living anywhere in Israel. The violence of Hamas goes back to Ishmael and Hagar. The desire to prevent Jews from owning any land near Israel goes back to Efron. The attacks in Hebron in 1929 continue the goals of both Efron and Ishmael. The war of Hamas against Jews has a history of approximately 3600 years.

The violence from anti-Semites continues. Rabbi Linzer connects this violence to the Tree of Life murders from five years ago. I am writing on November 9, 85 years since Kristallnacht. Rabbi Ovadia's discussion of the Akeidah from Sarah's perspective contrasts with the reaction of Hagar when she hears that her son will be a wild man and warrior.

Although the Torah focuses on living a life of chesed and emet (charity and truth), we see the contrasts between an ideal life and a life of evil. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, ensured that his congregants always focused on the distinction between emet (truth) and evil, a lesson that hopefully our grandchildren will learn and pass along to their children. May we soon see an end to the evil that our people face daily.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and 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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivvia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, 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; Rena bat Ilsa, Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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### **Chayei Sarah: Say Little, and Do Much**

By Rabbi Dovid Green, z"l © 5758

In last week's parsha we are taught of the deeds of hospitality of Avraham. When the three "guests" who are actually messengers of G-d come to visit Avraham, he offers them a piece of bread and some water to wash their feet. In actuality, after they accepted, he brought them much more; butter, milk, meat, etc. From this the sages learn the lesson "say little, and do much." Don't be a big talker and weak in the delivery. Rather be stronger in delivering than you are in making promises.

In counter distinction to that, the Torah portrays a character named Efron the Chiti. He was the owner of the famous burial place in Hebron called the Me'oras (Cave of) HaMachpelah. Avraham came to him requesting to purchase this cave. *"For full payment he'll give it to me...for a burial place"* (Genesis 23:9). Efron answered Avraham. *"The field and the cave in it – I've given to you (for free), go and bury your dead."* Avraham politely refused, but Efron persisted. *"What's a 400 silver shekel field between you and I (good friends)? (Take the field for free) and go bury your dead."* Generally we remove price tags from gifts if we really don't want to be paid for it. Since Efron told him the price, Avraham understood that this was his opening to hand over the silver and make the acquisition.

The Alter of Kelm takes note of Efron's change of heart. How could he so quickly go from insisting that Avraham take the cave for free, to accepting a huge sum of silver for it – way above the field's worth? The Torah adds that the money was good money as well. It was money that was acceptable in any country – and Efron grabbed it without further protest. Rashi comments: "he said much, and he didn't even do a little (of what he promised).

There was once a debate which is famed to have taken place between Maimonides and the philosophers of his day. The philosophers maintained that the nature of an animal can be changed, and it can be transformed into a refined creature. Maimonides maintained that it could not be intrinsically changed. Challenges were made, and the training began. When the day came, a huge gathering was eagerly waiting to witness this historical event. Everyone was astounded to see a cat appear as a waiter, holding a pitcher of wine ready to be poured. Apparently the philosophers had proven their point and won the argument. Maimonides brought out a little box containing a live mouse, and it was soon scurrying across the floor. Down went the pitcher of wine, and off went the waiter after it's prey to the disappointment of all.

Efron was like the cat. He was able to act generously, but the "smell" of a large sum of money overwhelmed him, and out went "Mr. Generous." "Maybe I'll be generous tomorrow." Imagine if Efron had known that his deeds would be forever read by generations, and lessons of "how not to be" would be learned from him. What would he have done differently? As we "write the story" of our own lives we would do well to learn from Efron.

## **A Sojourner or a Resident?**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh Yeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018

[Ed. Note: This essay/Dvar Torah by Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer from 2018 is relevant again given the horrors of the past month.]

Ger vi'toshav anokhi imakhem, "*A sojourner and a resident am I in your midst*" (Gen. 23:4). Avraham's description of his status in the land of Canaan – as both someone living among the inhabitants of the land, and yet not fully one of them – powerfully captures the experience of immigrants in general, and that of Jews in America starting from the first wave of major immigration in 19th century, in particular. As Jews, we have been quite successful in America, and – as distinct from our status in so many other countries – we were recognized as fully equal citizens under the law, and protected by the freedoms of the Bill of Rights, including, of course, the free worship of religion. We were, in one sense, fully toshavim, residents, citizens, in our new land. And yet, for a long time, we were acutely aware of our otherness. While anti-Semitism has always been significantly less prevalent in America than in Europe, for many generations American Jews suffered from discrimination, sometimes even of a systemic nature. There were firms who would not hire Jews, quotas on Jewish enrollment in colleges, and exclusion from social clubs and from purchasing property in certain neighborhoods. Thankfully, these phenomena are now a thing of the past. We have moved in recent years from the ger to the toshav. That "otherness" is no longer a displacing one; we now see ourselves as – not just legally, but in the fullest sense of the word – as citizens of the land, with a full sense of belonging and equality.

Some of this sense of security was shattered this last Shabbat, when a man on an anti-Semitic rage broke into the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, and gunned down 11 people, Jews, who had come to pray. The condemnation of this act and shows of solidarity and support was swift, reassuring and comforting, not least of which because it came from all quarters – Government officials and police, religious leaders, and people of all faiths, colors, and creeds. And yet, this horrific murderous act, palpably reminds us that there is still anti-Semitism in America, that it has been on the rise in recent years, that as much as we are truly toshavim, full citizens, of this land, we remain in the eyes of some as gerim, as sojourners, as the "other."

This is an attitude, a hatred, that often is not limited to Jews, that extends to immigrants and "foreigners" in general, to anyone who is a ger vi'toshav. It was not only anti-Semitism that fueled the murderous act last Shabbat, but also nativism, a hatred from immigrants and their presence in the country. In a posting that the murderer made just hours before the attack, he condemned HIAS – the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society – for bringing immigrants into America. There was more than just anti-Semitism here, and one of our responses to this tragedy must certainly be a renewed commitment to help all those who have immigrated from other countries to achieve the same level of equality and belonging that we as Jews have achieved. As Jews, however, we experience this as intensely personal. We are acutely sensitive to the old evil of anti-Semitism that is again rearing its head, and to those who would insist on seeing us as the other, no matter how much we would like to believe that that is fully a thing of the past.

In this regard, I would like to present here a letter and a teshuva, responsum, from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. Rabbi Feinstein came to America in 1937, fleeing from Soviet Russia, where life as a religious Jew had become unlivable. He was profoundly aware of what it meant to be an American citizen, with the full rights, protections and privileges that that entailed. Rav Moshe made it a point to speak to the members of the Orthodox community about the obligation of hakarat ha'tov, gratitude, that we owe America and about the need to see ourselves not as the other, but as citizens, to live up to our civic responsibilities, and to be model citizens for others.

We start with a letter that he penned in 1984, in response to a voter registration campaign by the Jewish Community Relations Council of NY. He wrote:

*On reaching the shores of the United States, Jews found a safe haven. The rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights have allowed us the freedom to practice our religion without interference and to live in this republic in safety.*

*A fundamental principle of Judaism is hakaras ha'tov — recognizing benefits afforded us and giving expression to our appreciation. Therefore, it is incumbent on each Jewish citizen to participate in the democratic system which guards the freedoms we enjoy. The most fundamental responsibility incumbent on each individual is to register and to vote.*

*Therefore, I urge all members of the Jewish community to fulfill their obligations by registering as soon as possible, and by voting. By this, we can express our appreciation and contribute to the continued security of our community.*

In this letter, he takes for granted that our identity is not just that of being Jews, but of being citizens of the land, and he emphasizes how the obligation of hakaras ha'tov must translate into action, into living up to our civic responsibilities and fully participating in the democratic system. This is a timely message: with an election just days away, we should take his words to heart and make it our business, now and at every election, to get out and vote.

The themes found in this letter echo those found in a teshuvah of his that he wrote years earlier for the purpose of opposing, in no uncertain terms, the practice of some yeshivot to misrepresent their enrollment numbers, or to engage in other dishonest activity or use of political influence, in order to get more government funding than they were entitled to. He writes (Igrot Moshe HM 2:29):

*Regarding the acts of kindness that our country, the United States of America, that God, in His great compassion on the remnant that escaped from the all of the countries in Europe and the remnant of the Torah giants and their students, has brought us here and has allowed us to establish yeshivot, both old and new. This government of goodness, whose entire purpose is to do good for all the inhabitants (toshavim) of the country, has created a number of programs to aid students in all of the country's schools, to help them learn and grow in their learning. Even Torah institutions receive significant funding for their students. Certainly, all of the heads of the yeshivot and the administrators and the students recognize all the good (hakaras ha'tov) that this country does for them, and offer blessings for the well-being of the country and its leaders.*

In this opening paragraph, Rav Moshe identifies the benefits that the Jews have received from America, in stark contrast to what was often their experience in other countries in the past, and the obligation of hakaras ha'tov that this places upon us. He then proceeds to outline why we are prohibited, halakhically and ethically, from taking more funding than we are entitled to, even for the purpose of learning Torah. He concludes by a reflection on the purpose of Torah learning and on our role as citizens:

*... [To take more funds than one is entitled to] would be against the entire purpose of the yeshivot and the learning that is done there, which is to ensure that the students are truly God-fearing, and that they are exceptionally scrupulous in all monetary matters...*

*All who are particularly scrupulous in these matters [of government funding] shall be blessed with all good things, and they shall be successful in their Torah institutions to have many students who are God-fearing, which will be a great blessing to the country as well. For it is widely known to all that the yeshiva students are among the best – thank God – of the citizens of the land, in their character and in their good actions.*

Significantly, in this closing, Rav Moshe speaks not just to the halakhic and moral obligations to be scrupulous in these matters, but also to our responsibility as citizens. It is not just one to live up to the laws of the land, but also to be model

citizens for all, to show that a life of Torah translates into not only a moral life, but one that lives up to the ideals of what it means to be a citizen of the country that we are in and in which we have been recognized and treated as equals.

Let us continue to give each other strength as we continue to recover from the horrific acts of this last week, and let us work to create a country that allows us, and all its citizens and inhabitants, to know that even if we were once gerim, we are now, truly and fully, toshavim.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2018/11/a-sojourner-or-a-resident/>

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## The Two Lives of Sarah: Thoughts for Parashat Hayyei Sarah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

*"And the life of Sarah was a hundred and seven and twenty years; these were the years of the life of Sarah (shenei hayyei Sarah)" (Bereishith 23:1).*

After stating that Sarah was 127 years old when she died, the Torah repeats *"these were the years of the life of Sarah."* Instead of seeing this as a redundancy, perhaps the Torah is alluding to something other than Sarah's age.

The words shenei Hayyei Sarah could be translated *"the two lives of Sarah"* (shenei meaning two, rather than years of). The Torah is pointing to two aspects of Sarah's life: Sarah as she was seen by others, and Sarah as she was within herself.

The Torah doesn't tell us too much about Sarah's life. She generally is described as a tag along with Abraham, who is the real hero. In almost all stories, Sarah is passive, even when Abraham twice tells her to pose as his sister rather than his wife thereby endangering herself to save him. She grows into a childless elderly woman, with her handmaid Hagar giving birth to a son — Ishmael — for Abraham.

But when conflict arises between Ishmael and Isaac, Sarah is no longer a passive bystander. She demands that Abraham banish Hagar and son, something Abraham very much did not want to do. God told Abraham: whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice. Sarah is vindicated. Her son Isaac will be Abraham's one and only spiritual heir. We hear no more about Sarah until her death.

To the outside world, Sarah might have seemed timid, passive, entirely subservient to Abraham. But she harbored a dramatic inner strength unsuspected by others, even by Abraham. When it came to her beloved son, Isaac, Sarah was a lioness. This was not merely a reflection of motherly love, but a commitment to the future of her people. Abraham would have been happy with Ishmael as his successor but Sarah knew better: Isaac was the worthy heir. Abraham had to hear it directly from God: listen to Sarah. If she tells you to banish Hagar and Ishmael, then do so. It is Isaac who is your true heir and successor.

When Sarah died, the Torah reports that Abraham came to eulogize and mourn for her (lispod leSarah velivkota) (23:2). Who came to the funeral? Who heard Abraham's words of eulogy? Abraham and Sarah were basically strangers in the land. They had one unmarried son, Isaac. Their nephew Lot disappeared from the scene long before. What words of eulogy would be relevant in the situation?

Answer: **Abraham's eulogy was essentially given to himself.** With Sarah's passing, he finally realized that Sarah wasn't simply a subservient participant in his life: she was in fact the vital force for his family's future. If Abraham was going to become a forefather of a great nation as God had promised, it was only through Sarah that this would come to

pass. Abraham finally saw the “two lives” of Sarah — the compliant wife, and the princess (Sarah means princess) of his people. Without her, Abraham himself would have been an empty and forgotten old man. [emphasis added]

Thank you Sarah.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3179>

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## Reflections on the Current Rise in Anti-Israel and Anti-Jewish Manifestations

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

The following is a note I received from a friend who is a professor at Columbia University:

*“Campus is indeed very difficult; no dialogue is possible, no conversations, and absolutely zero knowledge of history prevails among the loudest voices. We only have fear and sadness in abundance (along with terrifying yelling and cheering--for loss of life. It is unthinkable). I think the majority of students are oblivious but those who are affected are very affected. Many of my students are having a very hard time. One student told me he is scared to wear a kippah (I suggested he talk with his parents and hometown rabbi for advice). I wish I could help my students more. I've reached out and let them know I am available to speak with them individually and have been doing so...I worry especially about my students studying Arabic language. It's not a safe space. Do you have any advice on any of these matters--articles, advice to give students, etc.?”*

*My thanks and wishes for peace.”*

Here was my response:

*“I wish we could wave a magic wand and get people to become more reasonable, understanding, kind. Unfortunately, when hatred runs so deep all other humane qualities seem to vanish. Unfortunately, this isn't the first time (and won't be the last time, I'm afraid) that Jews are targeted with hatred and violence. We American Jews had thought that we were basically living in a fairly safe environment (and to a large extent it is still so), but current events have reminded us of our eternal vulnerability. Fortunately, the government on all levels is taking a strong stand against hate crimes, working against anti-Semitism in society and campuses...but this will be a prolonged battle. Remind your Jewish students that we are all ambassadors and soldiers of the Jewish tradition, that our people have stood strong for over 3000 years, that in spite of our enemies we have found ways to thrive, to foster humane values. Rabbi Nahman of Breslav has a famous line, which I think of often: All the world is a very narrow bridge (precarious), but the essential thing is not to be afraid, not to be afraid at all. Kol haOlam kulo, gesher tsar me'od, ve ha'ikar lo lefahed, lo lefahed kelal.”*

We have always been aware of an under-current of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel attitudes, but things today seem qualitatively and quantitatively different. We witness throngs of people throughout the United States and throughout the world who brazenly and unabashedly call for the annihilation of Israel and the murder of Jews. The public display of raw hatred is alarming.

Hamas is a terror organization that openly calls for the destruction of Israel and murder of Jews. It has shown time and again that it will commit acts of terror to promote its goals. On October 7, Hamas launched a heinous attack on Israelis, killing hundreds and taken hundreds as hostages. Israel has responded to this brutality by launching a war with the intention of ending Hamas rule in Gaza.

Hamas and its sympathizers deny Jewish history, Jewish rights to its own homeland. They deny Jews the right to live in peace. The Gazans keep describing themselves as “refugees” although I suspect that most or all of them were born and raised in Gaza. They refer to their towns as “refugee camps.” What they are really saying is that they are the rightful owners of the land of Israel and as long as Jews control Israel the Gazans are “refugees” from a land they never ruled and to which they have no legitimate historic claim.

Hatred is an ugly thing. Saturating a society with hatred is especially pernicious. It not only promotes hatred of the perceived enemy, but it distorts the lives of the haters themselves. Energy and resources that could be utilized to build humane societies are instead diverted to hatred, weaponry, death and destruction.

The media report on college students (and faculty) who support Hamas, who call for the annihilation of Israel. Hateful voices are raised calling for murder of Jews. I suspect that almost all of those spewing hatred of Israel and Jews don’t even know Israelis or Jews in person. They actually hate stereotypes of Jews. They are indoctrinated with propaganda that dehumanizes Jews. They are fed a stream of lies about Israel and about Jews.

The real enemy is dehumanization. The haters are so steeped in their hateful ideology and narratives that they perpetrate lies and violence against individual Jews that they don’t even know. The haters think that by killing anonymous Jews or Israelis, they are somehow doing something constructive. They don’t think of themselves as liars or murderers, even though that is exactly what they are.

When societies allow hatred to flourish, they are sowing the seeds of their own destruction. When universities, media and political forums condone blatantly anti-Jewish intimidation and violence, the infection spreads well beyond Jews. Civil discourse is threatened. Respectful dialogue is quashed. Hopes for peace diminish.

The Jewish community, and all those who stand up for Israel, are a source of strength to humanity. We will not be intimidated by the haters, bullies and supporters of terrorism.

As Rav Nahman of Braslav wisely reminded us: *“The whole world is a very narrow bridge (precarious); but the essential thing is not to be afraid, not to be afraid at all.”*

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3180>

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## Remembering Kristallnacht

Reprinted with permission from *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* \*

The unprecedented pogrom of November 9-10, 1938 in Germany has passed into history as Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass). Violent attacks on Jews and Judaism throughout the Reich and in the recently annexed Sudetenland began on November 8 and continued until November 11 in Hannover and the free city of Danzig, which had not then been



incorporated into the Reich. There followed associated operations: arrests, detention in concentration camps, and a wave of so-called Aryanization orders, which completely eliminated Jews from German economic life.

The November pogrom, carried out with the help of the most up-to-date communications technology, was the most modern pogrom in the history of anti-Jewish persecution and an overture to the step-by-step extirpation of the Jewish people in Europe.

### **Jews Leaving Germany**

After Hitler's seizure of power, even as Germans were being divided into "Aryans" and "non-Aryans," the number of Jews steadily decreased through emigration to neighboring countries or overseas. This movement was promoted by the Central Office for Jewish Emigration established by Reinhard Heydrich (director of the Reich Main Security Office) in 1938.

In 1925 there were 564,378 Jews in Germany; in May 1939 the number had fallen to 213,390. The flood of emigration after the November pogrom was one of the largest ever, and by the time emigration was halted in October 1941, only 164,000 Jews were left within the Third Reich, including Austria.

The illusion that the legal repression enacted in the civil service law of April 1, 1933, which excluded non-Aryans from public service, would be temporary was laid to rest in September 1935 by the Nuremberg Laws — the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor. The Reich Citizenship Law heralded the political compartmentalization of Jewish and Aryan Germans.

### **Desecrated Synagogues, Looted Shops, Mass Arrests**

During the night of November 9-10, 1938 Jewish shops, dwellings, schools, and above all synagogues and other religious establishments symbolic of Judaism were set alight. Tens of thousands of Jews were terrorized in their homes, sometimes beaten to death, and in a few cases raped. In Cologne, a town with a rich Jewish tradition dating from the first century CE, four synagogues were desecrated and torched, shops were destroyed and looted, and male Jews were arrested and thrown into concentration camps.

Brutal events were recorded in the hitherto peaceful townships of the Upper Palatinate, Lower Franconia, Swabia, and others. In Hannover, Herschel Grynszpan's hometown, the well-known Jewish neurologist Joseph Loewenstein escaped the pogrom when he heeded an anonymous warning the previous day; his home, however, with all its valuables, was seized by the Nazis.

In Berlin, where 140,000 Jews still resided, SA men devastated nine of the 12 synagogues and set fire to them. Children from the Jewish orphanages were thrown out on the street. About 1,200 men were sent to Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen concentration camp under "protective custody." Many of the wrecked Jewish shops did not open again.

Following the Berlin pogrom the police president demanded the removal of all Jews from the northern parts of the city and declared this area "free of Jews." His order on December 5, 1938 — known as the Ghetto Decree — meant that Jews could no longer live near government buildings.

The vast November pogrom had considerable economic consequences. On November 11, 1938 Heydrich, the head of the security police, still could not estimate the material destruction. The supreme party court later established that 91 persons had been killed during the pogrom and that 36 had sustained serious injuries or committed suicide. Several instances of rape were punished by state courts as *Rassenschande* (social defilement) in accordance with the Nuremberg laws of 1935.

At least 267 synagogues were burned down or destroyed, and in many cases the ruins were blown up and cleared away. Approximately 7,500 Jewish businesses were plundered or laid waste. At least 177 apartment blocks or houses were destroyed by arson or otherwise.

It has rightly been said that with the November pogrom, radical violence had reached the point of murder and so had paved the road to Auschwitz.

\* Reprinted with permission from *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (Yale University Press).

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/remembering-kristallnacht>

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## **Levaya -- The Funeral: Eulogy and Burial**

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

In this week's Parsha the Torah recounts how Avraham, the first Jew, buried his wife. This description is the model for Jewish burials for all time.

Avraham set out to purchase a burial place for his wife in accordance with the statement in Bereishis 3:19( that mankind's body originated from the earth *"and to earth it shall return."* According to Rabbi Luzzato )Derech Hashem 1:3( the decomposition after a person's passing is a critical part of the process during which the soul ascends to heaven to be energized. It will eventually be reunited with the body when the body is rejuvenated in the process known as Tchiyas Hameisim )Resurrection( which will happen in Moshiach's time )see Ritva end of Moeid(. The Talmud )Sanhedrin 90( compares the burial to planting a seed. As Jews we believe that the soul will be reunited with the body after it decomposes and is then resurrected. The burial in the earth is a significant step in that process.

The burial and the funeral in general also serve an obvious function of mourning the loss of life and saying goodbye. Just as we say goodbye to Shabbos when it leaves each week )by reciting Havdalla and eating Melaveh Malka( so when a person passes away, we take note of the significant loss of a treasure. After all, the body was the platform which made it possible for the soul to do Mitzvos, so when they separate, we accord the body a dignified burial. Additionally, when they separate, we acknowledge the loss — for us, the living — as well as the tragic loss for the deceased that he or she can no longer do Mitzvos.

These are also reasons that eulogies are so important. Firstly, for the deceased. It can't be that a human being departs from this world, and no one takes note. Secondly, for the living: It is important to recognize the loss and, in some way, try to learn from the deceased so that his or her legacy will live on. In this way we can make some effort to fill the void.

Interestingly, when the Torah describes the fact that Avraham cried, it writes the word *"to cry for her"* with a critical letter being noticeably smaller. The commentaries say that this is linked to the concept that although we mourn greatly, there is a diminishing of mourning from what one might expect because we believe in an afterlife and Sara lived an admirable life. Similarly, for all generations there are restrictions on our mourning )see Devorim 14:1( and we are instructed regarding mourning not to go all out. As great as a loss might be, we still have Hashem, and the deceased person's soul also has Hashem, in fact now closer than before.

