

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #5, November 22-23, 2024; 22 Cheshvan 5785; Chayeis Sarah 5785

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.

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

As Israel's primary focus turns from Hamas to the evils of Iran, Gaza, Hezbollah, and their allies, we pray that Hashem will protect us during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world.

Chayeis Sarah opens with the death of Sarah at age 127, when Avraham is 137, and Yitzhak is 37 years old. At this point, Avraham owns no land in Canaan, Yitzhak is unmarried, and Avraham has no grandchildren to carry on his legacy. Avraham also does not even have a place to bury his wife. With intelligent negotiating, Avraham is able to purchase property in Hebron – a field with a house and a cave to use as a cemetery.

Avraham's next project is finding a wife for Yitzhak. He insists on a wife from a distant land so his daughter-in-law will not face influences from idol worshippers in her family. Since the Akeidah, Yitzhak has the status of a korban olah – a sacrifice to God – and may not leave Canaan.

Avraham sends his trusted servant, Eliezer, to the land where his father had settled (Haran), to find a wife there. Rabbi Dov Linzer has a brilliant insight on why Haran is the ideal place to find a daughter-in-law. There is substantial evidence that Haran is a matriarchal society, where the mother of the family is the head of the household and makes important family decisions. When Eliezer identifies Rivka as his choice (she meets the criteria that he sets out for God to identify the ideal wife), she identifies herself as the daughter of Milkah (her mother), not of Betuel (her father). Rivka's mother and brother discuss the proposal with Eliezer – Rivka's father is not even present to participate in the discussion. Rivka's mother and brother leave the decision to Rivka (who would be head of her household after getting married in Haran), again without even asking her father.

Rivka is an ideal wife for Yitzhak. Growing up in a matriarchal society, she learns to make her own decisions and to develop a positive self image. Eliezer learns that Rivka also embodies chesed – she is willing to draw 50 to 100 liters of water from a well to satisfy the thirst for each of Eliezer's camels. Her offer, which she fulfills, could have required her to draw nearly 50 gallons of water from a well for Eliezer's camels. When Eliezer accompanies Rivka to her home, Lavan promises hospitality, but the Torah is clear that Lavan must draw water to wash the feet of his entourage, move around straw for all the camels, and take care of all the other chores of a servant. Only Rivka, no one else in her family home, shows any chesed. In personal attributes, Rivka is a clone of Avraham, not of anyone from her family. Eliezer learns very quickly that Rivka has the personal qualities that Avraham and Yitzhak will want – and that Rivka will be better off living with Yitzhak than remaining with her family.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the Haftorah's message of the importance of creating strong bonds with our children before it is too late. Avraham waits until very late in his life to look for a wife for Yitzhak. King David waits until nearly his death to clarify which of his sons should follow him as King of Israel. His son Adoniya prepares to seize

the throne as soon as David dies. The prophet Natan and Batsheva, Shlomo's mother, learn of the coup attempt and tell the King. David makes a public announcement that Shlomo will succeed him, and the plot fails. King David should have clarified his succession before the last moment, and Avraham might have started earlier looking for a wife for Yitzhak.

Rabbi Brander urges us not to neglect our legacy. In particular, he urges us to show our love and interest in our children and grandchildren regularly. The more we focus on closeness with our family and the importance of our religious heritage, the more likely we shall be to have Jewish grandchildren and great grandchildren. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, started me on my path to learn more about my religious heritage 55 years ago, and he inspired me always to reach for more mitzvot. This type of inspiration helps us make the world a better place – and to keep our children and grandchildren Jewish.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, 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

**Haftarat Parshat Chayei Sarah:
The Tent of Abraham vs. The Palace of David – How to Ensure Our Future**
By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5785 (2024)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

Avraham Avinu and David Hamelech. They are both giants of our people, each playing an instrumental role in the development of our identity and traditions. Avraham hears the call of God, sets out with his tent to an unknown land, and establishes the covenant with God that serves as the foundation of our national identity. King David is a unifying figure, cementing the establishment of the kingdom, and at the same time a person of passionate devotion, who gifted the world with his Psalms and began the process of building a grand palace, a home for himself and the Divine. Each left an indelible mark on our history and tradition, with their actions having a lasting impact on generations to come.

But these two leaders were also very different. This week, the parsha and haftara offer us glimpses into their personal lives, as each of these towering figures approaches his ultimate demise. In these intimate deathbed moments, the elder Avraham and David each focus on the private affairs of the home – and with that, send strong messages to future generations. While Avraham does not forsake Yishmael as well as his children born from Keturah, offering them various gifts, it is also in this week's Torah portion that he ensures that Yitzchak is his true heir through whom the Jewish people will be born. As he takes his last breath, he is surrounded by both Yitzchak and Yishmael, the two sons who quarreled in their youth. In a powerful scene, they join forces to lay their father to rest, tied together by the fact that Abraham had cared for both of them.