On a very practical level the eulogies, shiva, and mourning period that follows are opportunities to create a legacy and to do Mitzvos Li'iluy Nishmas )as an elevation for the soul( of the departed. When we recall the good deeds, memories, and sayings, and are inspired by them, and when we learn Torah and give Tzedaka or do other Mitzvos, a part of that merit goes to the deceased because they were the catalyst for that goodness.

In that sense, Avraham and Sara remain front and center in the minds of all Jews even in our generation. It was their fortitude, integrity, and devotion that forged the nation that is ours. They are the catalyst for Jews for all time. It was their loyalty to one another and the way that Avraham said farewell, that set the tone and model for Jewish burials for all time.

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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## Chayei Sarah - Beyond Challenges

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2022

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.

\* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

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**“Chelkeinu Be’toratecha, OUR Share in Your Torah:”**  
**Our Task Is To Plug the Holes and Fill the Gaps**  
by Rabbi Ysoscher Katz \*

My eclectic educational background left me with dichotomous messages regarding Tefila. Raised Chassidish, I was constantly told that Tefila is the best means to grow closest to God. In contrast, in the non-chassidic yeshivot where I studied for many years during my teens and twenties, they stressed that Torah is the most efficacious means to achieve this goal.

When I was younger, these two views presented me with a spiritual challenge. Which do I privilege: Torah or Tefila? I saw them as mutually exclusive. With maturity, however, came the realization that these two routes to God can operate in tandem, that one could possess multiple means to the same goal. These days, I am therefore thankful for the mixed messages I received in my schooling. As someone who prays three times a day and spends most of the day learning or teaching Torah, I was gifted the tools to infuse ALL parts of my day with Godliness and God consciousness.

Embracing these dual approaches, I noticed something about our daily Tefila which I had previously overlooked. Tefila and Torah study are in fact intertwined: the climactic request at the end of our trice daily Amidah prayer is *“Give us our share in Your Torah.”* This conclusion of Tefila dramatically sets the stage for our Torah study. As we take leave of davening, we ask that our next pursuit, the study of Torah, will achieve its optimal goal: the discovery of OUR share of God’s Torah. Yet, this notion of OUR share in God’s Torah requires explication.

While this request of the liturgist is emphatic, repeated multiple times in the prayer, it is also vague. What indeed is our share? The Tefila implies that we have something to contribute. But we are left wondering what it looks like. The implication of such a petition is also the claim that the Torah is somehow incomplete, a radical suggestion indeed.

This week’s Torah portion may perhaps be one of the sources for the liturgists’ claim. In terms of narrative, this is a transitional week. This Shabbat we will read the last installment in the Abraham story. Next week’s reading shifts to Yitzchak. Wrapping up the section on Abraham, we read three chapters about the final stages of Abraham’s life, each conveying a different episode. The first chapter tells us about Sara’s death, the second discusses his son Yitzchak’s marriage, and the final chapter tells us about Abraham’s remarriage after Sara’s death.

While the first two vignettes are told in relative detail, the third is extremely terse, giving us a skeletal outline of that phase of Abraham’s life. In brief sketches it tells us that he remarried; had children, grandchildren and great grandchildren; the unique way in which he divvied up his inheritance between his two families; and, finally, about his death.

The brevity leaves the reader frustrated. The centrality of Abraham in the Torah’s narrative leads one to expect a more comprehensive biography of him. Instead, we only receive a brief sketch, outlining his life’s trajectory in broad strokes. While this kind of brevity is particularly acute here, it is not unique to this parasha. One is often left with a similar feeling in almost every parasha. In general the Torah feels incomplete with holes punctuating many of its stories. The only way to make sense of this style of storytelling is to change our understanding of the purpose of these tales. History is about

recording events in detail and with precision. These tales have neither. Instead of a full-fledged description of what transpired, we have notes and outlines.

One is left to conclude that these stories are not there for historical record keeping. Their purpose instead is to lure us in with enough information so that we feel compelled to fill the gaps and plug the holes by ourselves. We are asked to be readers, not listeners. Our task is to make these moral fables concerning our forebears compelling and complete. Biblical stories are made complete in a unique way. We don't have historical artifacts to fill the gaps. All we have at our disposal is our imagination. Intuition and conjecture are the tools we use to complete these tales.

Historicity is not the reason the Torah records these stories. Instead, they are there to serve as a beacon and moral guide for creating for ourselves a life that is ethical, loving and caring. That is why we do not use historical tools to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of what happened. What "actually" transpired is of secondary importance to us. What we are after is significance. What can we learn from these tales?

That is the message the liturgist is so emphatically trying to convey. Torah was not given to us at Sinai, it was shared with us. There are raw materials in there for us to work with. It was deliberately revealed to us in this incomplete fashion, inviting us to join into a partnership with the Giver of the Torah so that we become active participants in the story, not passive bystanders.

May we all continue to fulfill our role in this unfolding story which is perpetually being written. Each of us has a unique contribution to make without which the Torah will forever remain incomplete.

\* Rabbi of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn, New York. Rabbi Katz received ordination in 1986 from Rabbi Yechezkel Roth, dayan of UTA Satmer.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/11/chayeisarah5784/>

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## **Chayei Sarah**

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter \*

[Note: Rabbi Hefter was unable to send me a Dvar Torah this week. As with all Israelis, Rabbi Hefter's first priority is the safety of his family and students in Israel. Please think of the Har-el Beit Midrash for donations during this time of war against our people.]

\* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see [www.har-el.org](http://www.har-el.org). To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

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## **Sarah's Diaries, Part II - The Akedah**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

[Ed. Note: Last year for Chayei Sara, Rabbi Ovadia presented part one of his imagined dairies from Sarah Emanu. You may find part one, about Sarah and Hagar, in the archives of PotomacTorah.org for Chayei Sara 5783. Here we present part II of Sarah's reimagined diaries.]

## **22 Years Later**

## Qiryat Arba', aka Hebron, Land of Canaan, 399 AF )After Flood(

Dear diary, here I am again. You wouldn't recognize me. Even my name has changed. I am Sarah now, the princess, not Sarai, my princess. But I'm rushing ahead. First things first.

Don't blame me for 22 years of silence. So many things happened since Hagar disappeared into the night. She came back shortly afterwards, with a big smile on her face and stories about angels and divine promises. She gave birth to a boy. Avraham's son. Not my son. Mind you, because we have annulled the contract. I had to watch her and Avraham attending to that kid day after day. I felt empty for fifteen long years, and I guess you could say that I was mourning. Couple that with my envy, jealousy, and anger, and you'd figure out why I didn't feel like writing.

Then, one day, three weird visitors came to my tent to tell me that I was going to be a mother. I was of course incredulous, I thought they came to mock me, but it did happen. I finally had my own child! My baby! At 90! Who would have believed that? Even Avraham didn't believe when God first told him that I will bear him a son. How could I have written then? I was consumed with caring for my little Yitzhak. My laughter, my jewel, joy of my life! And I also had to keep an eye on the maidservant's son. I cannot even bring myself to say his name. I told Avraham to get rid of him, but he still thought of him as his son and wouldn't let go, until God intervened and told him to listen to me.

Back then I thought God was on my side. I was so happy to have Avraham all to myself and to see that he finally he realized that he only has one son.

But all that is gone. I don't think I will ever be happy again. I wake up screaming from my nightmares just to live through another day of eyes-wide-open anxiety. I check on Yitzhak constantly. I want to make sure that he is safe and that he is not taken from me suddenly, while my thoughts keep going back to that horrible day, exactly one year ago. I stay up, afraid of falling asleep again, that's why I dug you out and sat down to write again...

It all started on that dreadful night, when Avraham told me casually, over dinner, that he might take Yitzhak with him for some kind of a field trip the following day. I reminded him that in the six years which have passed since the world first saw the shining smile of my baby, there was never a moment when we were apart. He said that he knows that and that I should take a break and that I shouldn't worry too much and that the kid is safe with him and that he needs to start learning some practical skills from his father. He said that there is this new theory that fathers and sons should spend some quality time alone for bonding. Bonding, hah, had I only known. Jed. Note: many commentators believe that the Akeidah took place when Yitzhak was 37 years old. The Torah is not clear on the timing.[

We left the matter at that, without me voicing a consent for the trip, and when I woke up the next morning, shortly after sunrise, Avraham was gone. With him, my treasure. I ran outside to ask the servants if they have seen my son. They said that they have not seen him and that two servants are also missing, as well as Avraham's donkey and several tools, including a slaughtering knife. At that moment, I didn't realize what was the purpose of the "field trip." No! I don't think that I would have ever imagined that this thing, which I can't even write, is possible. I thought that he was taking him on a hunting and camping excursion, and I was fuming. He is only six years old, for crying out loud, we don't need another maidservant's son, shooting and hunting. That is what I thought as I set out to look for them. Had I known that when he said bonding he meant binding and that the knife was meant for my own son, I would have caught up with them earlier, but as alarmed as I was, I didn't think that the danger looming over my dear baby's head comes from his father and not from wild animals.

Three days! Three days I was wandering, looking for them, asking travelers for information. They probably laughed at me, thought I was out of my mind. A 96-year-old woman, hysterical, alone on the dangerous roads, claiming to search for her lost toddler and his father. When I finally got to the land of Moriah, I saw my two missing servants dallying in the sun at the foot of a mountain. They were chewing some leaves and chatting, carefree and relaxed as if the world was not about to come to an end. I shook them up. Screamed at them. "Why did you go without telling me? I am the Lady of our household.

You don't do things behind my back." They were try muttering some silly excuses, but I was already in the next phase. "Where is my child? Where is my precious treasure? Where did he go with his father?"

They seemed surprised that I was so upset, and said that they have been traveling for three days with Avraham, searching for the perfect place to worship God. When they arrived at this place, which they thought was identical to a hundred others they saw along the way, Avraham got extremely excited. They said that he looked the way he used to when God spoke to him. He asked them to wait for him there and he started scaling the mountain with Yitzhak, apparently with the aim of building an altar. "An altar?", I asked, "are you sure about that?" They replied positively and added that Avraham tied the woodfire bundle to Yitzhak's back, and with the knife and torch in his hand, went up the mountain. For a moment, I was dumbfounded. "But the animal!", I exclaimed, "what about the animal? Did you catch a mountain goat? Did you bring a lamb?" "No, Mistress Sarah," they answered, "there was no animal."

I think that was the moment when the enormity of the situation dawned at me. For three days, running or dragging my feet in that never-ending journey, I probably knew deep inside what was happening, but I refused to believe it. I should have known the moment he was gone, because otherwise, why would he disappear like that, so early in the morning, without even saying goodbye? My knees buckled, my heart sank, and for what seemed like eternity, I just stood there frozen, shaken, and unable to move, drained of energy, drained of life.

I finally came to myself and started running up the mountain. I don't know how I found the strength. I guess it is mother's love. Climbing the mountain, sobbing and crying out my beloved child's name, I made it to the top, only to see my husband raising his knife-holding hand over the helpless tiny figure of my son, bound like an animal and lying on a layer of firewood. Yes, you read correctly! My husband, the father of my child, Avraham the Prophet, defender of truth and educator par-excellence, was about to use his knife to take the life of another human being, who was none other than my precious Yitzhak. I screamed his name one last time and blacked-out.

I woke up with the sweet worried voice of Yitzhak. "Mommy, mommy, wake up, don't sleep so much..." Was I dreaming, or did I live through a nightmare? I cautiously opened my eyes, just a slit, to see Yitzhak's beautiful little face. His eyes lit up when he saw me, and a wide smile spread over his face. His laughter, ringing like heavenly bells, clearly showed how relieved he was. I opened my eyes a little more and there was Avraham, wiping the blood off the slaughtering knife. It was then that the smell hit me, as if my senses were waking up one by one, the pungent smell of burnt animal flesh.

"What is going on?" I demanded, "I need to know!" Avraham then sat with me to tell me the whole story. How God told him to sacrifice Yitzhak and how he couldn't bring himself to break the news to me. How he took our son, MY son, and walked with him for three days, unable to utter one word. How they got to the mountain and built the altar. How he bound Yitzhak and was about to slaughter him, and how at the last moment he heard my frantic screams and froze for a second. He told me that an angel told him that the goal was achieved, and that he has proven himself to be a faithful servant of God, and I couldn't decide if I detected in his voice pride or bitterness. He told me that instead of Yitzhak, he offered God a wandering ram caught in the thicket, hence the blood-stained knife and the smell.

I asked him again and again, right there on Mount Moriah and maybe a thousand times after that, why didn't he stand up to God and say that he will not do it. I told him he should have offered his own life, that he should have argued just as he did for Sodom that Yitzhak does not deserve to die and that human sacrifices go against the very core of God's message to him. Again and again he would mumble his answer, "what could I do? God asked me to show my loyalty by sacrificing my son to him!"

I disagree. I told him that God wanted to test him. He wanted him to say no. But since Avraham went along with it, God stopped it only at the last minute, teaching us and our future generations that God does not want human sacrifices, and probably not even animal sacrifices. I also think that God taught us that if someone loves you dearly, you should not ask for a costly sacrifice because he will not be able to say no, so he will swallow his pain and do as you wish.

I got to go now and take care of the new place. I forgot to tell you that I just moved to Qiryat Arba' and I don't know if I could ever go back to Be'er Sheva' and to Avraham...

\* Torah VeAhava. 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 article includes Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

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## **Vayera: They Are Not Bargaining Chips**

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

This week we will read about the loss of love and its rebirth.

Abraham must bury his beloved wife Sarah and then find a wife for his son Isaac. After negotiating with the locals to sell him the Cave of Machpelah as a burial ground, he tells Eliezer how to negotiate and navigate the search for Isaac's wife.

Eliezer travels to Haran with all his gifts and prays for guidance. He asks God to send him a girl of unimpeachable character and kindness. A woman who will see how thirsty he is and offer him and his camels a drink without knowing who he is.

Rebecca comes out and passes this test with flying colors. After Eliezer secures her family's blessing, he takes her to Isaac. Isaac brings her into the tent of Sarah and the Torah testifies that Isaac was consoled through Rebecca for the loss of his mother.

We learn that the love we have for our family and our people does not die even when their body is gone. It is reborn in the form of a new love. No matter how many people we tragically lose at a personal level, or as a nation, the love will continue and will always be reborn.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Rube

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(.

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

**[Note: Saadia Greenberg, who compiles Likutei Devrei Torah, every year shares his great grandfather's account of the murder of his community in 1929. The descendants of these murderers operate today as Hamas and still devote their lives to murdering Jews and removing them from Eretz Yisrael.]**

*"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 immediate action and protect the Jews of Hebron.

The Chief Rabbi demanded that the British take swift and severe 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 full 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, their property looted and stolen. The British shipped the survivors off to Jerusalem.

The tzaddik Rabbi Arie Levine accompanied Rav Kook that Sunday to Hadassah Hospital on HaNevi'im Street 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 wept 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: “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 inhabiting 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 Machpelah cave where our Patriarchs are buried. It is the city of David, the cradle of our sovereign monarchy.

Those who discourage the efforts to restore the Jewish community in Hebron with arguments of political expediency; 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 be held accountable 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 outset of the Arab revolt in 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’anan, 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 — along 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)

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### **Hopes and Fears )5767, 5773(**

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

The sedra of Chayei Sarah focuses on two episodes, both narrated at length and in intricate detail. Abraham buys a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and he instructs his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Why these two events? The simple answer is because they happened. That, however, cannot be all. We misunderstand Torah if we think

of it as a book that tells us what happened. That is a necessary but not sufficient explanation of biblical narrative. The Torah, by identifying itself as Torah, defines its own genre. It is not a history book. It is Torah, meaning “teaching.” It tells us what happened only when events that occurred then have a bearing on what we need to know now. What is the “teaching” in these two episodes? It is an unexpected one.

Abraham, the first bearer of the covenant, receives two promises – both stated five times. The first is of a land. Time and again he is told, by God, that the land to which he has travelled – Canaan – will one day be his.

)1( Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, *“To your offspring I will give this land.”* So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. )Gen. 12:7(

)2( The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, *“Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north, south, east and west. All the land that you see, I will give you and your offspring forever . . . Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”* )Gen. 13: 14-17(

)3( Then He said to him, *“I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to take possession of it.”* )Gen. 15:7(

)4( On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, *“To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”* )Gen.15: 18-21(

)5( *“I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the god of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and to your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”* )Gen. 17:7-8(

The second was the promise of children, also stated five times:

)1( *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.”* )Gen. 12: 2(

)2( *“I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.”* )Gen. 13:16(

)3( He took him outside and said, *“Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them”* Then He said to him, *“So shall your offspring be.”* )Gen. 15:5(

)4( *“As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.”* )Gen. 17:4-5(

)5( *“I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky and as the sand on the seashore.”* )Gen. 22:17(

These are remarkable promises. The land in its length and breadth will be Abraham’s and his children’s as *“an everlasting possession.”* Abraham will have as many children as the dust of the earth, the stars of the sky, and the sand on the seashore. He will be the father, not of one nation, but of many. What, though, is the reality by the time Sarah dies? Abraham owns no land and has only one son )he had another, Ishmael, but was told that he would not be the bearer of the covenant(.

The significance of the two episodes is now clear. First, Abraham undergoes a lengthy bargaining process with the Hittites to buy a field with a cave in which to bury Sarah. It is a tense, even humiliating, encounter. The Hittites say one thing and

mean another. As a group they say, *"Sir, listen to us. You are a prince of God in our midst. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs."* Ephron, the owner of the field Abraham wishes to buy, says: *"Listen to me, I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead."*

As the narrative makes clear, this elaborate generosity is a façade for some extremely hard bargaining. Abraham knows he is *"an alien and a stranger among you,"* meaning, among other things, that he has no right to own land. That is the force of their reply which, stripped of its overlay of courtesy, means: *"Use one of our burial sites. You may not acquire your own."* Abraham is not deterred. He insists that he wants to buy his own. Ephron's reply – *"It is yours. I give it to you"* – is in fact the prelude to a demand for an inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. At last, however, Abraham owns the land. The final transfer of ownership is recorded in precise legal prose (Gen. 23:17-20) to signal that, at last, Abraham owns part of the land. It is a small part: one field and a cave. A burial place, bought at great expense. That is all of the Divine promise of the land that Abraham will see in his lifetime.

The next chapter, one of the longest in the Mosaic books, tells of Abraham's concern that Isaac should have a wife. He is – we must assume – at least 37 years old (his age at Sarah's death) and still unmarried. Abraham has a child but no grandchild —no posterity. As with the purchase of the cave, so here: acquiring a daughter-in-law will take much money and hard negotiation. The servant, on arriving in the vicinity of Abraham's family, immediately finds the girl, Rebecca, before he has even finished praying for God's help to find her. Securing her release from her family is another matter. He brings out gold, silver, and clothing for the girl. He gives her brother and mother costly gifts. The family have a celebratory meal. But when the servant wants to leave, brother and mother say, *"Let the girl stay with us for another year or ten [months]."* Laban, Rebecca's brother, plays a role not unlike that of Ephron: the show of generosity conceals a tough, even exploitative, determination to make a profitable deal. Eventually patience pays off. Rebecca leaves. Isaac marries her. The covenant will continue.

These are, then, no minor episodes. They tell a difficult story. Yes, Abraham will have a land. He will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, or suddenly, or easily. Nor will they occur without human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower will bring them about. The Divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that God will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation, from God to Abraham and his children that they should act. God will help them. The outcome will be what God said it would. But not without total commitment from Abraham's family against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable obstacles.

A land: Israel. And children: Jewish continuity. The astonishing fact is that today, four thousand years later, they remain the dominant concerns of Jews throughout the world – the safety and security of Israel as the Jewish home, and the future of the Jewish people. Abraham's hopes and fears are ours. (Is there any other people, I wonder, whose concerns today are what they were four millennia ago? The identity through time is awe inspiring.)

Now as then, the Divine promise does not mean that we can leave the future to God. That idea has no place in the imaginative world of the first book of the Torah. To the contrary: the covenant is God's challenge to us, not ours to God. The meaning of the events of Chayei Sarah is that Abraham realised that God was depending on him. Faith does not mean passivity. It means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we – inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise – who must bring it about.

[No footnotes have been preserved for this Dvar Torah]

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/chayei-sarah/hopes-and-fears/>

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## Be the Best You

By Aharon Loschak \* © Chabad 2023

"Rebbe, I want to see Elijah the Prophet," a chassid once told the Baal Shem Tov.

"I'll tell you what to do," said the Baal Shem Tov. "Get two boxes and fill one with food and the other with children's clothes. Then, before Rosh Hashanah, travel to such-and-such a town. On the outskirts of town, right where the forest begins, is a dilapidated house. Find that house, but don't knock on the door immediately; stand there for a while and listen. Then, shortly before candle-lighting time at sunset, knock on the door and ask for hospitality."

Off he went. He arrived at the home, and stood in front of the door, listening. Inside, he heard children crying, "Mommy, we're hungry. And it's Yom Tov and we don't even have decent clothes to wear!" He heard the mother answer, "Children, trust in G d. He'll send Elijah the Prophet to bring you everything you need!"

The chassid stayed for the holiday, sharing his food and clothes with the destitute family. But Elijah the prophet he did not see.

When he returned to the Baal Shem Tov with complaints that he didn't see Elijah, the Rebbe told him to go back for Yom Kippur and do the exact same thing.

Again, he stood in front of the door, listening. Inside he heard children crying, "Mommy, we're hungry! We haven't eaten the whole day! How can we fast for Yom Kippur?" "Children!" said the mother, "Do you remember before Rosh Hashanah I told you, 'Trust in G d! He'll send Elijah the Prophet, who'll bring you food and clothing and everything else you need!' Wasn't I right? Didn't Elijah come and bring you food and clothing? He stayed with us for two days! Now you're crying again that you're hungry. I promise you that Elijah will come now, too, and bring you food!"

Then the chassid understood what his master, the Baal Shem Tov, had meant. And he knocked on the door.

### **Eliezer's Choice**

Parshat Chayei Sarah tells the story of Isaac's marriage. His father, Abraham, designated his servant Eliezer as a matchmaker, sending him off to his native land to find a suitable wife for Isaac. The Torah devotes a significant amount of space to this story, repeating it over in its entirety, giving us a window into Eliezer's thoughts. All things considered, Eliezer was the prime example of a good servant, faithful to his master and his ways.

Indeed, the Midrash links Eliezer to the words in Proverbs<sup>1</sup> that speak of an "intelligent servant," commenting:

*An intelligent servant: This is a reference to Eliezer. What was his intelligence? He figured: I am destined to indentured service . . . it's best to be a servant in Abraham's house and not any other.*<sup>2</sup>

This is a puzzling Midrash. Is this supposed to be some sort of praise for Eliezer? It doesn't sound so praiseworthy. All it says is that Eliezer made an economic and entirely self-serving choice to be a servant in the best-possible home, rather than be unfairly treated elsewhere. What's so special about this choice that makes Eliezer a model for "wise choices?"

### **Eliezer's Brilliance**

Sometimes discovering the answer requires searching for more information, deeper insight, or a little debunking. Other times the answer is right there, in the question itself.

This is one such instance. Eliezer's brilliance was exactly that: his choice to stick with Abraham.

Why is that so brilliant?

Think about it. For whatever reason, Eliezer's "station" was one of servitude. Considering the hand he was dealt, Eliezer made the following calculation: I'm not going to look elsewhere. I'm not going to try to be something I'm not. Rather, I'm

going to make the best of my current situation and choose the here and now. I'm going to be the best servant in the best home and be really good at it. And with that, I'm going to be happy.

This, my friends, is indeed quite wise and brilliant. How many people do you know who are looking elsewhere to find their inner happiness and their role in life? How many people wake up each morning and find joy and meaning in their current situation? How many people truly appreciate what they're already doing?

I would venture not many.

But Eliezer was an extraordinarily wise man. He loved what he did and found his purpose right there. And sure enough, his story lives on in the verses of our parshah, earning him a prominent place in our collective imagination.

### **Be Wise**

Eliezer's wise choice is one we can and should all make. So many of us are frustrated with our lives, nursing some sort of image of what life "should be," throwing up our hands in despair at how it's turning out.

Did your parents tell you that you could be anything you wanted? Did your teachers convince you that you would be the next president of the United States or the greatest inventor since Nikolas Tesla? Were your friends always telling you that you were the life of the party and would be super popular and successful as an adult? Or perhaps you read something when you were younger and created a fantasy image of what your life would look like.

And then you wake up one fine morning, look around, and realize that very little, if any, of that is your current reality. You're not the president, you're not particularly wealthy, and the picture of a tidy family with smiling faces is, well ... not exactly the case.

What do you do?

Many people make the decision to bolt. To run away to something or somewhere else. To chase that fantasy and try to create the picture of yesteryear. They itch to be something different, to find a new reality, a new job, a new family, a new place to live, a new circle of friends — whatever it takes to climb out of their monotonous, mediocre life.

It is here that Eliezer's wise choice starts to look positively genius. Find the meaning in your current life. Forget about the fantasy. G d has engineered matters for you to be right where you are, and if you're smart about it, you can find tremendous joy and meaning in it.

Who knows? You may just be Elijah the prophet himself.<sup>3</sup>

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Proverbs 17:2.
2. Midrash Bereishit Rabah 60:2.
3. This essay is based on Sefat Emet, Chayei Sarah, 5649.

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[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5691872/jewish/Be-the-Best-You.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5691872/jewish/Be-the-Best-You.htm)

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

## **Benevolence**

*Eliezer prayed, "Let it be that the maiden to whom I will say, 'Please tilt your pitcher so that I may drink,' and she replies, 'Drink, and I will also give water to your camels,' will be the one whom You have designated for Your servant Isaac." )Genesis 24:14(*

Since G d lacks nothing, generosity is the primary way in which He relates to the world. For the same reason, generosity is the natural hallmark of people who feel closely connected to G d. In contrast, the hallmark of evil is selfishness. No matter how much an evil person possesses, he remains unsatisfied, so he seeks only to take and never to give.

Eliezer therefore sought a woman for Isaac who would display kindness. When Rebecca went beyond fulfilling Eliezer's specific request by offering to also water his camels, he understood that she was a G dly person and thus a fitting match for the son of Abraham.

By demonstrating kindness to others, we too are "matched" with the most worthy partners – whether soul-mates, friends, business partners, or callings in life.

— from *Daily Wisdom*

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# Likutei Divrei Torah

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Shabbat Shalom

Volume 30, Issue 5

Shabbat Parashat Chayei Sarah

5784 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### A Call from the Future

He was 137 years old. He had been through two traumatic events involving the people most precious to him in the world. The first involved the son for whom he had waited for a lifetime, Isaac. He and Sarah had given up hope, yet God told them both that they would have a son together, and it would be he who would continue the covenant. The years passed. Sarah did not conceive. She had grown old, yet God still insisted they would have a child.

Eventually it came. There was rejoicing. Sarah said: "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." (Gen. 21:6) Then came the terrifying moment when God said to Abraham: "Take your son, your only one, the one you love... and offer him as a sacrifice." (Gen. 22:2) Abraham did not dissent, protest or delay. Father and son travelled together, and only at the last moment did the command come from heaven saying, "Stop!" How does a father, let alone a son, survive a trauma like that?

Then came grief. Sarah, Abraham's beloved wife, died. She had been his constant companion, sharing the journey with him as they left behind all they knew; their land, their birthplace, and their families. Twice she saved Abraham's life by pretending to be his sister.

What does a man of 137 do – the Torah calls him "old and advanced in years" (Gen. 24:1) – after such a trauma and such a bereavement? We would not be surprised to find that he spent the rest of his days in sadness and memory. He had done what God had asked of him. Yet he could hardly say that God's promises had been fulfilled. Seven times he had been promised the land of Canaan, yet when Sarah died he owned not one square inch of it, not even a place in which to bury his wife. God had promised him many children, a great nation, many nations, as many as the grains of sand in the seashore and the stars in the sky. Yet he had only one son of the covenant, Isaac, whom he had almost lost, and who was still unmarried at the age of thirty-seven. Abraham had every reason to sit and grieve.

Yet he did not. In one of the most extraordinary sequences of words in the Torah, his grief is described in a mere five Hebrew

words: in English, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." (Gen. 23:2) Then immediately we read, "And Abraham rose from his grief." From then on, he engaged in a flurry of activity with two aims in mind: first to buy a plot of land in which to bury Sarah, second to find a wife for his son. Note that these correspond precisely to the two Divine blessings: of land and descendants. Abraham did not wait for God to act. He understood one of the profoundest truths of Judaism: that God is waiting for us to act.

How did Abraham overcome the trauma and the grief? How do you survive almost losing your child and actually losing your life-partner, and still have the energy to keep going? What gave Abraham his resilience, his ability to survive, his spirit intact?

I learned the answer from the people who became my mentors in moral courage, namely the Holocaust survivors I had the privilege to know. How, I wondered, did they keep going, knowing what they knew, seeing what they saw? We know that the British and American soldiers who liberated the camps never forgot what they witnessed. According to Niall Ferguson's new biography of Henry Kissinger,[1] who entered the camps as an American soldier, the sight that met his eyes transformed his life. If this was true of those who merely saw Bergen-Belsen and the other camps, how almost infinitely more so, those who lived there and saw so many die there. Yet the survivors I knew had the most tenacious hold on life. I wanted to understand how they kept going.

Eventually I discovered. Most of them did not talk about the past, even to their marriage partners, even to their children. Instead they set about creating a new life in a new land. They learned its language and customs. They found work. They built careers. They married and had children. Having lost their own families, the survivors became an extended family to one another. They looked forward, not back. First they built a future. Only then – sometimes forty or fifty years later – did they speak about the past. That was when they told their story, first to their families, then to the world. First you have to build a future. Only then can you mourn the past.

Two people in the Torah looked back, one explicitly, the other by implication. Noah, the most righteous man of his generation, ended his life by making wine and becoming drunk. The Torah does not say why, but we can guess. He had lost an entire world. While he and his family were safe on board the ark, everyone else – all his contemporaries – had drowned. It

is not hard to imagine this righteous man overwhelmed by grief as he replayed in his mind all that had happened, wondering whether he might have done something to save more lives or avert the catastrophe.

Lot's wife, against the instruction of the angels, actually did look back as the cities of the plain disappeared under fire and brimstone and the anger of God. Immediately she was turned into a pillar of salt, the Torah's graphic description of a woman so overwhelmed by shock and grief as to be unable to move on.

It is the background of these two stories that helps us understand Abraham after the death of Sarah. He set the precedent: first build the future, and only then can you mourn the past. If you reverse the order, you will be held captive by the past. You will be unable to move on. You will become like Lot's wife.

Something of this deep truth drove the work of one of the most remarkable survivors of the Holocaust, the psychotherapist Viktor Frankl. Frankl lived through Auschwitz, dedicating himself to giving other prisoners the will to live. He tells the story in several books, most famously in Man's Search for Meaning.[2] He did this by finding for each of them a task that was calling to them, something they had not yet done but that only they could do. In effect, he gave them a future. This allowed them to survive the present and turn their minds away from the past.

Frankl lived his teachings. After the liberation of Auschwitz he built a school of psychotherapy called Logotherapy, based on the human search for meaning. It was almost an inversion of the work of Freud. Freudian psychoanalysis had encouraged people to think about their very early past. Frankl taught people to build a future, or more precisely, to hear the future calling to them. Like Abraham, Frankl lived a long and good life, gaining worldwide recognition and dying at the age of ninety-two.

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Abraham heard the future calling to him. Sarah had died. Isaac was unmarried. Abraham had neither land nor grandchildren. He did not cry out, in anger or anguish, to God. Instead, he heard the still, small voice saying: The next step depends on you. You must create a future that I will fill with My spirit. That is how Abraham survived the shock and grief. God forbid that we experience any of this, but if we do, this is how to survive.

God enters our lives as a call from the future. It is as if we hear him beckoning to us from the far horizon of time, urging us to take a journey and undertake a task that, in ways we cannot fully understand, we were created for. That is the meaning of the word vocation, literally “a calling”, a mission, a task to which we are summoned.

We are not here by accident. We are here because God wanted us to be, and because there is a task we were meant to fulfil. Discovering what that is, is not easy, and often takes many years and false starts. But for each of us there is something God is calling on us to do, a future not yet made that awaits our making. It is future-orientation that defines Judaism as a faith, as I explain in the last chapter of my book *Future Tense*. [3]

So much of the anger, hatred and resentments of this world are brought about by people obsessed by the past and who, like Lot's wife, are unable to move on. There is no good ending to this kind of story, only more tears and more tragedy. The way of Abraham in Chayei Sarah is different. First build the future. Only then can you mourn the past.

[1] Niall Fergusson, *Kissinger: 1923–1968: The Idealist* (London: Penguin Books, 2015).

[2] Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, translated by Ilse Lasch (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

[3] Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 2012).

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

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#### **The Blessing of Old Age; Parents and Children**

And Abraham was old, well-stricken in age... (Genesis 24:1) The death of Sarah at the beginning of the portion of Chayei Sarah leaves Abraham bereft as a single parent, looking after his home and caring for Isaac, his unmarried son. We are already familiar with their unique father-son relationship from the traumatic biblical account of Isaac's binding, where ‘the two of them [father and son, Abraham and Isaac] walked together.’ In addition to their shared ideals, their symbiotic relationship includes a remarkable likeness in physical appearance. Our commentaries explain this by reflecting on Isaac's miraculous birth when Abraham is almost one hundred years old. We can imagine that every town gossip cast aspersions about Abraham's paternity, hinting that a younger, more potent man must have impregnated Sarah. Just the leers and the stares would have caused

unnecessary shame to Abraham and threatened Isaac's equanimity. Hence, suggests the Midrash, to prevent a trail of whispers and sly innuendos, God created Isaac as an exact double of Abraham, like ‘two drops of water,’ so that no one could possibly ever imagine anyone other than Abraham as the biological father.

Interestingly, one of the consequences of their physical similarity is the basis for one of the strangest comments in the Talmud. On the verse in the portion of Chayei Sarah, ‘Abraham was old, well-stricken in age’ [Gen. 24:1], our Sages conclude that at this point in time, the symptoms of old age were introduced to the world [Bava Metzia 87a]. The reason? They suggest this very identical resemblance between Abraham and Isaac. The Sages describe how people seeking out Abraham would mistakenly address Isaac, and those seeking out Isaac would approach Abraham. Disturbed by the confusion, Abraham pleads for God's mercy to make him look old, and Abraham's plea is answered: a one-hundred-and- twenty-year-old man will never again look like his twenty-year-old son!

How do we begin to understand why Abraham was so upset by this case of mistaken identities? After all, what's wrong with being mis- taken for your son? Doesn't every aging parent dream of slowing down the aging process and remaining perpetually young? What's the problem if father and son appear to be the same age?

We find the answers hidden between the lines of this Midrash in which the dialectic of the complex relationship between father and son is expressed. Despite our desire for closeness between the generations, a father must appear different from his son for two reasons. Firstly, so that he can receive the filial obligations due to him as the transmitter of life and tradition. This idea is rooted in the biblical commandment that the younger generation honors the elder. In fact, the last will and testament of the sage of the Middle Ages, Rabbi Yehudah the Pious, forbade anyone from taking a spouse with the same first name as that of their parents. This, explained, Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik, zt'l, was to avoid giving the impression that a child would ever address a parent by their first name. We may be close to our parents, but they are not to be confused with our ‘buddies’.

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

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

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

A Talmudic discussion of the pedagogic relationship between grandparents and grandchildren illustrates the importance of a dynamic and symbiotic relationship between the generations. In discussing the importance of teaching Torah to one's children and grandchildren, our Sages insist that teaching your own child Torah is equivalent to teaching all your child's unborn children down through the generations [Kiddushin 30a]. R. Yehoshua b. Levi adds that ‘teaching one's grandchild Torah is equivalent to having received it from Sinai.’ He proves this by quoting from two consecutive verses in Deuteronomy: the first highlights the commandment to ‘...teach thy sons, and thy son's sons’ and the following verse begins with, ‘The day that you stood before the Lord your God in Horev-Sinai...’ [Deut. 4:9, 10]. The message is crystal clear: our parents are our link to Sinai, the place of the initial divine revelation of Torah. When the younger generation learns Torah from the previous generation, it is as though they were receiving the words from Sinai. Such is the eternal bond which links the generations and one of the powerful reasons for children to respect and learn from their parents.

Interestingly, in that same Talmudic passage, R. Hiya bar Abba makes a critical word change in R. Yehuda's interpretation. R. Hiya states, ‘Whoever hears Torah from his grandchild [not whoever teaches his grandchild] is equivalent to having received it from Sinai!’ What does it mean for a grandchild to teach his grandfather Torah? Obviously, this will make any grandfather proud, but this concept also reveals that the line from Sinai to the present can be drawn in the opposite direction. Not only do grandfathers pass down the tradition to their children and grandchildren, but grandchildren pass up the tradition to their forebears. In contemporary times, this could certainly refer to the phenomenon of the ba'alei teshuva, the return of the younger generation to the traditions, where in many cases, the grandchildren literally are teaching their grandparents. But it might also be alerting us to the additional insights into Torah that we can and must glean from the younger generations.

Consider one of the most puzzling Talmudic passages which describes how, when Moses ascended on high to receive the Torah from the Almighty, the master of all prophets found God affixing crowns (tagim) to the holy letters of the law [Menahot 29b]. When Moses inquired about their significance, God answered that the day would arrive when a

great Sage, R. Akiva the son of Joseph, would derive mounds of laws from each twirl and curlicue. Moses asked to see and hear this rabbinic giant for himself, and the Almighty immediately trans-ported him to R. Akiva's Academy. Moses listened, but felt ill at ease almost to the point of fainting; the arguments used by R. Akiva were so complex that they eluded the understanding of the great prophet. However, when a disciple asked for R. Akiva's source, and he replied that it was a law given to Moses at Sinai, the prophet felt revived.

How is it possible that Moses could not understand a Torah lecture containing material that was given to him at Sinai? The answer is embedded within the same Talmudic text. Moses was given the basics, the biblical words and their crowns, the fundamental laws and the methods of explication and extrapolation (hermeneutic principles). R. Akiva, in a later generation, deduced necessary laws for his day, predicated upon the laws and principles which Moses received at Sinai.

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

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

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

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Kindergarten children are delightfully oblivious to the distinction between what adults call reality and the imaginary world. For these young children, there is no difference between the people in their actual lives and the people they learn about in the stories they hear.

For most adults, the heroes of the Bible stories are historical figures, and although they exist in our imagination, we know that they are long gone. These heroes and heroines, however, are as real to kindergartners as their parents and siblings are.

This hit home with me many years ago when my oldest daughter was a kindergarten student. She is now herself a grandmother, so that tells you just how long ago this was.

As all children in a Jewish religious kindergarten, by this time of year she had heard many stories about Sarah. She knew about Sarah's journey to the Promised Land, of her trials and tribulations in Egypt, of the fact that she was barren, and of the joy she experienced with the birth of Isaac.

On the Friday before the Shabbat of this week's Torah portion, Chaye Sarah, she came home from school distraught, with tears flowing down her little cheeks. "Mommy, daddy," she cried. "Did you hear? Sarah died, Sarah died!" She was in the grips of a sadness very close to real grief; for Sarah had become a living figure for her, much to the credit of the teacher who told her Sarah's story. Few of us adults will exhibit emotion this week as we read of Sarah's demise. But I wager there are numerous kindergarten age boys and girls in Jewish schools who will shed tears.

For those of us who study the Torah portion weekly, death and dying are not unfamiliar. From the first human being who died, ironically through murder, until the near death of Isaac of which we read last week, the Bible has reported dozens of deaths to us.

But there is something especially poignant and moving about Sarah's death, even to us jaded adults. This is partly because, for the first time in the Bible, we have the report of another person's reaction to the death of a loved one. We read of a bereaved Abraham, a loving husband who comes "to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her." (Genesis 23:2)

For the first time, we learn of the human capacity to express emotions through eulogy.

The Talmud has a fascinating discussion over the nature of eulogy, of hesped. "Is a eulogy designed to benefit the dead?" asks the Talmud. "Or is it for the benefit of the living survivors, the mourners?"

The Talmud has its own conclusion, but there can be no doubt that from a psychological perspective the eulogy does both. It honors the dead, and it provides the mourner with the opportunity to give vent to his grief and to achieve a degree of catharsis.

Perhaps this is why Abraham both "eulogizes" Sarah and "cries for her". In his "eulogy" he honors her person, her character, her achievements in life. By "crying for her," he gives voice to his profound sense of the loss of his life's partner.

I can never forget the powerful experience I had long ago in a workshop led by the famed psychologist, Virginia Satir. She asked us to each retreat to a private corner of the large room and to devote a quiet hour to meditate upon, and if we wished, to record in writing, the eulogy that we imagine would be written for us when we died. I remember silently

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adding to those instructions the words "...after 120 years."

This exercise forced us to look deeply within ourselves and to determine what was permanent and worthy in our lives, and how we wished to be remembered by others. After a few moments into the exercise, the initial silence was broken by sobs, by sighs, by weeping. After that hour, the group gathered and many shared extremely moving feelings, and reported much self-discovery and self-revelation.

I don't recommend this experience to you, dear reader, unless you can do so in the presence of a trusted friend, preferably a person trained in coping with the feelings that can possibly emerge from such an exercise. But I do draw upon the experience I had that day to understand what others go through in the inevitable process of grief and mourning. I do continually go back in my memory to that day to understand myself and to evaluate my own life and its successes and failures, accomplishments and frustrations.

And I do rely upon the reactions I witnessed and personally underwent that day to understand our patriarch Abraham and his need to both "eulogize Sarah, AND to cry for her."

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#### **Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's** **Derashot Ledorot**

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##### **"Frankness" As Vice and as Virtue**

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

Perhaps, then, in order to view the quality of frankness from a greater perspective, we ought to recall the ethics of Judaism as taught by Maimonides, one in which he gives us a philosophy of character. In general, Maimonides teaches, we should avoid the extremes of character and keep to the *derekh ha-shem*, the "way of G-d," which he also calls the *shevil ha-zahav*, the "way of G-d," which he also calls the *shevil ha-zahav*, the "golden path." In other words, one should generally

follow the path of moderation, although in certain specific instances one may veer more towards one extreme than the other. So it is with the quality of truth-telling or frankness. The two extremes are, one, absolute candor even at the expense of another person's happiness, sensitivity, and peace of mind; and two, so much kindness and deference to the feelings of people that the truth is never spoken in its fullness, and untruth begins to prevail. Following the derekh ha-shem as explained by Maimonides, we would say that in general one ought to be moderate in his frankness, tempering his manner of expressing the truth with gentleness and sensitive concern for the feeling of others, but that in certain very special cases one must veer towards one of the extremes, in this case that of greater veracity, more direct frankness and forthrightness.

One of those special cases where frankness must prevail even at the expense of temporary unhappiness is hinted at in this morning's Torah reading, according to the brilliant interpretation of R. Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, the revered teacher at the Yeshiva of Volozhin, widely known by his initials, Netziv.

A great tragedy marred the lives of Isaac and Rebecca. We shall read next week of the painful confusion with regard to the blessings Isaac offered to his twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Apparently, Isaac favored Esau, and Rebecca preferred Jacob. In order to reserve Isaac's blessing for Jacob and prevent its waste on Esau, Rebecca schemes with her son Jacob, and persuades him to do something which runs against the whole grain of his character: deceive his aged, blind father. The scheme is successful, but the end result is one of unrelieved anguish for all principals. Esau is left embittered, and more vagrant than ever. Jacob has soiled his soul and must flee from his brother into a long and bitter exile. Rebecca, the doting mother, is to die before she ever again sees her beloved Jacob. Isaac is confused and bewildered in the deep darkness that surrounds him.

And yet, when we study and analyze the Sidra carefully, we find that the tragedy is compounded by the fact that it was totally unnecessary. Isaac did not really favor Esau over Jacob. He merely wanted to prevent his total moral collapse. He wanted to salvage whatever shred of decency Esau still retained. He knew full well the difference in the characters of his two children. He, no less than his wife Rebecca, appreciated the saintliness of Jacob and suffered because of the wildness and sensuousness of Esau. He had never intended to give the blessing of Abraham to anyone but Jacob. Why then the cross-purposes at which Isaac and Rebecca at which Isaac and Rebecca worked? If they were indeed in total agreement, why this deep and cutting tragedy that destroyed the happiness of this second Jewish family in all history? Because, the Netziv answers, Rebecca never

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

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

Indeed, that is why the Torah tells us of certain domestic and seemingly purely private quarrels between Sarah and Abraham, and Jacob and Rachel. One might ask, why reveal for all eternity the domestic spats between couples? Sara laughs when she is told that she would have a child despite her advanced age and she denies it to Abraham. He turns to her in anger and says, "You did so laugh" (Genesis 18:15). Rachel wants children, and keeps urging Jacob for help. Jacob turns to her and seems quite irritated; why do you annoy me? Do you think I am God that I can give you children? We can now understand why these incidents are recorded: they are there for contrast. They show us how the other patriarchs and matriarchs exercised complete candor in their private lives. If there must be a slight argument, let there be one, but let husband and wife be perfectly honest with each other. Let there be no distance between them, no dissembling, no outer politeness which bespeaks an inner remoteness. How different was Rebecca from Sarah and Rachel! There was so little frankness in her relations with Isaac, so little straight-forwardness--and therefore, so much agony, so much unnecessary pain and frustration!