In the Haftarah, we see that as King David's age begins to wear him down, he must devote his energy to concerns for continuity. Those with their eyes open could see a power vacuum on the horizon, with Adoniyah threatening to seize the throne in place of David. Natan, the prophet, and Batsheva, the mother of Shlomo, approach the elderly king, insisting that the matter of succession be clarified. David then confirms that his heir will be Shlomo, as he had promised. For David, deafening silence on who is to be his successor causes his palace to implode and fractures the unity of the nation he worked so hard to create.

In those moments of truth, Avraham and David were not actively engaged in world-changing projects, yet their concern for their families left an indelible impact. Clearly, concern for family counts. Our legacy lives on through many channels – through our values, our actions, and the ways we nurture family bonds across generations. For that reason, a pathway forward for family continuity is a critical component of our legacy. Avraham strengthens the stakes of his tent through his proactive engagement with his family, while David's long avoidance of the matter almost causes his palace to collapse.

We, too, mustn't forsake our children, our family. In the midst of all the energies we dedicate to social change, communal resilience, national solidarity, and more, we cannot lose sight of the day when the end seems near, and we will look around for those who will carry on the torch of our values. If we are not invested along the way in the welfare of our families and the rich and thorough education of our children and grandchildren, many of our accomplishments will be short-lived. For all our outward-facing commitments and engagements, we must nurture our family connections, whether we are physically present or maintaining those bonds across distance. The haftarah points out the contrast between Avraham Avinu and David Hamelech, reminding us that engaging our families is the only way to ensure that the values we hold most dear will continue to shape and influence our descendants.

Of course most of us cannot spend every moment with our families; and for many of us the obligations outside the home, including for the thousands of Israelis honorably serving reserve military duty to protect the nation, are significant demands – and they are themselves profound expressions of family values as we model sacrifice and commitment to principles greater than ourselves.

But even actions or words that do not require much time — like leaving a short note or calling to wish a child good luck on a test, or acknowledging to your children that you know your absence is difficult – can go a long way in making one's family and children feel loved, in turn deepening respect for the family's values. The investments we make in our family – through love, communication, connection and values – are the seeds of continuity. No matter who we are, no matter our role in Am Israel or in the world, those moments of engagement are important, as they are the moments that will create lasting foundations for our people.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Chayeis Sarah: Make Every Day a Jewish Holiday!

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2010 (5771)

"No, my lord; listen to me! I have given you the field, and as for the cave that is in it, I have given it to you; in the view of the children of my people have I given it to you; bury your dead." So Avraham bowed down before the members of the council. He spoke to Ephron in the ears of the members of the council saying: "Rather, if you would listen to me, I give you the price of the field, accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." And Ephron replied to Avraham saying to him: "My lord, listen to me! Land worth 400 silver shekels; between me and you- what is it? Bury your dead." Avraham heeded Ephron, and Avraham weighed out to Ephron the price which he had mentioned in the ears of the children of Heth, 400 silver shekels in negotiable currency.)Breishis 23:11-16(

The Mishne in Pirke' Avos states that, *"Avraham Avinu was tested with ten trials and withstood them all. This teaches you how great was the love of Avraham Avinu."* What were the ten tests? It's a matter of great dispute amongst the giants of Torah thought. Curiously Rabbeinu Yonah accounts the 10th and final test for Avraham was his purchase of the field from Ephron to bury his wife Sara. What's the test? Land is bought and sold every day! Assuming the tests were in ascending order of difficulty, how could that be a greater ordeal than sacrificing his beloved son Yitzchok?

Rabbeinu Yonah explains, *"Avraham was told, "Arise, traverse the Land, its length and breadth, because to you I will give it." Despite this promise, when his wife died he could not find a place to bury her until he purchased a plot at great expense, and yet Avraham never doubted."*

How is that more difficult than "the Akeida"? I heard from a great person that dying for KiddushHASHEM, as difficult and holy as it is, is still not as lofty as doing an honest business deal and living KiddushHASHEM. How is that so?

Amos Bunim writes about his father Irving Bunim, in *A Fire in His Soul*: Once in the early 1950's, Julliard, in the midst of selling their company to United Merchants, was closing out its inventory and sold Bunim a large amount of velveteen. The shipment of many large boxes seemed fine until Bunim received the bill.

"Carton #1", it read, "38 yards." Bunim looked at it quizzically. "38 yards?" he asked himself. "I did not receive anything with 38 yards of goods." Puzzled, he went to the basement to check and discovered that the billing clerk at A.D. Julliard had inadvertently dropped the first digit. Carton #1 contained not 38 yards of velveteen, but 338 yards. "Carton #2," he read, "42 yards." A quick glance at carton #2 showed the same thing had happened. Bunim checked every item on the list and found that they were all the same. In every case, the first digit had been omitted. \$40,000.00 then, an enormous sum. "Too big for them to miss," Bunim thought. "They will correct it shortly."