Indeed, it would seem as if Eliezer, Abraham's servant whom he had sent to fetch a wife for his son Isaac, recognized this at the very outset. Charged with this grave and significant mission of looking for a wife for Isaac, a worthy mother of the Jewish people, Eliezer feels himself diffident and concerned. He prays

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for divine assistance, and twice he singles out one element above all others: chessed--love, kindness. May G-d show my master Abraham chessed, may He grant that his son be blessed with a wife whose greatest virtue will be kindness, love, sensitive understanding, self-sacrifice. If he can find that kind of wife, Eliezer thinks to himself, who will bring chessed to her new home, then he will consider his mission successfully accomplished. And yet, after he has met young Rebecca, after he has satisfied himself that this is the right woman for his master's son, he offers a prayer of thanksgiving in which he surprisingly adds another quality: barukh ha-Shem Elokei adoni Avraham asher lo azav chasdo va-amito me-im adoni, blessed is the Lord G-d of my master Abraham who has not forsaken His chessed (mercy) and also amito, His emet (truth), from my master. If we read between the lines we discover that Eliezer is quite satisfied that this young woman will bring chessed to her home. She will be a kind, devoted, loving wife. But what suddenly begins to disturb his innermost thoughts, perhaps only unconsciously, is that while there will be enough chessed, there will be a lack of emet or truthfulness in the sense of candor, there may not be enough frankness because she will too kind, too fearful, too gentle to speak openly and lucidly with her own husband. How wise was that old and loyal slave of Abraham! Thank you, G-d, for the chessed; how now help us with a little more emet.

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

And yet, while frankness is so very important in domestic relations, and while it is a wonderful and indispensable personal quality in all human relations, there is no question but that frankness can be overdone. Truth has the greatest claims on us; but its claims are not absolute. That is why the Talmud specifically permits the talmid chakham or scholar to modify the truth in three instances, where complete candor would result in needless

embarrassment. Not to tell a lie is a great virtue, but compulsively to tell all, to reveal all your innermost feelings without regard for others, is itself an unethical quality. Do you recall Abraham walking with Isaac to perform the Akedah? Isaac asked his father, I see the fire and the wood but where is the lamb for the sacrifice? Imagine if Abraham had exercised absolute frankness, unrestrained candor. He would have said: sorry son, but it is you I shall have to slaughter upon the altar. It would have been inhumanly cruel. That is why Abraham preferred to dodge the question with the reply: G-d will take care of that. Or imagine if a physician who had just discovered that his patient is suffering from a terrible and incurable disease were to turn to him, and, without any attempt to cushion the news, inform him bluntly of his imminent death? This kind of frankness is sub-human. It is living on the extreme edge of character, against which Maimonides counselled. That is why the Halakhah decides (see Taz on Yoreh Deah) that if a person does not know his relative has died, and you do know it, and he will not learn of it during the 30 days if you keep silent, then you must keep the information within and spare him the bad news.

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

Emet is, thus, a virtue, if tempered with graciousness. Emet is important enough to be the connecting link between the Shema and the Amidah. Yet we must remember that this emet is not mentioned alone. Along with it we enumerate a whole list of qualities which tend to make truth more palatable, which moderate frankness and make it human. Emet must also be yatziv ve’nakhon ve’kayam ve’yashar, proper and straight; it must be ne’eman va’ahuv ve’chaviv ve’nechmad, ve’na’im, loyally and pleasantly and attractively presented; even if it is nora v’adiv, an awesome and powerful truth, still it must be metukan u-mekubal, prepared for and acceptable to human sensitivity, and above all, ve-tov ve’yafeh, expressed in a manner that is good and beautiful. Frankness, yes; but mentschlichkeit as well. Emet--but up to and including tov ve’yafeh. Only then can we be sure that ha-davar ha-zeh alenu l’olam va-ed, that this truth will remain with us forever.

That is why the Halakhah maintained that the law of hokheiah tokhiach, of reproaching the sinner, must be executed with a great deal of delicacy and attention to individual feelings. There is, in Judaism, an ethics of criticism. A frank reproof may be in itself unavoidably painful, but one should minimize the anguish and the guilt and the feelings of inferiority and

worthlessness that may needlessly result from it.

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

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

Every morning, we begin the day with the following statement which sums up what we have been saying. Le’olam yehe adam yere shamayim be’seter u-va-galui, a man should always be G-d fearing, both publicly and privately; u-modeh al ha-emet, let him always recognize and acknowledge the truth. But once he has acknowledged the truth, once he has learned it--it is not always important to blurt it out unthinkingly. For, insofar as speaking out the whole truth--let him be ve’dover emet bi-levavo, telling all the truth only in his heart. When it comes to telling all that one considers to be the truth, exactly as one sees it and believes it, in all candor and frankness, there one must be judicious, consider the secret fears and vanities of his fellows, their sensitivities and idiosyncrasies. Complete and uninhibited frankness--only bi-levavo, in one’s own heart. Otherwise, candor must be wedded to considerateness, chasdo va-amito as Eliezer prayed, or emet to yatziv through tov ve’yafeh, as is our own devoted prayer every day all year long.

For this indeed is, as Maimonides called it, the derekh ha-Shem, the way of the Lord. And it is this “way” which has been bequeathed to us by

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Father Abraham and which we were commanded to teach to our children. Ki yedativ le’maan asher yetzayeh et banav ve’et beto acharav, “for I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him,” ve’shamru derekh ha-Shem, “that they may keep the “way of the Lord’s,” la-asot tzedakah u-mishpat, for in this way will righteousness and justice be achieved.

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### Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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

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How can anyone have two lives on earth? Parshat Chayei Sara commences as follows (Bereishit 23:1): "Vayiyhu 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

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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.

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#### **Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

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##### **Tehilla and Yehoshua Sadiel**

##### **There are no soup almonds in Germany.**

One can buy overpriced kosher yellow cheese and even cottage cheese, which is hardly as tasty as the Israeli kind, mind you. But soup almonds are nowhere to be found. If one wants some, one has to bring them from Israel. The packets of soup almonds that are available at kosher stores – bearing English and German captions, of course – are imported from Israel.

Many Israeli emissaries, or any Israeli visiting or living in another country for that matter, usually lack something, a specific item that is not available outside of Israel. It can be food, a piece of stationery, a kitchen utensil, a particular toiletry or anything else. We miss those little things from Israel to such an extent, that should we hear of anybody coming from Israel with some space in his or her suitcase – we immediately ask them to bring those particular items with them.

In the portion of Chayei Sarah it is written of Avraham: "And the Lord blessed Avraham in all things" (Bereishit 24:1). Avraham, who was born in Ur-Kasdim, and had wandered many miles before arriving in the place to which God had sent him, seems to be lacking nothing. He is even able to buy a burial plot in his new place of residence.

However, it seems that even in the Land of Canaan, Avraham was lacking something after all – a bride for his son. The Radak explains as follows: "He was lacking nothing, and desired nothing in the world, except for a woman who would be suitable to become his son's wife" (Radak on the verse above).

Indeed, Avraham was lacking nothing physical; he coped well with everything God sent his way, even in this new land to which he was sent. However, Avraham was missing the means to continue this huge shlichut enterprise of his: disseminating God's name and the worship of God in the world.

But even when the servant is sent out to find a bride to bring back to Canaan, no clear definition is given of the bride-to-be. Moreover, the episode in question evokes quite a few challenging questions:

Why does Avraham send out his servant to search for a woman among his own relatives?

At the end of the portion of Vayera, Avraham hears of the birth of Rivka. How do we know she is suitable for Yitzhak?

Who would even be a suitable woman for Yitzhak? What qualities or character traits ought to be included on the "check list for a suitable bride"?

How is the servant supposed to go about searching for a woman?

Avraham's prayer attests to the fact that he believed things would sort themselves out in a way yet to be discovered. These are his words to the servant: "God... He will send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife for my son from thence".

It goes without saying that Avraham was well aware of the fact that he was not just sending "any old servant" of his. Rather, he was sending the "elder of his house", a man who had been by his side all this time; a man who had observed Avraham's conduct and all his ways, learning from Avraham constantly and incorporating Avraham's values into his own life. So much so that our Sages tell us that had Yitzhak not been born, the servant in question, Eliezer, would have become Avraham's heir. This did not only mean inheriting Avraham's worldly possessions, but also meant that Eliezer would be his successor and the one who would continue Avraham's extensive enterprise! (Rashi on Bereishit 24:39)

And, indeed, a closer look into the words and deeds of this servant, reveals an impressive figure: the man in question has truly learned to emulate Avraham's ways. At every point in the story, and with every action taken, two motifs are highlighted: The first is chessed, the acts of kindness in which the servant is engaged; the second – the fact that "the name of God is constantly on the servant's lips".

His kind and compassionate conduct is apparent in many of his actions and reactions: The first example is the precondition he sets right at the outset. He prays to God to help him find a woman who will give water not only to himself, but to all his camels as well. What this really meant was that the sought-after woman would have to be an exemplary chessed figure, a woman of extraordinary kindness, one who would be willing to quench the enormous thirst of the newcomer and his

ten camels, following a strenuous journey through the desert. Surely this would require exceptional efforts on the part of the woman.

Immediately following this, the servant expresses his gratitude to the woman by giving her gifts – even before he asks her for her name or her family's name. This shows us that the servant did not wait to express kindness and show gratitude until he knew in certainty that his mission had succeeded; rather, he repaid Rivka's kindness right away. Furthermore, when the servant arrives in Rivka's home, he puts the needs of his camels and his men before his own. Through these actions, we learn that the servant practices what he preaches. He may expect compassion and kindness of the intended bride, but expects of himself no less.

The second motif is the mention of God every step of the way. As soon as the servant arrives in Charan, he utters a prayer. When he hears of Rivka's ancestry, he thanks the Lord. When the family consents to Rivka's marriage, he expresses gratitude to God. During the scene that takes place in the home of Rivka, the servant retells the events as they had unfolded and keeps mentioning God's name throughout, making mention of Avraham's hope that God would render the mission successful, referring to his own prayers, and highlighting his gratitude to God for making the mission successful. By seeing God's hand in everything that had transpired, and acknowledging the fact that God directs everything in the best possible, the servant also conveys Avraham's unwavering faith in God.

Thus, the servant teaches what any shaliach or emissary knows first-hand. However, the goal of any shlichut, as it is written on paper, doesn't end there. Every individual impacts upon reality through his deeds and his way of conduct. In some instances, he has the power to influence others; at other times, he illuminates the lives of those whose paths cross his.

As such, any shlichut or mission turns into a way of life and is much more than just a job.

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#### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

#### **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

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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 Noah 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, Shavuot 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 rey'eihu 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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### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

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#### **Be a Window Not a Pane**

And [food] was set before him to eat, but he said, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words." And he said, "Speak." And he said, "I am a servant of Avraham!" (Breishis 24:33-34)

This is one of the most remarkable accounts in the entire Torah. Rashi says it all when the Torah begins to record Eliezer's repetition of the narrative we just read about. "Rabbi Acha said: The ordinary conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs is more beloved before the Omnipresent than the Torah of their sons, for the section dealing with Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, whereas many fundamentals of the Torah were given only through allusions." Yes, Eliezer gets more airtime in the Torah than almost anybody else. How is that possible? Why is that so? What are we to learn from the fact that this man whom Avraham deemed unworthy to have his daughter marry Yitzchok, is still so revered in the Torah? Eliezer was from a cursed lineage. He would have been voted in his high school class least likely to be featured in the Holy Torah and yet here he is dominating the stage. What is this all about!? What do we learn!?

One important factor here is revealed by the fact that Eliezer's name is not mentioned even once in the entire episode. He only refers to

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

himself as the servant of Avraham. This is the summary of his identity. He is not playing the role of himself. He is not acting as the authentic man expressing his raw feelings and doing what he pleases. Just the opposite is true.

He has totally quieted and subdued his ego and sublimated his own wishes to his master, Avraham. He is a messenger and a loyal extension of Avraham. It is as if we are watching and listening to Avraham. He has made himself into a vessel to accomplish only what Avraham wants. Eliezer himself is almost non-existent and by choice he has rendered his own personal agenda worthless in comparison to Avraham's mission. He is such a big hero because he has made himself into a zero!

Years ago, I was asked to be a master of ceremonies – MC at a Yeshiva Dinner. It's not my flavor or style at all and neither am I comfortable as a guest speaker at these types of gatherings. I would rather be eating chicken and listening to other people and even write a check just to avoid that stage. In this case I could not say "no" and so under duress I agreed.

I reviewed and studied my role as the MC and in my opening marks I declared, "The job of the MC is to be a window and not a pane, to allow the light of the main featured speakers to shine through. I'm not sure I succeeded but at least I understood where there was room for me to fail. What is most memorable and helpful to me is that definition of that definition of an MC. Be a window and not a pane/pain!

That's what it means to be an Eved – a Servant, and an Eved HASHEM a Servant of HASHEM. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz writes in one of his Mussar Essays on Pesach that the measure of a Jew, the truest indicator of his greatness, is how big of an Eved HASHEM he is. The Jewish People did not exit Mitzraim to become free. That is less than half the story. We became available to become servants of HASHEM.

Eliezer was from that segment of Noach's children that was cursed that they would be servants. It's not a pure curse and a punishment. It's a recommendation for a cure. They would need guidance and coaching to shape them from without. Left to their own devices they would tend to self-destructive and antisocial behaviors. With proper training and an infusion of strong moral values they can be polished and formed into disciplined, marine-like soldiers and reliable citizens. Without a regimen, in the absence of a serious system of training, they will likely disassemble and backslide into disrepair and despair.

Not only does he require that structure, a teacher, a community, a Torah, a G-d, we the Jewish People need it even more so. Without it, we are at great risk and so is the world around us. That is also evident! With those

features in place, our substance has true form. We stand a chance of being a blessing as Avraham was promised. It's not a birthright as much as it is a birth opportunity.

How do we do this? Simple as a dimple! The Ramchal writes in Derech Etz Chaim that a person should take some time each day to contemplate what Avraham and Moshe and Dovid did to attract the attention of HASHEM. What did Eliezer do? He made himself a zero. He did his job. He made himself into a window to allow the light of Avraham to shine through and so our job is to become a window, to polish that window, and to allow the light of HASHEM to shine through us to the whole world. Be a window not a pane!

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#### **Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

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

What is the essence of loving-kindness, chessed, 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 proactively for kindness. Every day living as Jew means proactively looking to those around us and asking how can we make a difference to the lives of others.





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### Has the World Gone Mad?

#### Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The Jewish future depends upon the selection of a suitable bride for Yitzchak. Unable to travel, Avraham places his legacy in the hands of his trusted assistant. Because local women aren't morally suited to mother Yitzchak's progeny, a bride must be chosen from a distant land. Avraham's servant is charged with a decision which will affect Jewish destiny. Surprisingly, instead of selecting Yitzchak's future wife, his servant arranges a contrived method for identifying the proper woman. Entirely removing himself from the process, he casts the decision into the hands of fate, hoping for divine intervention. The first girl who offers refreshment to him and his herd of camels will become the mother of our nation. Instead of deliberation and decision making, he suspends his reasoning and leaves it to Providence. Fortunately, Hashem did not tolerate a random process and delivered Rivka to Yitzchak.

Despite the gravity of this decision and the long-term consequences of his mission, this servant defaults to chance rather than plotting a more careful and conscious path. By spotlighting this gimmicky solution, the Torah, effectively, critiques his abandonment of the decision.

Unlike the servant, Avraham was a bold decision maker. During his dramatic career he faced numerous weighty decisions, but never balked or flinched. He emigrated to a foreign land, twice relocated in the face of a stymying famine, went to war against fierce chieftains, and twice took the excruciating decision of dismissing undesirable family members. His boldest decision was silently following divine instructions to sacrifice his son, an idea which clashed with his own moral instincts.

By contrasting Avraham's decision-making skills with his servant's inability to face decisions, the Torah highlights the religious importance of free will. Monotheism and Free Will

In the ancient and dark world of paganism human beings weren't afforded "special status". Many different gods were responsible for creating different parts of our world and the absence of any all-powerful God dismissed any notion that Man was a selected creature.

Avraham spoke of a One, all-powerful G-d, responsible for all of creation. Having created everything, that One G-d carefully crafted Man in His image and in His likeness. Man was endowed with free will and freedom of

conscience, and was similar to G-d. The emergence of monotheism introduced the concept of human free will, and Avraham's ability to shoulder the weight of decision making reflected his religious beliefs.

By contrast, Avraham's servant from a foreign land is not part of this monotheistic tradition. His avoidance of decision making is a throwback to a pagan culture in which Man is lost in the chaos and uncertainty of Nature, frightened for his future and unwilling to shoulder the burden of decisions. Twins

Ultimately, Rivka marries Yitzchak and bears twin boys. In describing this pregnancy, the Torah repeatedly emphasizes that they incubated within one common womb. By stressing their identical genealogy, the Torah further reinforces the power of free will. Though their DNA was 100% identical they each possessed and exercised free will about their future. One became righteous and pious while the other became violent and enraged. Their fates weren't predetermined but solely a product of their own decision making. In the book of Genesis, those who belong to the legacy of monotheism author their own decisions, while outsiders balk in the face of decisions. Free will is a crucial byproduct of monotheism.

#### Abdicating Freedom of Thought

Sadly, over the past few weeks we have witnessed largescale abdication of freedom of thought, as opponents of Israel line up to condemn us for "moral crimes", while celebrating deplorable acts of torture and monstrosity. What is happening to the human race, and why are people reflexively supporting butchers and murderers while accusing us of fictitious crimes? Has the world lost its marbles? It certainly seems that way. What is happening to human freedom?

#### Hate

In part, people have abandoned clear thinking because they are consumed with hate. Hate is a powerful emotion which clouds our judgment and muddles our moral assessments. It leads to confirmation bias by which we accept only the facts which confirm our preexisting hatred. Opportunistic antisemites are always waiting in the wings, prepared to join whatever group or movement preaches hatred of Jews and violence toward Jews. The particular agenda or platform of antisemitism makes no difference, as long as Jews are vilified for fabricated crimes, and hatred is fomented. In medieval times blood libels preceded pogroms. In 2023, first came the pogrom and afterwards the blood libels commenced. Many of our haters are lost in a cloud of hatred which has fogged their minds.

#### Social pressure

Group think or herd mentality has also caused many to abandon reason and moral clarity while naively joining the anti-Israel parade. We assumed, incorrectly, that modernity would afford greater freedom. After all, the modern world delivered us political freedom, economic freedom, and, most recently, freedom to independently acquire information. However, by exponentially swelling the information flow, social media has induced group thinking. People sheepishly subscribe to popular opinions, mistaking popularity for accuracy or for morality. Without possessing even a smidgeon of knowledge of Oct 7 or the events of the past 75 years people denounce us, while mindlessly supporting sub-human animals who committed and continue to commit unspeakable crimes. My favorite but sad story surrounds an anti-Israel protester who was asked to describe which land "from the river to the Sea" Israel should abandon. He responded that the Palestinians deserve all the land from the Nile River to the Red Sea. Effectively, he was protesting against Israel about land in Egypt. Absolutely no knowledge of the situation, but frenzied rage and indignation. Israel bashing has become a popular fad.

#### Supporting the "Oppressed"

Additionally, the politicalization of morality is causing moral confusion. As moral values decline, morality has become politicized. Ideally, morality is defined through personal conduct to individuals with whom we live in contact. Virtue signaling is gradually replacing actual moral behavior, which is in sharp decline. Seeking to compensate for actual morality, many

desperately adopt moral “causes” such as planetary conservation or animal rights.

Searching for broad moral “causes” people adopt simplistic formulas to determine virtue. In the modern world the most simplistic formula is the “David and Goliath” narrative where those who occupy power are always criminal, while the oppressed suffer in virtuous silence. Though the narrative sometimes pertains, in our instance it is completely specious. Our people have faced religious violence from Islamic extremists for thousands of years, and our state has been under siege since its inception. Thank G-d we are no longer helplessly weak and oppressed but powerful enough to defend our lives. However, the “David and Goliath” narrative offers an easy but false formula for determining the criminal party.

Enter the foolishness known as intersectionality which asserts that all oppressed parties possess one common agenda. All aggrieved parties share the common enemy which was recently termed “the constellations of power” who look to discriminate against the weak. Based on this corrupt logic, if you are aggrieved, you must automatically bash Israel. It is ludicrous to witness gay people supporting Hamas murderers who would gladly toss them off a roof and drag their bodies through the street. But to people who are blinded by intersectionality or muddled by false virtue signaling, facts don’t matter. They make no difference. Goodbye freedom, hello madness.

Fw from [Hamaleket@gmail.com](mailto:Hamaleket@gmail.com)

<https://theyeshiva.net/jewish/>

**Rabbi YY Jacobson**

**To Truly Be Alive Some People Don’t Have to Die to Be Dead**

*The Vilna Gaon’s Idea*

The study of Torah is so multi-layered and multi-faceted. You can focus on the theme, on the storyline, on the lessons derived, on the structure, syntax, words, and phrases, on the structure of the verses and portions, and on the hidden meanings. But sometimes we are shocked by that which we do not even bother to notice, because our minds are not trained for such nuanced thinking.

One of the great minds who zoomed-in to such wondrous aspects of Torah was one of the great Lithuanian sages of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, known as the Vilna Gaon. Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman Kramer, known in Hebrew the Gra (Gaon Reb Eliyahu) lived from 1720-1797, and wrote dozens of brilliant works on all aspects of Jewish thought and law.

I want to read with you the verse in the opening of Chayei Sarah, and tell me if you notice an apparently unnecessary repetition – not once or twice or thrice, but seven times! And then the last time, there is a significant shift.

*The Storyline*

Here we go, tune in.

**חיי שרה כג, ב:** ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע הוא חברון כנען וזבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולביתה: ג. ונקם אברהם מעל פני מתו ונדבר אל בני-ישראל לאמר: ד. גרו-ותשב אצלי עמכם תנו לי אהות-קבר עמכם ואת-קברה מתי מלפני: ה. ונענו בני-ישראל את-אברהם לאמר לו: ו. שמענו אדני נשיא אלהים אתה בתוכנו במבשר קברינו קבר את-מתך איש ממנו את-קברו לא-יכלה מלך מקבר מתך: ז. ונקם אברהם וישתחו לעם-הארץ לבני-ישראל: ח. ונדבר אתם לאמר אבינו את-נפשכם לקבר את-ימתי מלפני שמעוני ופגעו-לי בעפרון בודצסר: ט. ויטמולו את-ימתי המכפלה אשר-ליו אשר בקצה שדהו בכסף מלא וימנה לי בתוככם לאחוזת-קבר: י. ועפרון ישב בתוך בני-ישראל ונען עפרון נחמי את-אברהם באזני בני-ישראל לכל באי שער-עירו לאמר: יא. לא-אדני שמעני השדה נחמי לך והמערע אשר-יב לך נחמיה לעיני בני-ימתי לך קבר מתך: יב. וישתחו אברהם לפני עם הארץ: יג. ונדבר אל-עפרון באזני עמיה-הארץ לאמר אד אסאתה לו שמעני נחמי כסף השדה קח ממני ואת-קברה את-ימתי שמה: יד. ונען עפרון את-אברהם לאמר לו: טו. אדני שמעני ארץ ארבע מאת שקל-כסף ביני ובינה מה-היא ואת-ימתי קבר:

**Genesis 23:2:** Sarah died in Kiriath-Arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her.

Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, “I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may **bury my dead**.” And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, “Hear us, my lord: you are a prince of G-d among us. **Bury your dead** in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for **burying your dead**.” Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the landowning citizens, the Hittites, and he said to them, “If it is your wish that I **bury my dead**, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns, which is at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial site in your midst.” Ephron

was present among the Hittites; so Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, the assembly in his town’s gate, saying, “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. **Bury your dead**.” Then Abraham bowed low before the landowning citizens, and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the landowning citizens, saying, “If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may **bury my dead** there.” And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him, “My lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? And **your dead you shall bury**.”

*Seven Times*

Did you notice a pattern in the phraseology of the discussion? The term burying one’s dead is mentioned seven times!

1. “I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may **bury my dead**.”
2. “Hear us, my lord: you are a prince of God among us. **Bury your dead** in the choicest of our burial places.
3. none of us will withhold his burial place from you for **burying your dead**.”
4. “If it is your wish that I **bury my dead**, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar.
5. I give it to you in the presence of my people. **Bury your dead**.”
6. “If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may **bury my dead**”
7. And your **dead you shall bury**.”

In a regular discussion such as this, the actual phrase of burying the dead might appear two, three, or four times. It seems that anytime the Torah can insert the phrase to bury the dead it does, even if completely superfluous.

But there is something even stranger. While six of the times it refers to burying the dead, “bury my dead, bury your dead.” The seventh time, at the conclusion of the negotiations, Abraham is told, “your dead you should bury”—not “bury your dead,” but “your dead you shall bury.”

Why does the Torah use such wordy and excessive descriptions of the purpose of Abraham’s purchase? And why, in the last time the phrase is used, does the terminology switch order?

You might say, who cares? It’s just a story. But the Torah is Divine, every word and phrase are the word of G-d, dictated by the Creator to Moses. Every phrase, every repetition, even the order of a phrase, is infinitely meticulous, precise, and meaningful. As it turns out, this teaches us what it means to truly be alive. It also demonstrates how every phrase in the Torah is full of endless meaning and insight.

*The Answer*

The Vilna Gaon suggests a fantastic and brilliant interpretation:

Abraham purchased the Cave of Machpela as a family plot. Eventually, as Genesis progresses, we discover that three couples would be buried there: Abraham and Sarah (Chayei Sarah), Isaac and Rebecca (Vayishlach, Vayechi), Jacob and Leah (Vayechi).

Jacob makes it very clear right before his passing:

**ויחי מט, כט:** ונצו אותם ויאמר אליהם אני נאסף אל-עמי קברו אתי אל-אבותי אל-המערע אשר בשדה עפרון הקמחי... **שמה קברו את אברהם ואת שרה אשתו שמה קברו את יצחק ואת רבקה אשתו ושמך קברתי את לאה.**

“There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—The Last Grave.”

Now, the Talmud relates a fascinating and tragic story about the funeral and burial of Jacob. According to instructions, his body was taken to the Holy Land to be buried in Hebron, in the Cave of the Machpelah. A massive entourage accompanied Jacob on his final journey: Joseph, the viceroy of Egypt, together with all his brothers, all of the grandchildren, many ministers, soldiers, servants, and friends, a “huge camp” as the Torah puts it. When the procession arrived at the Cave of Machpelah to bury Jacob, one man suddenly appeared to contest it. Who was it? It was Jacob’s twin brother Esau. There were three double-plots in the cave, one per couple. One was used for Abraham and Sarah. The next, for Isaac and Rebecca. And then one more plot was used for Leah. Now, there was only one remaining plot in the burial cave. Who would get it? Esau argued that when their father Isaac died,

he left the children two plots, to be divided between the two sons. Jacob used his plot already for Leah; the last remaining plot belonged to Esau.

Now, the truth was that Jacob had purchased and bought the plot from Esau. That is why he has instructed Joseph and made him swear that he would bury him in the grave which "I prepared for myself in the land of Canaan," since Jacob made sure to buy off the plot from Esau, years earlier, for an extraordinary huge sum of money. But Esau denied this. The children of Jacob claimed that they did have the document, but that they had left it in Egypt. Esau insisted that they were thieves, and that Jacob had no permission to be buried there. Esau stopped the burial procession.

This was before the days of Federal Express, and certainly before the days of sending a picture via WhatsApp. They sent Naftali, one of Jacob's twelve sons, who was well known as the speediest runner among the brothers to retrieve the sale document. (Indeed, before his death, Jacob referred to Naftali as a "deer.")

Naftali was dispatched on a marathon to Egypt, as Jacob's body remained on the ground. Esau stood by to guard that no one violate justice, and the entire entourage stopped short.

Jacob had a grandson whose name was Chushim. He was the son of Dan, a very strong young man, and he was deaf. He was also impaired in his speaking. Unable to hear anything, he was not privy to the entire dispute between his great uncle Esau and his uncles, the children of Jacob. Chushim inquired from someone about the delay of the burial, and he was told (via sign language or in writing) what was happening. Chushim, the deaf grandchild, was horrified. "Until Naftali returns from Egypt, my grandfather should lie over there in disgrace?" he exclaimed.

Chushim took a club and struck Esau. But the strike was too hard; Esau died as a result. He was beheaded. The Talmud concludes that this tragically fulfilled the prophecy of Rebecca who once told Jacob, "Why should I lose both of you on one day?" Esau's head, the Talmud and Midrash say, rolled into the burial plot of his father Isaac. Father and son were reunited in death.

#### *A Plot for Seven*

Ah, says the Vilna Gaon, now everything is crystal clear. The seven expressions of burying the dead in the story of the purchase of the burial cave are a prophetic reference to the seven people who would eventually come to rest in the cave.

(The Talmud says that Adam and Eve were also buried there. But they were buried earlier, before Abraham purchased the plot. Hence when the Torah speaks of "bury your dead" it is referring only to those who would still be buried following Abraham's purchase.)

#### *The Time of Death*

But there is a profound difference between the first six and the last one, the seventh. The first six, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah, were people of virtue, true tzaddikim, men and women aligned with their souls and Creator. Esau, the seventh person who made it into the cave, was of a different world. His behavior was immoral and promiscuous.

Hence, the distinction in the expression of the first six times and the seventh. Why does the Torah use the phrase "burying the dead" when talking about the righteous, and then change the order to "the dead being buried" in reference to Esau?

The Talmud states, "the righteous even in death are considered alive."<sup>[1]</sup> Because the tzaddik's life is aligned with his or her inner Divine soul and consciousness. The body is a conduit for the soul, a physical channel for the Divine light of the soul, like a lightbulb for light. So even after the tzaadik is "unplugged," the life continues. What is more, the positive influences of good people allow their memories to continue long after their bodies have been laid to rest.

This is why, in reference to the righteous, the Torah says "bury your dead." In a spiritual sense, the burial precedes the death because the soul and legacy lives on. As the Talmud states, "Jacob did not die; his children are alive, so he is alive."<sup>[2]</sup>

You look at some of the greatest people of our history. Their death did not conclude their story. Even after they passed on and were brought to burial,

their soul, influence, love, light, truth, values literally can be felt in the world and in the hearts of living human beings.<sup>[3]</sup>

Conversely, the Talmud states, "the wicked even in their lifetimes are considered as dead." When a person lives an immoral and empty life, escaping from one distraction to another distraction, even when they are physically alive, there is an internal deadness. Esau, who devoted himself to the empty pursuits of hedonism, adultery, idolatry, and murder, lived an empty life, misaligned with his essence, with his own source of life. In that sense, he was a "dead man walking." He was a shell of his true self, not his real self. Therefore, in the seventh time, the Torah says, "your dead you shall bury." For Esau and his ilk, death takes place prior to the actual burial. He does not have to die to be dead.

For some people, they need not be physically alive to live; and for others, they need not be physically dead to die.

This explains also why the name of this portion is "the life of Sarah," though it is focused on events after her demise. Together with Abraham, Sarah pioneered the Jewish settlement of the Land of Canaan, and as described in the opening chapter of Chayei Sarah, her burial in the Cave of Machpeilah achieved the first actual Jewish ownership of a piece of land in the Holy Land. Sarah devoted her life to the creation of the first Jewish family, and indeed the story of Rebecca's selection demonstrates how Sarah's successor embodied the ideals upon which Sarah founded the Jewish home.

<sup>[1]</sup> Berachos 18. <sup>[2]</sup> Taanis 5b. <sup>[3]</sup> Why then does it even say "bury your DEAD?" The Vilna Gaon quotes Shabbos 152, that before the resurrection even the tzaddikim will revert back to earth for an hour (See the explanation Sichas 20 Av 5732). So way after their burial there is some form of "death."

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#### **Chayei Sara 5784: With Perseverance & Determination**

**Mrs. Michal Horowitz**

November 07 2023

In this week's parsha, Parshas Chayei Sarah, we learn of the death of Sarah Imeinu (Bereishis 23), the shidduch between Yitzchak and Rivka (Bereishis 24), and the death of Avraham Avinu (Bereishis 25).

The pasuk tells us that Sarah died at the age of 127 years, וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה, בְּקִרְיַת, אַרְבַּע הָיָה עֶבְרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן; וַיָּבֵא, אַבְרָהָם, לְסֹפֶד לְשָׂרָה, וְלִבְתָּהּ, Kiryat Arbah, which is Chevron, in the land of Canaan, and Avraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her (Bereishis 23:20). And then, Avraham had to deal with the logistics of burying his wife. For this, he entered into negotiations with Efron, for the purchase of the Cave of the Machpela, for 400 silver shekels in common currency. Considering this Land was already promised to Avraham, he paid an exorbitant sum for the Cave. Yet he was not deterred and he was willing to give up much for the purchase of the Cave (Bereishis 23).

Here we have the first purchase, by the first Ivri (Hebrew), of a portion in Eretz Yisrael. This is the Land that G-d had promised to Avraham time and again, from the time He first revealed Himself to Avraham.

And in the next perek (chapter), we learn that Avraham sent his faithful servant (who the Sages identify as Eliezer), to find and facilitate the shidduch for Yitzchak. Ultimately, after a very lengthy chapter (67 verses long!), replete with many details and nuances, Yitzchak and Rivka marry, and she entered into the tent of Sarah, and took her place as the second Eim b'Yisrael.

The major themes, then, of this parsha, are the two-fold promise Hashem made to Avraham at the dawn of our history: Eretz Yisrael and the continuity of Am Yisrael. Neither promise came easy to Avraham (and Sarah), and for both they had to struggle and overcome formidable challenges in order to acquire and succeed.

In tribute to the great visionary, statesman, leader, diplomat, and scholar, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (Yaakov Tzvi ben Dovid Aryeh), z'l, may his memory be for a blessing, whose second yartzheit was this past Shabbos, 20 Cheshvan 5784, I quote here from his writings. With the ongoing battle for Eretz Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael taking place in full force, Hashem

yerachem aleinu, his timeless words are extremely profound and powerfully relevant.

In regard to Avraham's persistence in purchasing the Cave of the Machpela, and the servant's persistence in ensuring that Rivka would become Yitzchak's wife, Rabbi Sacks writes, "These are no minor episodes. They tell a difficult story. Yes, Abraham will have a land. Yes, he will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, nor suddenly, nor easily. They will not occur in his lifetime, and they will not occur without human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower and determination will bring them about. The divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that G-d will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation from G-d to Abraham and his children that they should act. G-d will help them. The outcome will be what G-d said it would be. But not without total commitment from Abraham's children against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable, insurmountable obstacles (italics added).

"A Land: Israel. And children: Jewish continuity. The astonishing fact is that today, four thousand years later, they remain the dominant concerns of Jews throughout the world - the safety and security of Israel as the Jewish home, and the future of the Jewish people. Abraham's hopes, and Abraham's fears, are our own (italics added).

"Now as then, the divine promise does not mean that we can leave the future solely to G-d. That idea has no place in the imaginative world of the first book of the Torah. On the contrary: the covenant is G-d's challenge to us, not ours to G-d. The meaning of the events of Chayei Sarah is that Abraham realized that G-d was depending on him.

"Faith does not mean passivity. It means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we - inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise - who must bring it about" (Covenant and Conversation, Genesis, p.126-127).

On October 30, 2023, in the beginning of the fourth week of Operation Swords of Iron, the IDF released the following:

Rabbi Naaran Ashchar was critically injured in the tank accident on Israel's northern border, which killed Yinon Fleischman, HYD, z'l, 31 years old, of Jerusalem, and injured two others. Rabbi Ashchar, 32, who serves as a Rosh Mesivta in the Baka hesder yeshiva in the Shadmot Mechola yishuv in the Jordan Valley, is hospitalized in the ICU, sedated and ventilated. Just four months ago, Rabbi Ashchar, a father of two children, donated a kidney to a stranger. When the war began on October 7, the IDF didn't send him a call-up notice due to his recent surgery. But that didn't deter him and he fought against the decision, even personally appealing to the head of the transplant department where his surgery took place. After a long struggle, he received permission to enlist as a volunteer. Please daven for a refuah sheleimah for Naaran Chaim ben Rochel Perla b'toch shaar cholei Yisrael.

The following Sunday, November 5, the shloshim of the Simchas Torah Massacre, the IDF announced that Naaran Ashchar succumbed to his wounds and was niftar z'l HY"D. Despite being exempt because of his selfless act of donating a kidney just four months ago, he fought his exemption so that he could courageously fight this milchemes mitzvah on behalf of our nation and our Land.

"Faith means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we - inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise - who must bring it about."

תהא זכרו ברוך

בברכת בשורות טובות, ישועות, ושבת שלום

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Nov 9, 2023, 5:43 PM

subject: Rav Frand - **Parshas Chayei Sarah - Attitude & Expectations Are the Secret to Happiness & Contentment**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi

Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion:

#1268 – Should Rabbis Be Paid For Performing Weddings? Good Shabbos

In Parshas Chayei Sarah, the pasuk says "v'Hashem beirach es Avraham bakol" (And Hashem blessed Avraham with everything) (Bereshis 24:1). Rashi comments that the word bakol (beis-chaf-lamed) is numerically equivalent to the word Ben (beis-nun). The letters in each word add up to the number 52. The pasuk thus alludes to the fact that Hashem blessed Avraham with a son (ben).

Rashi says very early on in his Chumash commentary (Bereshis 3:8) "And I have come only to provide the simple Scriptural interpretation (p'shuto shel Mikra)." Rashi notes that there are dozens of Medrashim which provide more homiletic readings of Chumash, but he views the job of his commentary to keep it simple and provide the most straightforward reading of the pesukim (the "pashuta p'shat").

Gematriya is a legitimate mode of Torah explication, but Gematrias are not usually considered "p'shat" (Avos 3:18). The question over here is what motivated Rashi to abandon the p'shuto shel Mikra of this pasuk and replace it with a Gematria? The Radak, who is another commentary that sticks to the simple reading of the Chumash, in fact, interprets the pasuk in a way that seems closer to its simple reading: Avraham Avinu had everything and the only thing left for him to do now was to find the proper match for his son Yitzchak. This is the p'shuto shel Mikra which introduces us to the rest of the parsha.

What forced Rashi, the 'pashtan,' to explain this pasuk with a Gematria, when the p'shuto shel Mikra is very obvious?

I found an approach to this question in the writings of the Tolner Rebbe. The following is not exactly what he said, but it is the gist of what he said, at least the way I understand it:

Rashi is answering a question over here. The pasuk states that Avraham is now an old man, he had been blessed with a wonderful life – he had everything! Over the last several weeks, we learned the parshiyos of Lech Lecha and VaYera. Would you consider Avraham Avinu's life an idyllic, wonderful, peaceful life – such that the pasuk can now say at the end of his days that Hashem blessed him with "everything?"

Let us just list, for instance, aspects of this wonderful life that Avraham Avinu had:

#1 When he was in Ur Kasdim, he was accused of heresy and thrown into a fiery furnace

#2 He experienced the "Ten Tests" (Avos 5:3) of which Chazal speak

#3 He dealt with a wife who was childless until age 90 at which time Avraham was already 100 years old, infertility being one of the most painful of life's experiences

#4 He dealt with the domestic trauma of Sarah doing battle with Hagar, and needing to very reluctantly banish Hagar from his household

#5 When Hagar finally gives Avraham a son, it is a son who is perhaps the first "off the Derech kid" in Jewish history

#6 Sarah is captured when Avraham went down to Mitzrayim

#7 Sarah is again captured when Avraham went down to Eretz Plishtim

#8 He successfully passed his tenth and final test – the Akeidas Yitzchak – and he returned home to find his beloved wife dead

Does this list really indicate "And Hashem blessed Avraham with 'everything?'" Is that a wonderful life? It is a life of one trouble after another!

Rashi is answering this question. Rashi is explaining how Avraham Avinu was able to cope with all of this. What was his secret that he never gave up and he never became depressed? The answer is that Avraham Avinu possessed the quality that assures happiness in life. It is a quality that we saw previously in Parshas Lech Lecha: When HaKodosh Baruch Hu tells Avraham that he is going to have a son (Yitzchak), Avraham responds (according to Rashi there): "Halevai that Yishmael should live. I am unworthy to receive such a great reward as this!" (Bereshis 17:18)

This is the key to Avraham Avinu's success. He does not expect anything from Heaven. Everything is considered a gift. There are only two types of people in the world – those who say "Aynee k'dai" (I am unworthy of this) and those who say "Zeh magiyah li" (I deserve this!).



This is expressed by a Medrash: Rav Levi and Rav Chanina say – On every breath a person takes, he should praise his Creator, as it is written (a play on words) “Kol haneshama te’hallel K-ah” (Every soul (i.e., each breath) should praise G-d) (Tehillim 150:6). Have any of us ever thought to say “Ah! Thank G-d that I can breathe?” Unless a person has asthma, pneumonia or some type of other terrible lung disease, chas v’shalom, a person does not think about rejoicing over the fact that “I can breathe, I can see, I can walk.” We may all say the morning blessings that express gratitude for our basic necessities in life, but who mentally thanks the Ribono shel Olam for all of that? We take it for granted.

“I need to be alive. I need to be healthy. I need to see. I need to be able to walk. I need to be able to do everything.” Now, what are You going to do for me? The rest is a given.

A person that has that first attitude (I am unworthy of this) can experience all the trials and tribulations that Avraham Avinu experienced and still feel “V’Hashem beirach es Avraham ba’kol” (and G-d blessed Avraham with everything). Rashi says that “ba’kol” in Gematria equals “ben” (son).

Avraham says “You gave me a son named Yitzchak? Now I have everything. I don’t need anything else. Even Yishmael was enough for me. Now I have a Yitzchak as well! That is literally ‘everything’ (ba’kol).”

This is why Rashi invokes the Gematria here. Rashi is trying to explain how the pasuk can make the statement that Hashem blessed Avraham with everything when we know that Avraham had a life full of trials and tribulations. The answer is that this was Avraham’s perspective on life – “I have a son? What more do I need!”

When Avraham Avinu dies, the Torah states: “And Avraham expired and died at a good old age, an old man and content...” (Bereshis 25:8). This is the eulogy that the Ribono shel Olam says on Avraham Avinu. It is the epitaph on his tombstone. It does not say “Avraham Avinu the Ba’al Chesed.” It does not say “Avraham Avinu who was willing to sacrifice his son.” The greatest thing that Hashem says about Avraham Avinu is that he died at a ripe old age full and satisfied with his life. He had no unmet wants in the world. This was his attribute in life: “I am unworthy.”

We are not Avraham Avinus. We don’t go through life repeating the mantra “Aynee k’dai; Aynee k’dai.” But the closer we can get to the attitude of “Aynee k’dai” and the further we can get from the attitude of “Magiya li,” the happier we will be. That should be our goal. That is our mission – to become “Aynee k’dai” people. Then we will be happy people.

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. ...A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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### Themes from the First Aliyah in Chayei Sarah

#### Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 58:3) notes a connection between the 127 years of Sarah’s life and the 127 provinces that her descendant, Esther, ruled over, by relating a story involving R. Akiva, who attempted to rouse his students, dozing off in the middle of his shiur. He said to them, “What motivated Queen Esther to reign over one hundred and twenty and seven provinces? We must assume that Esther, as a descendant of Sarah who lived for one hundred and twenty and seven years, considered it proper to reign over one hundred and twenty and seven provinces.”

Many explain the nature of his message as highlighting the proportional reward Sarah’s meritorious life earned for her offspring. One year earns one province; perhaps one month is a county, one week a city, one day a neighborhood...look how much your time is worth! Certainly it is too precious to waste sleeping during shiur.

23:2 VaTamat Sarah. Rashi cites from the Midrash that Sarah’s death is related in juxtaposition to the story of the Akedah, because the latter was the proximate cause of her death. Apparently, Sarah was told that “Yitzchak was slaughtered...almost”, and before hearing the final clarification, died of shock (there are different renditions of how exactly this statement was transmitted; see Gur Aryeh and other commentaries). This midrash has practical implications regarding the care that must be taken with the communication, and especially the miscommunication, of distressing news. Citing this midrash, my father z”l was careful, whenever referencing a funeral or a shiva, to identify the deceased as “the mother of ploni” rather than “ploni’s mother”, out of recognition that in the split second between “Ploni” and “...’s mother” the listener may get the impression that the younger individual had died. This is particularly an issue with modern electronic communications, in which an email may bear the subject heading “Funeral of Ploni’s Father”, and then get shortened in the inbox listing to “Funeral of Ploni...” and cause even greater distress than is called for. Lispod L’Sarah V’Likvotah.

The midrash (Gen. Rabbah, 58:9) states that Abraham was praised as having attained the qualities of God when he buried his wife Sarah. This is striking; Abraham, who performed so much kindness in his lifetime, receives singular commendation for an act that any relative, certainly any husband, would be expected to perform.

R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht suggests that the other services that Abraham provided to humanity were those for which one could expect reciprocity, and thus could be understood as part of a social contract, recommended without necessarily being rooted in Divine influence. Burial, however, an act of kindness to the departed, is a “chesed shel emet,” a pure, selfless act for which no reciprocity can be expected. Thus, it is a clear manifestation not of utilitarianism, but of Godliness.

R. Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg (Tokh’chat Mussar [ed. R. Mordechai Rennert], #30) also emphasizes the lack of expected reciprocity, but towards a different message. From a spiritual perspective, the value of an act of chesed is assessed not on its impact, but on the cost it extracts on the one performing the chesed. When there is no reciprocity, the equation is already lopsided; however, this is more true when the chesed comes at a time of great personal distress, further aggravated by unpleasant negotiations. Abraham’s ability to persevere through all of this and give his wife the proper honor is indeed deserving of great praise.

R. Nossan Tzvi Finkel, the Alter of Slobodka, explained this midrash differently. He noted that often people do not consider tending to their own families to be chesed; it is the call of father away opportunities for service that seems more noble and praiseworthy. The truth, however, is the opposite; the mandate of chesed and tzedakah requires prioritizing those closest. Accordingly, out of a lifetime of chesed, it is the care that Abraham showed to the person closest to him that is help up as a model of following the Divine path.

<https://aish.com/282277091/>

### What’s Going On With The Israel-Hamas War? M’oray Ha’Aish by Rabbi Ari Kahn Chayei Sarah (Genesis 23:1-25:18)

A strange negotiation is reported in this week’s parasha. Sarah has died and Avraham has a carefully planned agenda for the funeral arrangements. He approaches the local clan and asks to purchase a particular parcel of land owned by a man named Efron. Efron offers to give Avraham the plot of land as a gift, free of charge, yet Avraham insists on paying for it. Eventually, a price is set; the sum is apparently exorbitant, especially considering the opening “price” offered by the seller. While some Jews take pride in their business savvy, their forefather Avraham’s negotiation skills seem to have

been sorely lacking: He overpays for something he could have procured for free. To make matters even worse, Avraham had been promised this entire land as his inheritance. Why did he insist on paying for something that God Himself would eventually deliver to him on a silver platter? Avraham had not "forgotten" that this land would eventually belong to him; in fact, God's promise was precisely the reason Avraham behaved so strangely in this negotiation. Part and parcel of God's promise that Avraham would inherit the Land of Israel was a "price" to be paid: "Know with certainty that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs and they will be enslaved and oppressed, for four hundred years." (Bereishit 15:13) The standard translation of this verse presents us with a much-debated problem: The Jews were not enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years. However, if the verse is read while taking into account the cantillation symbols that serve as punctuation of the Hebrew text, a very different parsing emerges: "Know with certainty that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs for four hundred years. (At times,) they will be enslaved and oppressed." This nuanced reading of the text is not always conveyed correctly in translation, but the gist of the verse is that the four hundred years describes the duration of time in which they would be strangers or foreigners, devoid of sovereignty. The verse describes a period of time in which Avraham's descendants would be a political minority in the land that would eventually belong to them, and not a period of four hundred years of oppression and enslavement.

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subject: Covenant and Conversation

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

**Abraham: A Life of Faith**

**CHAYEI SARAH**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

Abraham, the Sages were convinced, was a greater religious hero than Noah.

We hear this in the famous dispute among the Sages about the phrase that Noah was "perfect in his generations," meaning relative to his generations:

"In his generations" – Some of our Sages interpret this favourably: if he had lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. Others interpret it derogatorily: In comparison with his generation he was righteous, but if he had lived in Abraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance.

Some thought that if Noah had lived in the time of Abraham he would have been inspired by his example to yet greater heights; others that he would have stayed the same, and thus been insignificant when compared to Abraham. But neither side doubted that Abraham was the greater.

Similarly, the Sages contrasted the phrase, "Noah walked with God," with the fact that Abraham walked before God.

"Noah walked with God" – But concerning Abraham, Scripture says in Genesis 24:40: "[The Lord] before Whom I walked." Noah required [God's] support to uphold him [in righteousness], but Abraham strengthened himself and walked in his righteousness by himself.

Rashi to Genesis 6:9

Yet what evidence do we have in the text itself that Abraham was greater than Noah? To be sure, Abraham argued with God in protest against the destruction of the cities of the plain, while Noah merely accepted God's verdict about the Flood. Yet God invited Abraham's protest. Immediately beforehand the text says:

Then the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.'

Genesis 18:17-19

This is an almost explicit invitation to challenge the verdict. God delivered no such summons to Noah. So Noah's failure to protest should not be held against him.

If anything, the Torah seems to speak more highly of Noah than of Abraham. We are told:

Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord.

Genesis 6:8

Twice Noah is described as a righteous man, a tzaddik:

1) Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God (Genesis 6:9).

2) The Lord then said to Noah, 'Go into the Ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation' (Genesis 7:1).

No one else in the whole of Tanach is called righteous. How then was Abraham greater than Noah?

One answer, and a profound one, is suggested in the way the two men responded to tragedy and grief. After the Flood, we read this about Noah: Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank some of the wine, making himself drunk, and uncovered himself in the tent.

Genesis 9:20-21

This is an extraordinary decline. The "righteous man" has become a "man of the soil." The man who was looked to "bring us comfort" (Genesis 5:29) now seeks comfort in wine. What has happened?

The answer, surely, is that Noah was indeed a righteous man, but one who had seen a world destroyed. We gain the impression of a man paralysed with grief, seeking oblivion. Like Lot's wife who turned back to look on the destruction, Noah finds he cannot carry on. He is desolated, grief-stricken. His heart is broken. The weight of the past prevents him from turning toward the future.

Now think of Abraham at the beginning of this week's parsha. He had just been through the greatest trial of his life. He had been asked by God to sacrifice the son he had waited for for so many years. He was about to lose the most precious thing in his whole life. It's hard to imagine his state of mind as the trial unfolded.

Then just as he was about to lift the knife the call came from Heaven saying 'Stop', and the story seemed to have a happy ending after all. But there was a terrible twist in store. Just as Abraham was returning, relieved his son's life spared, he discovers that the trial had a victim after all. Immediately after it, at the beginning of this week's parsha, we read of the death of Sarah. And the Sages suggested that the two events were simultaneous. As Rashi explains: "The account of Sarah's demise was juxtaposed to the Binding of Isaac 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." We'd say today she had a heart attack from the news.

Now try and put yourself in the situation of Abraham. He has almost sacrificed his child and now as an indirect result of the trial itself, the news has killed his wife of many years, the woman who stayed with him through all his travels and travails, who twice saved his life, who in joy gave birth to Isaac in her old age. Had Abraham grieved for the rest of his days, we would surely have understood, just as we understand Noah's grief. Instead we read the following:

And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, that is Hebron in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her, and Abraham rose up from before his dead.

Genesis 23:2-3

Abraham mourns and weeps, and then rises up and does two things to secure the Jewish future, two acts whose effects we feel to this day. He buys the first plot in the Land of Israel, a field in the Cave of Machpelah. And then he secures a wife for his son Isaac, so that there will be Jewish grandchildren, Jewish continuity. Noah grieves and is overwhelmed by his loss. Abraham grieves knowing what he has lost. But then he rises up and builds the Jewish future. There is a limit to grief. This is what Abraham knows and Noah does not.

Abraham bestowed this singular gift on his descendants. The Jewish people suffered tragedies that would have devastated other nations beyond any hope of recovery. The destruction of the first Temple and the Babylonian exile. The destruction of the second Temple and the end of Jewish sovereignty. The expulsions, massacres, forced conversions and inquisitions of the Middle Ages, the pogroms of the 17th and 19th centuries, and finally the Shoah. Yet somehow the Jewish people mourned and wept, and then rose up and built the future. This is their unique strength and it came from Abraham, as we see in this week's parsha.

Kierkegaard wrote a profound sentence in his journals:

It requires moral courage to grieve, it requires religious courage to rejoice. Perhaps that's the difference between Noah the Righteous, and Abraham the Man of Faith. Noah grieved, but Abraham knew that there must eventually be an end to grief. We must turn from yesterday's loss to the call of a tomorrow. We must help to be born.

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<https://en.yhb.org.il/revivim1068/>

### **Banish the Son of the Handmaid Revivim ---Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

Our matriarch Sarah afflicted and chastised Hagar to put her in her place \* Only when she understood there was no more chance of Hagar and Ishmael changing their ways, did she request banishing them \* The divine decree to banish the handmaid and her son, is also when it is not pleasant \* The more we contributed to the prosperity of our Arab neighbors, the sons of Ishmael, the more their war against us intensified \* We are commanded to examine whether and how we can encourage the emigration of our enemies from our land \* If we do not succeed in removing our enemies from all our land, we will have to suffer

The Good Intention, and the Imperfections

The original intention was very good. Seeing that God had restrained her womb, our matriarch Sarah nobly decided to give her good handmaid to Abraham. It was kindness to Abraham to merit a son after so many years, and tremendous kindness to her handmaid Hagar, to connect with the righteous, esteemed Abraham. Her children would cling to the great vision that Abraham and Sarah established in the world. Sarah was certain Hagar, who had until now accepted her leadership with humility and love, would continue recognizing her superiority, and the child born to her would be raised on Sarah's knees. And due to her generosity, God would hasten her redemption, and perhaps also grant her a son. Hagar's son would join her son fulfilling the great vision they established in the world, recognizing the primacy of the son born to Sarah.

But immediately after Hagar conceived, "her mistress was lowered in her esteem" (Genesis 16:4). She no longer served Sarah as before, and in her heart, she also stopped respecting her, saying: "This Sarah, her conduct in secret is not like her conduct in public. She shows herself as if she is a righteous woman, but she is not a righteous woman, for she did not merit to conceive all these years, whereas I have conceived from the first union" (Rashi, Genesis 16:4).

Similarly, many years later, the Muslims viewed the Temple's destruction and Israel's exile as proof God annulled His covenant with Israel, and their victories, as proof they replaced Israel as Abraham's heirs.

Our Matriarch Sarah's Initial Reaction

Our matriarch Sarah afflicted and chastised Hagar, to put her in her place. Ramban (Nachmanides) and Radak hold she did not behave properly in this matter. However, the righteous Sarah still hoped that afflicting the handmaid would make Hagar understand her place, and things would return to how they were beforehand. But Hagar no longer agreed to accept her authority, and fled the home. Only after an angel of God told her "Return to your mistress, and be afflicted under her hand" (Genesis 16:9), did she lower her head, accept Sarah's authority, give birth to Ishmael, and raised him on her master Abraham and Sarah's knees.

Even after Isaac was born, it still seemed Hagar accepted Isaac the mistress's son's primacy. But when Isaac became a child, Ishmael began mocking him. If Isaac strived to grow in righteousness, he, Ishmael, would pave another path. Some say Ishmael began lusting after idol worship and licentiousness. Others say he played with Isaac in life-threatening games, revealing his inner desire to murderously hate him for taking his place. And people would say: 'Look at Abraham the Hebrew, who always preached to us to beware of robbery, licentiousness and murder – behold, his son Ishmael, is a wild man!' (See Bereishit Rabbah 53:11).

The Decision to Banish

Then, our matriarch Sarah understood there was no more chance of Hagar and Ishmael changing their ways. Hagar's return home and acceptance of authority was only external. Indeed, Hagar forgot the kindness of giving her a husband, and in her heart, believed she would inherit her mistress, with her son Ishmael becoming Abraham's successor. This is apparently also why Ishmael was becoming more degenerate. If they remained in the home, Abraham and Sarah's great vision of building a family and nation that would fix the world, could be dashed. "And she said to Abraham banish this handmaid and her son, for the son of this handmaid shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac" (Genesis 21:10).

This was very hard for our patriarch Abraham. He, who all his life lovingly drew near the distant, was now demanded to banish his beloved son. "And God said to Abraham: Do not be distressed over the boy or your handmaid; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you" (ibid. 21:12). As if, even to Abraham our patriarch, God had to state that although Ishmael is important, and will become a nation, nonetheless "through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you." He will continue you, not Ishmael.

The Painful, Yet Justified Banishment

If Hagar and Ishmael had separated agreeably, recognizing it is good for them to build their future elsewhere, the banishment would have been easy, and the pangs of conscience somewhat calmed. But apparently beforehand, Ishmael had already spoiled things, become unrestrained, wicked, and degenerate, to the point where Abraham could not send him from his home respectably with gifts, as he desired. Hagar and Ishmael were banished in shame (see Shemot Rabbah 1:1). Not only that, but despite Abraham guiding them on their way, they wandered in the desert, and Ishmael became deathly ill from thirst, until miraculously saved.

This is no condemnation of our matriarch Sarah, or patriarch Abraham. It is a fact that on Rosh Hashanah, the day we are careful about mentioning any speck of condemnation of Israel, our Sages instituted reading the Torah portion about banishing Hagar and Ishmael. Meaning, the divine decree to banish the handmaid and her son, is also when it is not pleasant. For the law is the law. Hagar who denied Sarah's goodness, and Ishmael who already in Abraham's home dared to worship idols, steal and threaten murder, must receive their punishment. Precisely on Rosh Hashanah, when Israel recognizes its uniqueness and distinction above all nations, it merits a good judgement for the new year.

Specifically after Hagar and Ishmael were banished and suffered did they recognize their sin, and repent. Perhaps I will be able to expand on this after the war is over, in a crushing victory over our enemies.

Then and Now

History has a tendency to repeat itself. We thought that if we were good to our Arab neighbors, the sons of Ishmael, if we made the land that was desolate under them flourish, if we developed the economy and raised their standard of living, granted them rights no other Arab have in Arab states – they would appreciate us. But the more we contributed to their prosperity – the more their war against us intensified. Even if we try afflicting and defeating them in wars – they accuse us, and cause others to do so as well. The only way for us to succeed, is by strengthening the Jewish nature of the state, clarifying to all that this land is ours, no other nation has a share or inheritance here. Anyone who lovingly accepts this can live here with us by the law of ger toshav (a resident alien). But towards those who do not accept

this, we must act through all moral means at our disposal to make sure they emigrate elsewhere, as stated “They shall not remain in your land” (Exodus 23:33).

Three generations ago, this idea was acceptable. After World War II, over 12 million Germans fled, and were expelled from where they had lived for many generations, back to Germany. Half a million Ukrainians were expelled from Poland to Ukraine, Poles were expelled from Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus to Poland, Italians were expelled from Yugoslavia to Italy, and Hungarians were expelled from Slovakia to Hungary.

Had Jews ascended to Israel when the nations of the world gave Britain the mandate to assist the Jewish people establish its national home in both sides of the Jordan, we would have avoided many troubles (Holocaust, Communism, and assimilation). And if the Arabs, then numbering less than a million on both sides of the Jordan fought us, we could have expelled them to their lands. But sadly, we delayed ascending to Israel, and the possibility of expelling enemies, considered moral and acceptable in the international arena 80 years ago, is today considered unacceptable.

And still, due to all the wars and waves of terror, we are commanded to examine whether, and how, we can encourage emigration of our enemies from our land. And simultaneously, draw close Arab friends, and recruit them to the army, so together with us, they will fight the State of Israel’s enemies.

If we do not succeed removing our enemies from all our land, we will have to suffer, as stated: “If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, those you leave will be thorns in your eyes and stingers in your sides, and they will harass you on the land you settle” (Numbers 33:55).

#### Understanding the Enemy’s Warfare

In order to understand our enemy, we must realize that, in general, the Muslim religion is a warring religion. Since the prominent aspect defining Allah according to Islam is power and might, there is a great commandment to conquer lands and nations, and force Islam upon them by might of sword. This is jihad. They believe this expresses Allah’s absolute might.

With the power of this faith, the Arabs founded a nation of brave, dedicated and stubborn warriors who conquered many lands and nations, and ruled them under Islam for over a thousand years. The war against the State of Israel takes supreme importance for them, because Islam already conquered the Land of Israel in the past, thus making it Muslim holy land in their view. It is a tremendous disgrace to their religion that a non-Muslim state arose on this land. The disgrace is magnified sevenfold being a Jewish state, for they are commanded to humiliate the Jews, in order to prove Islam replaced Judaism as the true religion.

#### Total Victory

The only way to exempt Muslims from the obligation to wage war to destroy the State of Israel is to decisively defeat them, until they understand they have no chance of defeating Israel, or weakening its strength. Then, according to Muslim law, they must wait until they have strength, and only afterwards will the commandment to fight in order to destroy the State of Israel return. Therefore, any Israeli concession erodes deterrence, and brings war closer.

It is fitting to add and hope, that specifically through our steadfastness and defeating the enemy, the deep streams existing in Islam recognizing that the Children of Israel and their right over the Land of Israel should be respected, will emerge. And that in truth, the purpose of Islam is to call for inner jihad against the evil inclination, and educate towards honoring all creatures, instead of warmongering.

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date: Nov 6, 2023, 1:19 AM

subject: How Much May I Charge?

What prohibition did Efron violate when he overcharged Avraham Avinu for the me’aras hamachpeila?

#### How Much May I Charge?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

#### Question #1: Overcharged esrog

“My esrog dealer charged me \$150 for an esrog. My brother-in-law, who knows the business, told me that he overcharged me, and the esrog is not worth more than \$35. Can I get my money back?”

#### Question #2: Just a little bit

“Am I permitted to charge a little bit above the market price for an item?”

#### Question #3: Damaged coin

“I noticed that someone tried to scrape off some of the metal on a coin that I have. May I use it?”

#### Question #4: Expert error

“I purchased a rare coin from a dealer, and he clearly undercharged me. Am I required to tell him about it?”

Answer:

Upon graduation from olam hazeh, the first question asked upon entering the beis din shel maalah, the Heavenly Court, is: “Did you deal honestly with your fellowmen?” (Shabbos 31a). The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chayim 156:3) explains that this does not mean, “Did you steal?” or “Were your weights honest?” Someone who violated those laws, whether dealing with Jewish or non-Jewish clientele, qualifies as a rosho gamur. Rather, the Heavenly Court’s inquiries are: “Did you make unjustified claims about the quality of the merchandise that you sold?” “Did you speak to people softly in your business dealings?” “Did you curse, scream, or act angrily with people?” “Did you realize that all livelihood comes only from Hashem, and acted within that framework?”

In parshas Behar, the Torah teaches, Lo sonu ish es amiso (Vayikra 25:17). The word sonu has the same root as the word onaah, the name by which we call this mitzvah. The word onaah is difficult to translate into English, but for the purposes of our article, I will use the word overcharging, although, as we will soon see, onaah also includes situations of underpayment or of misrepresentation. The purpose of this article is to present the basic principles; specific questions should be referred to your own rav or dayan. Just as everyone must have an ongoing relationship with a rav for psak and hadracha, one must also have an ongoing relationship with a dayan who can answer the myriad Choshen Mishpat questions that come up daily.

#### Three types of onaah

There are three types of overcharging that are included in the prohibition of onaah, all of which involve taking unfair advantage:

(1) Fraud – when the item being sold contains a significant flaw that the seller conceals or otherwise misrepresents.

(2) Overpricing – when one party to the transaction is unaware of the market value of the item.

(3) No recourse – when someone is aware that he is being overcharged, but he has no recourse, because of the circumstances.

I will now explain a bit more about each of these types of onaah.

#### (1) Fraud

It is prohibited to hide a defect or to misrepresent an item. For example, the Mishnah (Bava Metzia 60a) and the Gemara (ibid. 60b) prohibit selling watered-down products, or painting something to hide a flaw or to make it look newer than it is (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 228:9). One may not add inferior material to a quality product when the purchaser will see only the quality product (Bava Metzia 59b-60a; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 228:10, 11).

Onaah is prohibited not only in sales, but also in other transactions, such as hiring people or contracting work (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:35, 36, 16).

#### Shidduchin

Holding back significant medical, emotional or spiritual issues that could affect a shidduch is also prohibited because of onaah. To quote the words of the Sefer Chassidim (#507): “When arranging matches for your children or other family members, do not hide from the other party medical issues that would have been reason for them to reject the shidduch, lest they afterwards choose to annul the marriage. Similarly, you should tell them about deficiencies in halachic observance significant enough that the other party would have rejected the marriage.”

By the way, there is no halachic requirement to reveal detrimental information to a shadchan, and one is not required to inform the other side before the couple meets. However, it must be told sometime before the shidduch is finalized. This particular topic is more detailed than we can discuss in this article. Indeed, I devoted a different article to this topic, entitled May I Keep the Skeletons in the Closet?, which is available on my website, RabbiKaganoff.com. There are also other articles on the website that touch on this broad topic, which can be found with the search word shidduch.

#### Insider trading

Insider trading, meaning buying or selling a commodity or security on the basis of information that is not available to the general public, is now a heavily punished felony in the United States, but was once legal there and is still legal in many countries



of the world. Halacha prohibits all forms of insider trading because of onaah, since the insider is taking advantage of the other party.

## (2) Overpricing

A second type of onaah is when there is no flaw or other problem with the quality of the item being transacted, but the price paid is greater than the item's market value.

Overcharging of this nature is also prohibited because of onaah.

### Over a sixth

When the price, or range of price, of an item can be established, if an item was sold at more than one sixth over the market price, the aggrieved party has a right to return the item for a full refund (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:4.) For example, the stores that stock this item sell it for up to \$600, and the seller charged the purchaser over \$700. In this instance, according to halacha, the purchaser can return the item and get his money back. (There are detailed halachos that govern how much time he has to make this claim.)

One can demand return compensation only when the party did not use the item once he realized that he had been overcharged.

Another case where the item cannot be returned: The aggrieved party realized that he was overcharged, but decided to keep the item anyway. In the interim, the price of the item dropped such that he can now get a much better deal. Since his reason to back out on the deal is not because of the original overcharge, he may not invalidate the original sale (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:9).

It is interesting to note that there are authorities who rule that even the aggrieving party can withdraw from the deal when the price was so much off the mark. This is because they contend that the buyer does not agree to a transaction if he knows that the price was so disproportionate to the item's value (Rema, Choshen Mishpat 227:4.)

### One sixth

The halacha is that if the overcharge was by exactly one sixth, the deal holds, but the aggrieved party is entitled to be refunded the overcharge sum (one sixth of what he paid). Thus, if the item was worth \$600 and it was sold for \$700, the purchaser is entitled to receive \$100 back.

### Less than a sixth

If the overcharge was less than a sixth, which means that the price was clearly too high but less than a sixth over the market value, the deal is valid, and the aggrieved party is not entitled to any compensation. Thus, if the item was worth \$600 and it was sold for \$690, the deal remains as is.

Some major authorities conclude that a yarei shamayim should return the difference, even in a case where it amounted to less than a sixth (Sma 227:14).

Is it permitted?

At this stage, we can address one of our opening questions: "Am I permitted to charge a little bit above the market price for an item?" Granted that the deal will be valid if someone did this, is one permitted to do so lechatchilah?

Indeed, this is an issue that is disputed by the halachic authorities (Tur, Choshen Mishpat 227, quoting Rosh). The Tur explains that min haTorah, overcharging is prohibited if one is aware that this is the case, but Chazal were lenient, because it is difficult for anyone to be this accurate. However, many prominent authorities are of the opinion that it is prohibited to overcharge intentionally, even by a very small amount (Aruch Hashulchan, Choshen Mishpat 227:2).