In the meantime he paid for the merchandise as the bill was rendered. Julliard did not find the error. After waiting two months, Bunim called Julliard's billing department and told them that he thought there had been a mistake. "I'd like to know," he asked, "is everything settled?" Do I owe you any money?" The clerk checked Eden's file and told him that everything was clear and that they owed no money. "In fact, Mr. Bunim," he added cheerfully, "your account is closed. You're all paid up." Bunim thanked the man, hung up, and called Julliard again.

The second time, he asked for the president's office, and made an appointment with Mr. Valentine for the next day. When the two men met and cordially shook hands, Bunim told Valentine, *"I want you know that today's a Jewish holiday."* Valentine, who did business with many Jews, looked puzzled. "I was not aware today is a Jewish holiday," he said. "What is it?" *"Today is the day,"* Bunim answered, *"that a Jewish businessman shows you what our Torah ethics and morality demand of us."* He then explained to the surprised Valentine what had happened. *"I received merchandise from you,"* Bunim said, *"and I owe you money for it. Here is a check for \$40,000.00- money that you had no idea was ever coming to you."* *"That moment,"* Bunim later told his family, *"when Mr. Valentine realized what G-d's holy Torah means to us, was the greatest KiddushHASHEM a man could ask for."*

Chayei Sarah: Was Rivka a (Gasp!) Feminist?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015

When Avraham charges his servant to find a wife for Yitzchak, the servant asks a strange question: “*Perhaps the woman will not desire to follow me to this land. Should I return your son to the land which you came from?*” (Breishit, 24:5). The servant’s concern that the woman might resist is unexpected. Laws appearing later in the Torah make it clear that a father controls and speaks for his daughter, but here, the father and his possible refusal to give his daughter is not an issue. The possibility that Yitzchak will be asked to go live with his wife is also considered. This is quite strange, as normally the woman would have been taken into the husband’s home. Certainly there must have been exceptions, but the more natural question would have been: “*If she refuses, can I then find a wife from somewhere else?*” It seems that Avraham’s servant knew something about this particular society that shaped his concerns, focused as they were on how the woman would act and what she would demand.

Questions of the place of women in Aram society come up again when the servant arrives there and interacts with Rivka and her family. After Rivka passes his test by offering water for him and his camels, the servant asks her, “*Whose daughter are you?*” She responds, “*I am the daughter of Betuel, who is the son of Milkah, whom she bore to Nachor.*” This manner of familial identification is a departure from the norm. A classic example of identification by father can be found at the beginning of next week’s parasha: “*These are the generations of Yitzchak the son of Avraham, Avraham begat Yitzchak*” (25:19). Following this, Rivka’s answer would have been, “*I am the daughter of Betuel, the son of Nachor.*” What is Milkah’s name doing here?

Milkah actually showed up at the end of Vayeira, the previous parasha. “*After these things it was told to Avraham saying, behold Milkah has given birth to Nachor your brother*” (22:20). Notice again the unusual focus on the mother. It seems that the family structure is different in Aram Naharaim. This society is not a patriarchy, where a child is identified through his or her father and genealogies come in the form of father-son, father-son. Aram Naharaim seems to be a matriarchy, a society in which the family structure is defined by the mother. (I owe this insight to Nancy Jay’s book, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity.*)

A matriarchal society is not necessarily one in which mothers hold political power. In fact, there is doubt as to whether a society has ever existed in which women are the holders of political power. Rather, a matriarchal society is one in which family lines are defined by matrilineal descent, one in which women do, as a result, have more rights and a greater voice. The benefit of this structure is obvious: In such societies, the question of the identity of a person’s father – which can always be in doubt – was nullified. It was the identity of the mother that mattered, and this was always known. The head of the household would not be the (presumed) father but the mother’s brother or her oldest son. Thus, while a man was at the head, the matriarchal structure removed the anxiety around paternity that existed in patriarchal societies. Consider Rashi’s comment on the verse, “*Avraham begat Yitzchak*”: “*Since the mockers of the generation were saying that Sarah had been impregnated by Avimelekh....God formed Yitzchak’s facial appearance to be similar to Avraham’s, so that all could testify that Avraham had sired Yitzchak*” (25:19).

We can now understand why Rivka identifies herself as the granddaughter of Milkah. However, when the servant repeats the story, he reframes Rivka’s answer in his own cultural norms: “*And she said, ‘I am the daughter of Betuel the son of Nachor, whom Milkah bore to him’*” (24:47). While Rivka said that Betuel was the “son of Milkah,” in the servant’s version he is the “son of Nachor,” just as he would be described in a patriarchal society.