The Tur concludes that a yarei shamayim, a G-d fearing person, should try to act strictly regarding this law.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that it is uncertain whether it is permitted to overcharge by less than a sixth (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:6).

Furthermore, when the price on a specific item is very exact, because of government regulations or market conditions, even those authorities who are lenient about overcharging a small amount will agree in such a case that it is prohibited to charge any more than the accepted market price (Aruch Hashulchan, Choshen Mishpat 227:3).

### Cash fast

Here is a situation in which someone cannot demand return compensation, even though he sold the item at way below its value: A seller needed to raise cash quickly and therefore sold items without checking their proper value. He cannot request his money back by claiming that he was underpaid, because it is clear that, at the time he sold them, he was interested in selling for whatever cash he could get (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:9).

### All items?

The Mishnah (Bava Metzia 56b) quotes a dispute between tana'im whether the laws of overcharging by more than a sixth apply to items such as sifrei Torah, animals and precious stones. The tanna kamma contends that the laws of onaah apply, including the right to have the item returned, whereas Rabbi Yehudah holds that these laws do not apply to such items. In the case of sifrei Torah, this is because the pricing is difficult to determine, and in the cases of animals and precious stones, because the purchaser may have a special need for this specific animal or stone which makes it worth more to him

than the usual market price. For example, this animal has the same strength as an animal the purchaser already owns, making it possible to pair them together in work; or this stone matches well to the specific color and size he is using for a piece of jewelry (Bava Metzia 58b).

### Wartime

Although most tana'im disagree, the Gemara (Bava Metzia 58b) adds that Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseira ruled that there is no onaah for selling horses, shields or swords during wartime, because your life might depend on it. I presume this means that during a war, the value of these items far exceeds their normal market price, and that, therefore, even an inflated price is not considered overcharging. The halacha does not follow the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda ben Beseira. Therefore, should someone be overcharged for the purchase of these materials during wartime, he is not required to pay more than the accepted market price.

### Overcharged esrog

At this point, we are in a position to examine our opening question: "My esrog dealer charged me \$150 for an esrog. My brother-in-law, who knows the business, told me that he overcharged me, and the esrog is not worth more than \$35. Can I get my money back?"

This question is discussed in Shu"t Beis Yitzchak (Orach Chayim 108:4). He explains that the laws of invalidating a transaction because of an overcharge do not apply to an esrog purchased for use on Sukkos, unless the esrog was not kosher. His reason is that an individual has all sorts of reasons why he wants to purchase a specific esrog, and that, therefore, high-end esrogim do not have a definitive price. We could compare this to someone who purchases a painting at auction, and an art expert contends that the purchaser overpaid. The opinion of the expert does not allow the buyer to invalidate his acquisition.

### Expert error

Let us return to another of our opening questions: "I purchased a rare coin from a dealer, and he clearly undercharged me. Am I required to tell him about it?"

An expert can also be overcharged or underpaid (Mishnah, Bava Metzia 51a; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:14). Therefore, the purchaser is required to point this out to the dealer.

Furthermore, if you know that the price of an item has gone up, but the seller is unaware of this, you are required to let him know (Aruch Hashulchan, Choshen Mishpat 227:1).

### Mistaken overcharging

A person who overcharged someone in error is required to bring it to his attention. All the halachos mentioned above of overcharging apply, even if it was unintentional (Pischei Choshen 4:10:fn #1).

### Real estate

The Mishnah (Bava Metzia 56a) states that there is no onaah regarding real estate.

This means that the concept of a deal being invalidated when the price is more than a sixth overpriced does not relate to land. Nevertheless, it is prohibited to deceive someone in matters germane to property, such as by withholding information that affects the value of the property or its utility (Sma 227:51, quoting Maharshal; Pischei Teshuvah 227:21, quoting Ramban and Sefer Hachinuch).

### Title search

If someone sells a property based on his assumption that proper ownership has been established, which is later legally challenged, the purchaser has a claim to get his money back (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 226:5).

### Legal tender

At this point, let us examine another of our opening questions: "I noticed that someone tried to scrape off some of the metal on a coin that I have. May I use it?"

In earlier days, a coin's value was usually determined by its weight and purity. In today's world, the value of a coin or other currency is determined predominantly by the market forces germane to that country's currency, but not by the quality of the individual coin, unless it is damaged to the point that it will no longer be accepted in the marketplace. Therefore, today, it is acceptable to use a damaged coin or bill that the average merchant or the bank will accept (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 226:6). One is even lechatchilah permitted to give someone a damaged coin or bill and hoard the nice-looking ones for himself, since it is not harming the other party in any way (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:6 and Sma).

### Counterfeit money

However, this is true only when the bill or the coin is damaged, but is still legitimate and legal currency. It is forbidden to use counterfeit money, even if you ended up with it in error. Once you know that the currency you are holding is counterfeit, it is not only forbidden to use it, you are required to destroy it (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:18). It would seem to me that it is permitted to turn the counterfeit item over to the authorities for investigation and enforcement.

### Calculated profit

According to what we have said until now, a person is obligated to know the market value of a product that he is selling, and he will violate onah if he sells it at a price that is clearly, significantly above the market price. Does this mean that someone must be aware of the fluctuations in market price of items he is selling at every moment? Is there any way one can avoid having to be constantly aware of the market values of the items he is selling?

Yes, there is. It is halachically permitted to do the following: A seller may tell the purchaser, "This is the cost at which I acquired this item, and I add this percentage for my profit margin. Therefore, I arrive at this particular price" (Bava Metzia 51b as explained by Rambam, Hilchos Mechirah 13:5; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:27).

(3) No recourse

Previously, I mentioned a third type of onah in which a person is aware that he is being overcharged, but circumstances force him to pay more than he should for the item. There are several examples of this. One is when a business or cartel creates a monopoly and then raises prices because they control the market. Since the halachos germane to this situation are somewhat complicated, I will leave this topic for a different time.

Another example is when someone has a serious need for a product now – and the seller takes unfair advantage, insisting on a price that is well beyond what the item should fetch. For example, someone needs a medicine and can find it only in a certain drugstore, which decides to increase the price tenfold, simply to gain huge, unfair profit. This is forbidden.

Was the seller wrong?

I once purchased a four-volume reprint of an old, very hard-to-read edition of a relatively rare sefer. Subsequently, I discovered that the sefer had been reprinted in a beautiful format, information that the bookdealer must surely have known. Had I known that the new edition existed, no doubt I would have purchased it instead. I will leave my readers with the following question: Was the bookdealer permitted to sell me the old edition without telling me that a new one exists? Does this qualify, halachically, as insider trading or deception, and is it therefore prohibited as onah? Conclusion:

The Gemara tells us that the great tanna Rabbi Yehoshua, the rebbe of Rabbi Akiva, was asked: "What is the best means to become wealthy?" Rabbi Yehoshua advised that, aside from being very careful in one's business dealings, the most important factor is to daven to He Who owns all wealth (Niddah 70b). A Jew must realize that Hashem's Torah and His awareness and supervision of our fate are all-encompassing. Making this realization an integral part of our thinking is the true benchmark of how His kedusha influences our lives.

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<https://torah.org/learning/is-israel-palestine/>

### **Is Israel Palestine?**

JewishAnswers.org |

Question: I am Christian and have visited several different churches in the past few years. I often hear Israel referred to as Palestine. What's going on here? I don't find such reference in the Old Testament in my bible other than referencing the Philistines. Your opinion please.

Answer: Thanks for the question. It's a good one. I didn't know that American churches were commonly referring to the Land of Israel, the Holy Land, as Palestine. As you say, the Bible speaks of the ancient Philistines, or Filistin, or Plishtim (in Biblical Hebrew). To call someone a "philistine" is to call that person crude, uncultivated, bad mannered, and, particularly, insensitive to art and culture. The term comes from the Bible's depiction of the Philistines, who were notoriously insensitive to Torah.

Ancient sailors called the coastland of Israel Philistia, after the people who lived on the Mediterranean coast. In fact, ancient Philistia had been devastated, first by Samson, who destroyed the cream of Philistia, the nobles and leaders, gathered in the Dogon (fish-god) temple that Samson brought down; then by Israel's kings Saul and David, when the Jews or Hebrews finally destroyed the Philistines' local monopoly on ironworking (the Bible describes this), and organized militarily against the Philistines, and by David's successors. They still inhabited the coast, though; finally, in the time of the Maccabees, the Syrian-Greek empire's agents rounded up most of the surviving Philistines, their allies, plundered their cities, and sold them into slavery – to help pay for their several unsuccessful but enormously costly campaigns against the Jews. By Roman times the proud Philistine cities, Aza (Gaza), Ashkelon, and some others I can't remember, were just a bunch of ruins.

After the several Roman-Jewish wars, the ancient Romans tried to erase even the memory of Israel, so they changed the name of Judea to Philistina – in fact, to Felix Philistina, Happy Philistia. What made Philistia so happy was, supposedly, the absence of Jews (and the abject state of the Jews who were there, crushed in war, defeated and then deliberately impoverished further). From then on, the Romans referred to the

Holy Land, not just on maps but in diplomatic and all sort of legal documents, as Philistia.

Israel's prophets promised that w/out Jews the Holy Land would "enjoy its rest" and empty out, and that is indeed what happened. Except for a brief period, about 20 years, in the time of Genghis Khan, when almost the whole land was all but completely abandoned, the Jews never left the land, but their numbers were always small and they lived as a subject people, no longer the masters of the country.

"Arab" comes from the Arabic for "wanderer" or "vagabond." They regarded the land as "the Jews' land" [eretz shel yehudit], which they also believed to be full of ghosts – Jewish ghosts – and cursed. America's Mark Twain visited around 1870 and saw it the same way – as a barren has-been of a land, a desert, poor and unhealthy, almost empty of people. He asked, "Can the curse of the Deity improve a land?" (The Innocents Abroad – New York, c. 1876). The Ottoman Turkish empire governed the land – interestingly, as a department of Syria, with its capitol in Damascus, while the department capitol was Ramallah – the Muslim Turks and Arabs didn't care that much for Jerusalem. As for the benefits of Turkish rule, the Arabs have a saying: "In the footsteps of the Turk, no grass grows."

In the last third of the 19th century the modern Zionist movement began. When young, mostly secular-minded Jews began returning to the Land in the late 19th and early 20th century, they called themselves Palestinians – to distinguish themselves not just from other Jews but from the local Turks and Arabs, who regarded themselves as (wait for it) Turks and Arabs. The Jews' institutions had Palestine in their names – the Palestine Savings Bank, the Palestine Post (now the Jerusalem Post) – and the American newspapers, both mainstream and Jewish, called the Jewish, Zionist emissaries from Israel "Palestinians." Only in 1948, when "Jewish Palestine" won independence from the British, the parts of the British Mandate Territory of Palestine that the Jews could hang onto became Israel, and the Palestinians – who were at that time all Jewish – became Israelis.

Sometime in the 1960's the name Palestinian began to be applied to the Arabs of the Holy Land. I've heard that it was an extreme left-wing Jewish idea-man who came up with the idea, but who knows? At any rate, in 1964 a small group of Christian Arab Marxists and other secularists, along with some Muslim and Muslim-descended secular radicals, took the name Palestine Liberation Organization, and they began calling themselves and the other non-Jews in the area, whether Arab or not, Palestinians.

Ever since, we have been hearing about "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" – just as though there were such a people as the Palestinians (as opposed to vying tribes and clans that detest each other spread around Gaza and Judea and Samaria (the West Bank of the Jordan River), in United Nations' supported 60-year old plus "refugee camps," and throughout the world. According to Hamas, as well as the Palestine Liberation Organization, every non-Jew (or is it only Arabs) who 1) lives in the area, or ever lived in the Arab, or who had a single parent who ever lived in the area, is a Palestinian.

Why do these churches prefer to call the land Palestine instead of Israel? Because they prefer the narrative of a struggling third-world people who were cruelly disposed of their incredibly rich land by the perfidious colonialist and racist Jews and their fat-cat capitalist allies to the truth.

Thank you for your question. For more on the subject, you might want to go to our First Covenant website – it's made for non-Jews, or Noahides, who want to know more about the Universal laws that make up the core of the Hebrew Biblical Tradition, and about the role of non-Jews in the Hebrew Prophecy and Torah – and our articles that address it. [\\_Click here: First Covenant Articles.](#) Scroll down to the articles under the subject heading, From Genesis to 9/11, Islam, Israel, and Amalek. Believe it or not, you'll find some pieces there that go directly to your question.

I hope this helps.

Michael Dallen

Question: Are Jews offended by this or am I being overly sensitive?? When I hear Palestine, I always think of Arafat and the PLO and wonder if others do too. ?

Answer: Thanks again, your question shows real empathy. For me too, and a lot of other Jewish people, the use of the word Palestine for the Holy Land instead of Israel suggests a preference for the propaganda of Israel's Arab enemies, and other anti-Semites, over truth. For example, a Nazi doctor, one of Dr. Mengele's associates, who had the habit of searching out identical twins among the Jews who went through Auschwitz and murdering them just to get their skulls, for display, was just found to have died a few years ago in Egypt; he left behind diaries and letters in which he railed against what he called the vile injustices perpetrated by Israel against the true owners of the Land, "the suffering Palestinians." (Who would have thought that a mass murderer like that would be so concerned with human suffering, or with "justice"?) To him, and Nazis generally, it's always Palestine, never Israel.

Naturally, not everyone who calls it Palestine and speaks of Palestinians hates Israel. Some people call it Palestine to refer to the entire Land of Israel, including most of

Jordan, southern Lebanon, southern Syria, and of course Judea and Samaria (the West Bank of the Jordan River), as well as Gaza. The entire Holy Land, while still small in relative terms (it would fit easily inside several Texas COUNTIES, or within one of the smaller American states, like New Jersey or Vermont), includes a lot more than just “Green Line Israel.” And, so long as the State of Israel’s political leaders keep insisting that most of the Land really belongs to Israel’s Arab enemies, someone who calls it Palestine may just be referring to the whole land: Metropolitan Israel, you might say, including Israel and everything that the Bible calls Eretz Yisroel – the Land of Israel.

Oddly, to me, even some folks who insist that the whole Land of Israel belongs to the People of Israel often seem to forget that the Jews’ relationship to the land isn’t just one of privilege, or rights of ownership, but of obligation, including a direct responsibility to God, the Creator of the Universe, to rid the land of horrible, offensive-to-God, anti-Torah practices and anti-Torah people, too. Israel’s obligation to “Palestine” is to turn it, under G’d, into an exemplary country including an exemplary society, a Jewish society, to make the godly, “higher-consciousness” principles of Torah operational in the world, for the good not just of Jews or Israel but the whole of humankind – including, incidentally, the entire Arab Nation.

Michael Dallen

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> date: Nov 9, 2023

**WE CANNOT BE SILENT: A CALL TO ACTION**

**Rabbi Moshe Hauer | NOVEMBER 7, 2023**

Once again, the threat is not a Jewish problem. It is a human problem.

There are moments when we cannot be silent. When our voices need to be heard for Am Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael, for American Jewry and for America itself.

On **October 6, 1943**, three days before Yom Kippur, 400 Orthodox rabbis arrived in the nation’s capital to participate in a march calling attention to the plight of the Jews of Europe. It was the season of teshuvah and the time when our tefillos are best received, b’himatzo, yet these rabbanim chose to dedicate some of that sacred time to the decidedly nonspiritual activity of lobbying in Washington.

They understood that in this world we must raise our voices both to the heavens and to the humanly powerful. America was the country best positioned to stand up to the existential threat facing the Jewish People, and they needed to make every effort to raise their voices and activate its leadership. And, in the words of William Randolph Hearst, the threat was not a Jewish problem. It was a human problem.

Eighty years later, world Jewry faces what are arguably the most serious threats it has faced since the Holocaust. On October 7, Israel was brutally attacked, hundreds of its citizens taken hostage, and continues to face existential threats on multiple fronts. In America and the world over, the attacks and their aftermath unleashed a surging and shocking wave of anti-Semitism that has engulfed the universities and the streets of many of our cities, creating genuine fear for the future of the Jews in this blessed country. Jews have opened their hearts with extra tefillos after every minyan, via their WhatsApp chats, in the middle of their day’s work, and at innumerable communal tefillah gatherings. Along with tefillah, there has been an outpouring of tzedakah and meaningful teshuvah, reflecting on communal failures of machlokes and more. In a sense, the Yamim Noraim of 5784 have not yet ended.

Yet once again we need to interrupt our spiritual efforts and go to Washington. Once again, it is America that is best positioned to offer human protection and support the Jewish People, in both Israel and America. It has been doing so, but it needs to keep at it, and we need to make every effort to raise our voices and activate its leadership to act even more decisively. We cannot be silent. Once again, the threat is not a Jewish problem. It is a human problem.

**On Tuesday, November 14, at 1 p.m., on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.,** there will be a mass rally in support of the Jews of Israel and America and insisting on freedom for the hundreds held hostage. Tens of thousands of voices will be raised in unison to stand for truth and for life and to chase away the darkness that has been spreading over our world. We all need to be there.

Anu ratzim v’heim ratzim. We march and others march. The streets of Washington — like the streets of every major city — have played host to many protestors in the past month. But we will march differently from them. Ours will not be a call for death or elimination, but a plea for life and peace. While others filled the streets with ugliness and bloodcurdling chants calling for our extermination, “from the river to the sea,” we will advocate for life and peace, for the freedom of innocent hostages, for Israel’s right to defend itself from those who continuously seek to destroy it, and for the freedom to live in this country without hatred and threats.

The kol Yaakov, the Jewish voice, has been defined and refined by hours of humble prayer to Hashem. That same voice, when raised toward the human powers that be, will do so with firm resolve and with its characteristically humble refinement. We will raise our eyes to Hashem and our voices to man and we will daven with all our hearts that our efforts be effective, that Hashem will direct the hearts of the leaders of this

country to show compassion and respect to the Jews of America and to the government of Israel, allowing us all to live in safety and security, u’va l’Tziyon go’eil v’nomar amein.

Rabbi Moshe Hauer is the executive vice president of the Orthodox Union.

## **The Hebron Massacre of 1929: A Recently Revealed Letter of a Survivor**

by Meyer Greenberg

The massacre of the Jews of Hebron in 1929 put an end to the ancient Jewish community at the burial site of the patriarchs. The riots which erupted throughout the country were an organized Arab attack against the entire Zionist enterprise with the aim of preventing the eventual establishment of a Jewish state. They were the most violent eruption until that time in the conflict that has been termed "one long war between Arabs and Jews comparable to the Hundred Years War in medieval Europe."<sup>[1]</sup>

Unlike other parts of the country, where Jews resisted with force, the Hebron community reflected the mind set of the pre modern Jew, conditioned by almost 2,000 years of Jewish powerlessness. The reaction of the local leadership to the impending attack was to turn to the authorities -- the British appointed governor and the Arab notables -- for protection, which, when it arrived, was much too late.

The events in Hebron and my grandparents' miraculous rescue are vividly described in a letter written by my grandfather nine days later to my mother, Blanche Greenberg.

In 1907, the peak year of Jewish immigration into the United States, my maternal grandfather, Aharon Reuven Bernzweig, his wife Breine Zuch Bernzweig, and their six children left Stanislaw, Galicia (then Austrian Poland), and settled in New York City. Twenty years later, in 1927, after their children were grown and they had accumulated a modest capital, they were in a position to fulfill the dream of many traditional Jews to spend their retirement years in Eretz Hakodesh, the Holy Land.

Late in the spring of 1929, my grandparents travelled to the United States in order to attend my brother's bar mitzvah. Upon their return they decided to escape the heat of a Tel Aviv summer by vacationing in Hebron. Five days later the riots broke out.

Zeide Bernzweig's health was affected by the Hebron ordeal, and he died of a heart attack in 1936. Baba Breine continued to live at 16 Bialik Street in Tel Aviv until her death in 1945. That is where I would visit and spend Shabbat in 1937-38, when I studied at Hebrew University.

Aharon and Breine Bernzweig were buried on the Mount of Olives. In the summer of 1967, after the reunification of Jerusalem, my wife and I found and restored their desecrated graves.

While members of the family knew that Zeide had written a letter about Hebron, we were not familiar with the actual text. I found the original in my parents' papers after their death. The Yiddish is closely written on ten pages and is difficult to read. I am therefore greatly indebted to Helen G. Meyrowitz, who deciphered the text and prepared the initial translation, which I have revised and edited.

While preparing the letter for publication, I found clarifying and corroborating information in the testimonies of other eyewitnesses, preserved in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. From the survivor documents I was able to identify others who were in the group of 33 who shared the same hiding place, as well as the names of the Arabs who saved their lives.

### **MEGILLAT HEBRON**

With the help of God, Monday, Torah portion Shoftim V'shotrim, 5689 [September 2, 1929], Tel Aviv, may it be built up and firmly established, speedily in our days, Amen.

My dear children, may you live and be well.

Even before I begin writing, my hand is already shaking, my head swims, and every limb is trembling. I am unable to get control of myself, because the cries are still ringing in my ears. It is one week today since we came back from the bitter tragedy. Each day I want to write to you, but when I sit down to write, all my limbs start to quiver and tears pour from my eyes, so I have to stop. Today for the first time I was able to pull myself together, with all my strength, with superhuman effort. I got up at dawn and sat down to write. I hadn't started yet, but even before I could begin, my pen was already soaked with tears. Although it seems that I am writing this letter with ink, you should know that it is not ink, but

tears.

Now, let me get to the point. I don't really know where to start and where to finish, because my blood is still churning inside me. But I will begin my Megillah of Hebron. Children, as you already know from my earlier letter, Mama, may she live and be well, had been feeling very weak, ever since we came back from our trip to America. Moving to a new apartment and all the hard work involved added to it. The apartment wasn't finished and there was endless aggravation because the work was not being done to her liking. On top of everything else, she couldn't bear the terribly hot weather. It was awful; the perspiring was beyond human endurance. She lay in bed all day because she was too weak to walk about. I kept begging Mama, may she live and be well, with tears in my eyes, that we needed a change of climate. It was impossible to convince her because she didn't want to abandon the house and leave it hefker. Finally she realized that she had no choice and she agreed. She did not want to go by herself, only with me. So we left home and went to the country to Hebron.[2]

We arrived on Sunday, August 18th. There we went to a guest house, where we got a very nice room and came to an agreement on the charges. We paid for one month in advance, since we planned to stay for several months, until after all the holidays, when it would be cooler.[3]

From the very beginning, things did not go well. Although the air was very good and the weather cool, and Mama, may she be well, did not perspire any more, she caught a severe cold and had to stay in bed. In addition, there were swarms of biting mosquitoes. We had no choice but to hope that things would get better. Unfortunately, things don't always turn out the way we would like, and no one knows what the future holds.

Ever since we arrived in Hebron, we had heard talk of disturbances in Jerusalem, that Arabs and Jews were fighting. We didn't have any specific details, but there were rumors in the air, so we were not in a happy state of mind. But what could we do about it?

On Friday, the 23rd, we heard that things had gotten worse in Jerusalem. Everyone became very uneasy and walked about without a head. We had forebodings that something terrible was about to happen but what, exactly, we did not know. I was fearful and kept questioning the local people, who had lived there for generations. They assured me that in Hebron there could never be a pogrom, because as many times as there had been trouble elsewhere in Eretz Israel, Hebron had remained quiet. The local population had always lived very peacefully with the Arabs.

But my heart told me that the situation was serious. Hebron alone, without the surrounding villages, has a population of 24,000. Including the villages, there are 60,000 people. Of what significance is the Jewish community there, a mere 100 families?[4] What could we do to protect ourselves? We could only comfort ourselves with the hope that God, blessed be He, would have mercy, and the troubles would run their course quietly.

Friday afternoon the situation worsened. We heard that on the street Arabs had already beaten several Jews with clubs. Next we heard that all the Jewish stores had closed. The atmosphere was explosive. Everybody was afraid to go out into the street, and we locked ourselves in our rooms. Things looked really bad. What should we do? "No one could go out, and no one could come in "[Joshua 6.1]; everybody was fearful. By now the local Jews too were saying that the situation was serious.

Suddenly, just one hour before candle lighting, pandemonium broke loose. Window panes were smashed on all sides. In our building, they broke every window and began throwing large stones inside. We hid ourselves. They were breaking windows in all the Jewish homes. Now we were in deathly fear. As we were blessing the Shabbes candles, we heard that in the Yeshiva one young man had been killed. It was bitter, the beginning of a slaughter.

In the meantime, mounted policemen arrived, and all became still outside. We thought that our salvation had come. All through the night the police patrolled the streets. But it seemed that they were having problems. You can understand that I walked the floor all the night terribly worried, with my heart in my mouth. On Shabbes morning, we saw that the situation was getting worse. Cars kept racing back and forth through the streets. They were filled with Arabs armed with long iron bars, long knives, and axes. The Arabs kept screaming that they were going to Jerusalem to slaughter all the Jews. Soon many Jews gathered in our house. We held a meeting and talked over the situation, but couldn't think of anything we could do to protect ourselves, since none of us had any weapons. Many of the people remained in our house, because by then it was too dangerous to try to go home.

Now let me tell you about the massacre. Right after eight o'clock in the morning we heard screams. Arabs had begun breaking into Jewish homes. The screams pierced the heart of the heavens. We didn't know what to do. Our house

had two floors. We were downstairs and a doctor lived on the second floor.[5] We figured that we would be safe in the doctor's apartment, but how could we get up there? The stairs were on the outside of the building, but it wasn't safe to go out. So we chopped through the ceiling and that way we climbed up to the doctor's house. Well, after being there only a little while, we realized that we were still in danger because by that time the Arabs had almost reached our house. They were going from door to door, slaughtering everyone who was inside. The screams and the moans were terrible. People were crying Help! Help! But what could we do? There were thirty three of us. Soon, soon, all of us would be lost.[6]

Just then, God, blessed be He, in His great mercy, sent us an Arab who lived in back of our house. He insisted that we come down from the doctor's apartment and enter his house through the back door. He took us to his cellar, a large room without windows to the outside. We all went in, while he, together with several Arab women, stood outside near the door.[7] As we lay there on the floor, we heard the screams as Arabs were slaughtering Jews. It was unbearable. As for us, we felt that the danger was so great that we had no chance of coming out alive. Each one of us said his vidui [his confession in anticipation of death]. At any moment we could be slaughtered, for double edged swords were already at our throats. We had not even the slightest hope of remaining alive. We just begged that it should already be done and over.

Five times the Arabs stormed our house with axes, and all the while those wild murderers kept screaming at the Arabs who were standing guard to hand over the Jews. They, in turn, shouted back that they had not hidden any Jews and knew nothing. They begged the attackers not to destroy their homes.

We heard everything. In addition, the little children in our group kept crying. We were in deadly fear that the murderers outside would hear them.[8]

As for me, I was already 99 percent in the next world. All the time that we were in the Arab's house, I lay there on the floor in terrible pain [from a heart attack].[9] It just happened that there were two doctors in the house. They sat near me and they saved my life.[10]

Well, I cannot continue describing the destruction any longer. It took several hours to us it seemed like years until all became quiet outside. We still lay there, waiting for the Angel of Death to finish with us as quickly as possible.

But God heard our prayers. Suddenly, the door opened, and the police walked in. They had been told that we were hidden there. They demanded that we go along with them, and they would take us to a safe place. We were afraid to go, because we thought they themselves might slaughter us. Eventually, they succeeded in convincing us that they had our good in mind. Since we couldn't walk there, they brought automobiles and took us, under police guard, to the police station, which was in a safe location.[11]

When we reached the police station, there was acted out a real life dance of the devils, for the police had brought together those who were still alive, the surviving remnant. During the earlier confusion, naturally, no one could have known what was happening to anyone else, but there in the police station, everyone first discovered whom he had lost. As people told each other about their misfortunes and how many casualties they had suffered, there burst out a terrible cry, everyone shrieking and crying at the same time. It was unbearable. Blessed God, give us strength! It was beyond human endurance. Three women went out of their minds right there.

In short, we were in the police station three days and three nights. We couldn't eat and we couldn't sleep. We lay on the ground in filth, just listening to the crying and the groaning.[12] Finally, God, blessed be He, had mercy on us and [on Monday night] the police again transferred us to Jerusalem. There we stayed in the Nathan Straus Health Center for two days and two nights, and on Wednesday we came back to Tel Aviv.[13]

I am writing you only about our troubles. I don't have the strength to write about the additional troubles of the whole Jewish community. That you will surely read in the American newspapers. It is very tragic, but everything is from God.

Now I will tell you the total number of people who were slaughtered in Hebron. As of today, there are 63 holy martyrs. While we were still there, 58 were buried in a common grave, 51 males and 7 females; up to today, there are 5 more martyrs from among the wounded. Of the wounded, 49 are in serious condition, and 17 slightly wounded. Who knows how many more fatalities there will be? The Yeshiva suffered 23 killed and 17 wounded. Eight of the dead and 14 of the wounded from the Yeshiva are American boys. Gevald! Twenty three living Torah scrolls were burned! May the heavens open and avenge us.

All the houses of study with their Torah scrolls and holy books were burned; everything in them was destroyed. All the homes were plundered; not even a straw was left!

We ourselves were left practically naked and barefoot. Since we had planned to stay there a few months, we had taken along all our clothes. Mama, may she live and be well, was left with only the one dress she was wearing and I, too, had only what I was wearing. They even took my talis and tefilin. Before Shabbes, I gave the money that I had brought along to the innkeeper for safekeeping. The Arabs took that money too, quite a large amount.

To make matters worse, the situation in the entire country is very bad, and no one is paying his debts. I have notes for several thousand dollars. Last week, notes for \$750 came due, but no one paid. Who knows what will happen in the future? God forbid that we shouldn't be ruined altogether.[14] We're trying to keep our heads above water while we keep hearing that here things are bad and there things are bad. May God, blessed be He, have mercy and help all the Jews, including us, that we should at least be well and be able to bear up under these trials. We Jews have had enough troubles!

I have no patience to write about family matters because my hand is still trembling.

Just one thing, my dear children, may you live and be well, I ask of you that you put away this letter for the generations. Each year, at an agreed upon day, you should all meet and give thanks and praise to God, blessed be He, who saved your parents from this great catastrophe, and each one of you should make a generous contribution to charity. The miracle took place on Shabbes, Torah portion Ekev, the 18th day of the month of Av, 5689 [August 24, 1929], in Hebron.

Your father, who wishes you the best, writing to you through tears.

Aharon [Aharon Reuven Bernzweig]  
[(Wife) Breine Zuch Bernzweig]

## **APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL SUMMARY**

Total number of Jewish residents in Hebron: 750 800

Jews present in Hebron at the time (including visitors): 550 estimated

Residents not present: 250 300

Yeshiva students and staff away between terms

People visiting or working elsewhere

Killed in the riots: 67

Yeshiva students and staff: 24

Buried in mass grave: 59

Wounded and survived: 53

Survived and uninjured: (assembled in police station after the riots): 430

Saved by Arabs: 280 300

Saved in other ways: (hiding, homes not reached, lay among bodies of dead and wounded): 130 estimated

Arabs who saved Jews: 25 estimated

Arabs who participated in attacks and plunder: thousands

## APPENDIX 2

Hadassah's Dr. Kitayin Testifies:

"At about 11:00 A.M. on Friday, while I was at work [in the Health Clinic], the nurse, Shoshana Bat Haim, was told by one of the frequenters of the dispensary, Rashad Sa'ad, 18 years old and a government official, that preparations were being made to kill Jews in Hebron. The nurse called me and reported the matter. I answered, 'Tell him that these days one doesn't ordinarily murder people.'

At the same time an Arab guide named Bakri came into the dispensary. When the nurse requested two piasters for the medicine, he replied that he would put out her eyes that day. The nurse called me and told me what the Arab had said, and I chased him out of the building. After a few minutes another guide came in and begged me to forgive the man. I forgave him and he came in for the medicine."

After 10:00 on Saturday morning, when the slaughter had ceased, Dr. Kitayin was sought out and taken to the Police Station to tend the wounded. Together with them were others who were not wounded but "whose faces and clothes were full of blood. They told me that they had lain near the dead and had been saved by being thought dead." Shortly afterward the wounded and the corpses were moved to the government Health Office. (Kitayin Statement, op. cit., Annex 72.)

There Dr. Kitayin worked without stop for 36 hours until Sunday evening, when ambulances arrived from Hadassah to transport the wounded to Jerusalem. Assisting Kitayin were the local Jewish medical staff, Dr. Elkanah and the Hadassah nurse. Toward evening on Saturday they were joined by a surgeon, Dr. John MacQueen, the Government Medical Officer from Jerusalem, his assistant and two nurses. Together they operated upon and treated about 20 of the 60 wounded. (Letter from Dr. Kitayin to the Palestine Zionist Executive dated September 25, 1929, in C.Z.A., S25/4601, and Oded Avissar, p. 418.)

### Notes:

[1] For the significance of the riots see Naomi W. Cohen, *The Year after the Riots: American Responses to the Palestine Crisis of 1929-30*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988; and Aaron S. Klieman, ed. *The Rise of Israel -- The Turn toward Violence 1920-1929*, New York and London: Garland Publishers, 1987, p. 12.

[2] In those days Hebron in the south and Safed in the north were favorite summer vacation sites for the traditional Jewish community. Hebron, 3,000 feet above sea level, is 19 miles south of Jerusalem.

[3] The guest house was called Eshel Avraham, the Tamarisk Tree of Abraham, a classical Jewish symbol of hospitality. It was operated by Haim Shneerson and was one of five or more small family run lodgings for visitors. Students at the Hebron Yeshiva were housed with private families. See Statment of Yehuda Leib Shneerson, son of Haim Shneerson, Central Zionist Archives (hereinafter C.Z.A.), 1929 Riots, Notes on Hebron, File S25/4601, Annex 16. Eshel Avraham was the first hotel in Hebron and was located in one of five buildings constructed by the two grandfathers of Yehuda Leib Shneerson during the period of Turkish rule over Palestine. Hard times forced them to sell the buildings to Arabs. On the main floor there were four rooms and a synagogue. See Yehuda Leib Shneerson, *Hoy Hebron, Hebron!* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, Yair Publishers, 1980, p.23.

[4] The entire Jewish community of Hebron numbered between 750 and 800. Included in these figures are about 200 students and staff of Yeshivat Hebron Keneset Israel. In 1924, Rabbi Moses Mordecai Epstein had transplanted 150 students and faculty en masse from Slobodka in Lithuania to Hebron. Rabbi Epstein was notable also for his interest in the building up of Palestine. While at the Volozhin Yeshiva in the 1880s he encouraged the Hovevei Zion group organized



by the students, and he himself was a member of the Hovevei Zion delegation which purchased the land for the settlement of Hadera in 1891.

A population figure of 20,000 Moslems and 800 Jews in the town of Hebron is given in the memorandum of the Palestine Zionist Executive, prepared by Mordecai Eliash and dated October 14, 1929, for the government Commission of Enquiry into the 1929 Riots, C.Z.A., S25/4601. The census of 1931, however, lists 17,531 Moslems in the urban area and 50,100 in the rural portion of the Hebron sub district.

[5] In his disposition after the riots he identified himself as Dr. Zwi Kitayin, Hadassah physician at Hebron. C.Z.A., S25/4601, Annex 72. Later he changed the spelling of his name to Kitain.

The Hadassah Clinic was housed in a building erected in 1909 by a Bagdadi Jew, Joseph Avraham Shalom, and the Sasson family for the Hesed Le'Avraham Hospital. Subsequently the structure was taken over by the Hadassah organization and called Beit Hadassah.

The clinic in Hebron is listed in the November 1919 report of the American Zionist Medical Unit (A.Z.M.U.), set up in 1918 by Hadassah and the American Zionist Organization. The A.Z.M.U. maintained hospitals in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Safed and Tiberias, as well as clinics in many towns and settlements. In 1921 the name was changed to Hadassah Medical Organization (H.M.O.). C.Z.A., Hadassah 1920 22, S30/2513.

Dr. Kitayin, in his statement, described the atmosphere of threats and danger on the eve of the riots and his work in caring for the wounded in the days that followed. See Appendix 2.

[6] Only five minutes before the mob reached the guest house, the Arab landlord "knocked and said to us: "Come out of here at once and go to my house. There you'll be safer." Statements of Shneerson and Kitayin, op. cit., Annexes 16 and 72.

The number of people who took refuge with him is verified by Dr. Kitayin. op. cit., S25/4601.

The known members of the group are the family of Haim Shneerson and his son Yehuda Leib, Dr. Zwi Kitayin, his wife Rivka and their two children, Gavriel and Elisheva, Dr. Leib Levit and Aharon Reuven and Breine Bernzweig. About half of the 33 were children.

[7] The name of the Arab was Haj Eissa El Kourdieh, who is included prominently in the three lists of Arabs identified shortly after the massacre as those who saved the lives of Jews. He lived in the same courtyard as the guest house and was its landlord. One of the women was his wife, Imm Mahmoud.

The most reliable of the lists, dated January 20, 1930, was attested to by the rabbis of the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities, Yaacov Yosef Slonim and Meir Franco. It includes 19 rescuers and 270 rescued. Since the list underestimates the number in my grandfather's group by nine, we would estimate the total number of Jews saved by Arabs as 280 to 300. The number of Arab rescuers should also be increased by at least four or six to compensate for the omission of women from the list.

The other lists are unsigned and undated. The shorter of the two, naming 17 Arabs but omitting numbers for Jews, is entitled "Arabs of Hebron who behaved well towards Jews." This is apparently an earlier compilation that is referred to in a letter from Mordecai Eliash to the chairman of the Palestine Zionist Executive, Colonel Frederick H. Kisch, dated November 13, 1929, which states, "I attach a list of Arabs of Hebron who behaved well towards Jews."

The third list, which credits 32 Arabs with saving over 444 Jews, appears exaggerated. Only 430 Jews were alive and whole when assembled to the police station, and that number included a substantial number whose homes were not reached by the attackers, others who hid and were not discovered, and those who were overlooked as they lay among the bodies of the dead and wounded. See C.Z.A., The Riots in Palestine, August 1929, Arabs Who Assisted Jews, S25/3409 and List of Jews Protected by Moslems in Hebron, S25/4472.

[8] Other survivors add details: During the attacks two Arab women sat in front of the door and ground on millstones, whose shrill whine, together with the women's screams, helped to drown out the sounds of the crying children inside. Earlier, Imm Mahmoud handed her 10 year old son to the group as a hostage, to reassure them that she would not give them up. The mother coached the boy. When she would call out to him, "Are there any Jews inside with you?" he was to answer, "No, there are no Jews here. They all ran away."

The people inside heard one of the attackers shout out, "Today is a day that is holy to Mohammed. Anyone who does not kill Jews is a sinner." Dr. Kitayin and Shneerson, op. cit., Annexes 72 and 16. Oral interview with Mrs. Rivka Kitain Mellor and her daughter, Mrs. Elisheva Greidinger, on August 24, 1989.

Edward Robbin, who went to Hebron three weeks later "with a convoy of refugees returning to their homes to bring the remnants of their possessions to Jerusalem," describes meeting a woman whom we recognize as Imm Mahmoud. "Opposite the Slonim house in front of what had been a hotel, a crowd of Jews had gathered about an Arab woman. To each one that approached they repeated the story of how she had saved twenty three [sic] people by bringing them into her house. People looked at the thin worn face of the Arab woman with awe." The Menorah Journal, XVII, 3 (December 1929), p.304.

[9] I remember hearing at the time that he suffered a heart attack.

[10] The second doctor was Dr. Leib Levit, the government veterinary surgeon in Hebron. Statement of Dr. Levit, C.Z.A., S25/4601, Annex 32.

[11] Eyewitness accounts report that police with rifles controlled the streets on Friday night. On Saturday morning, however, they were sent out armed only with clubs and quickly lost control of the mobs. Only when the police commander R.O. Cafferata himself was attacked did he order the police to be rearmed with rifles. They returned, fired shots into the air and the rioting immediately stopped. Op. cit., S25/4601, Statements of Rabbi Feivel Epstein of the Hebron Yeshiva, Annex 28; Yehoshua Hason, Annex 40; Rabbi Yaacov Yosef Slonim, Annex 6; Kitayin, Annex 72, and Shneerson, Annex 16.

[12] The rescued sat and slept on the floor, soaked with the blood of the wounded who had lain there earlier. For two days the British did not supply them with food. Only on Monday were they able to purchase half burned pitta and grapes. The police made no effort to clean the room until they heard that people were coming from Jerusalem to evacuate the women and children. Oded Avissar, ed., Sefer Hebron (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1970), p. 419.

The police station was in the Romano House, a spacious building with dozens of rooms that was constructed by a Jew from Istanbul in the 1860's. During World War I the Turkish authorities confiscated the building. When the British took over the country they used the structure as a police station, courthouse and prison.

[13] [On Sunday night] "Crowds gathered at the [Hadassah] Hospital [on Straus Street] and waited for the wounded to be brought from Hebron. The [British] authorities ordered that they be transported in the dead of night when the streets would be empty. The next night the women and children refugees [and the elderly] were transported in buses. They brought them to the new Straus [Health Center] building....(This then would be the opening of the new building)....

As the buses stopped, a muffled hysterical crying, shouting, screaming. Half crazed women leaped from the autos, clutching their children tightly and moaning....

One little old woman had jumped out of the auto and started to run about silently among the crowd searching and whispering, "My children, have you seen my children?" Robbin, op. cit., p. 299.

[14] My grandfather had invested his capital in mortgages and construction loans, especially in Bnai Brak, which was being developed in those years.

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By Bryna & Paul Epstein of Rehovot, Israel, Dvora & Nathan Liebster, and Saadia & Lily Greenberg in loving memory of Saadia, Bryna, & Dvora's great grandparents, Aharon Reuven and Breine Bernzweig, on the 91st anniversary of their miraculous deliverance, b'Chasdei Hashem, during the Hebron massacre on Shabbat Parashat Eikev, 18 Menachem Av 5689 (August 24, 1929).

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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 pilegish. (Sounds familiar?)]
- Avraham's marrying off his son to Nachor's granddaughter

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

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

### WHY TERACH?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

destiny.

shabbat shalom  
menachem

### =====

### 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 parsha! In our shiur, we rely on this assumption.]

To guarantee that Eliezer will faithfully fulfill that mission, Avraham makes his servant take an oath in the Name of:  
"Hashem, **the God of the Heavens, and the God of the**

**Earth** (see 24:1-4).

However, two psukim later, when Avraham must allay Eliezer's worry that the wife he finds for Yitzchak may prefer to stay in Charan (see 24:5-6) - he promises his servant that:  
"Hashem **the God of the Heavens**, who had taken him [Avraham] from his homeland..." will send an 'angel' to assist him (see 24:7).

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

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

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

## HEAVENS 'and' EARTH

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

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

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

### A. RADAK - 'Helping his servant understand'

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

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

### B. SFORNO - 'Scare tactics'

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

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

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

### D. RAMBAN - "Eretz Yisrael"

Finally, Ramban offers a very 'zionistic' explanation. Unlike the other commentators who understand 'aretz' as referring to the 'earth', i.e. to events taking place on earth or in this world,

Ramban understands 'aretz' as referring to the 'land of Israel'. Because his servant is now leaving Eretz Yisrael (but must bring Yitzchak's future wife back to this land), Avraham adds the phrase 'Elokei ha-aretz' to the standard phrase of 'Elokei ha-shamayim' in his description of God at this time.

## ELOKEI HA-SHAMAYIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## SHIUR #2 - AVRAHAM AVINU & 'REAL' ESTATE

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

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

## TWO PERCEPTIONS

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

## 1) Bnei Chet's perception:

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

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

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

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

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

## 2) Avraham Avinu's perception:

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

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

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## FOR FURTHER IYUN:

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

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## SHIUR #3 "ZERA VA-ARETZ"

### - A PROMISE, COVENANT, AND OATH

Just prior to sending his servant in search of a wife for his son, Avraham briefly reviews the various stages of his 'bechira': "Hashem Elokei ha-shamayim asher lekachani mi-BEIT AVI u-ME'ERETZ MOLADETI ve-asher DIBER li, ve-asher NISHBA li leimor - le-ZAR'ACHA ETiN 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 etin et ha-aretz ha-zot"].

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

"Asher lekachani mi-BEIT AVI ußMe'ERETZ MOLADETI" clearly echoes God's opening command of:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AKEIDA (22:17)	PREVIOUS PROMISES
ki barech avarechecha	va-avarechecha..ve-heye bracha (First Promise - 12:2)
ve-harbeh arbey 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-Betarim - 15:4)
Ve-hitbarchu be-zar'acha kol goyei ha-aretz (15:18)	Ve-nivrchu becha kol mishpechot ha-adama (First Promise - 12:3)

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

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

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

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

## THE OATH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Avraham's 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 disuasive effort, the Torah tells us, "Va-yishma Avraham," that "Avraham listened." It seems that Avraham has given in; he "listens" to Efron. Here we have a double irony: on the surface, Efron has lost -- he wanted to give the field for free, and Avraham insists on paying and gets his way. The irony is that in truth, Efron has won, because he will be paid a lot of money for the field he said he would give for free. But on the most fundamental level, Efron loses the most important struggle, as Avraham calls his bluff once again and comes up with the money without a second's hesitation. Efron underestimates the importance of Eretz Yisrael to Avraham, and this mistake costs him victory in this polite struggle.

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

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

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

## **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 fiancée, 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 Yitzhak'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 Yitzhak, 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 Rambam). 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 (Zevachim 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 fiancée 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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