Similarly, the servant asks Rivka, “*Does your father’s house have a place for us to stay?*” (24:24). What is Rivka’s response? “*And she said to him, ‘We have much straw and fodder, and also a place to sleep’*” (24:25). For Rivka, there was no “*father’s house*”; in her society the father was simply not in the picture. Thus, when Rivka leaves the servant we read, “*And the young woman ran and she told her mother’s household according to these events*” (24:28). This is perhaps the most revealing verse of all. Rashi notes how unusual it is to refer to a “*mother’s household*” and resolves this problem by interpreting the phrase to mean a physical house or room that a mother had to herself, saying that Rivka ran to such a place to confide these events to her mother. There is no question, however, that the simple sense of the verse is that it was her mother’s household; the mother, not the father, was at the head of, or defined, the household.

In fact, Rivka's father, Betuel, is quite invisible in this entire episode. It is not Betuel who greets the servant but Lavan, Rivka's brother. And when the servant completes his story, we read that "*Lavan and Betuel responded, 'From God has this matter come!'*" 24:50(. Why is Lavan, the brother, mentioned before Betuel, the father? In this society, the brother and mother head the family, not the father. And thus, the servant gives gifts not to the father, but to *Rivka's "brother and mother"* 24:53(.

It thus comes as no surprise that **the father is nowhere to be found when the final decision is made**: "*And her brother and her mother said, 'Let the lass stay with us a year or ten months'*" 24:55(. Rashi, assuming the norms of a patriarchal society, asks, "*And where was Betuel?*" His answer: "*Betuel wanted to refuse to give Rivka and an angel came and smote him dead.*" As we have seen, this question disappears once we realize that we are dealing with a matriarchal society. This is also why Lavan and Rivka's mother send Rivka away and bless her, referring to her as "*sister*" and not daughter 24:59-60(. With Lavan as the head of the family, Rivka is the family's sister, not its daughter.]emphasis added[

Returning now to the beginning of the parasha, we can understand why Avraham's servant was concerned that the woman would stay put and Yitzchak would be asked to relocate, and why he was concerned about what the woman, and not her father, would say. For in matriarchal societies, the husband would move into the woman's house and women had a voice regarding their fate. And, lo and behold, we find that unlike cases in which a father marries off his daughter unilaterally, here, when the critical moment comes, the final decision is given to Rivka. "*And they said: Let us call the lass, and ask for her answer*" 24:57(. In fact, this is a value that finds its way into halakha. It is from this that the Sages learn that a father is forbidden to marry off his underage daughter, that he must wait until she is an adult and can choose her own husband)Rashi and Nachalat Yaakov, Breishit, 24:57 and Kiddushin 41a(.

Perhaps this helps explain why Avraham was so insistent on the servant going to Aram. Maybe Avraham wanted to make sure that Yitzchak's wife would be a woman who had a voice of her own. Avraham had learned this lesson well: "*Everything that Sarah tells you, listen to her voice*" 21:12(. Sarah, also from Aram, did what was necessary to ensure the survival of her family. And for this family, this new religion, to succeed, it would require not just strong men, but strong women as well. It would require women like Sarah and Rivka. For as we will read in next week's parasha, it was Rivka who, using her strength and her voice and finding a way to operate in a patriarchal society, followed in Sarah's ways and acted to ensure the continuity of the Jewish family.]emphasis added[

It is unhealthy to have only men in positions of power. We need to learn to follow Avraham's example, to seek out strong women, to seek out women's voices, to be led collaboratively by men and women working to ensure our survival as a people who will sanctify God's name in the world.

Shabbat Shalom!

Note: copied from my archives

My Grandparents Saw Light, Even After the Dark of Kristallnacht

By David Stras © Wall St. Journal 2018*

[Ed.: Anti-Semites throughout the world observed Kristallnacht last week with a flood of pogroms and violence. Thugs attacked fans from Israel and elsewhere at a soccer match in Amsterdam – and then continued the violence throughout much of the city. Vandals threw stones and shattered glass at Char Bar, an upscale Kosher restaurant in Washington, DC, early on Shabbat morning. Much of the world continues to be dangerous for Jews. I am reprinting the following remembrance to continue to observe Kristallnacht this month.]

This week marks a cruel yet hopeful anniversary. On Nov. 9-10, 1938, a two-day period now known as Kristallnacht, Nazis plundered Jewish homes, schools and businesses across Germany. My grandfather, only 14 at the time, recalled seeing Jewish stores looted, books burned, and signs saying "kill the Jews." Two days later, he received a letter from his family

saying that his father, my great-grandfather, had been taken to Dachau, which we now know was the equivalent of a death sentence.

It has never been easy to come to grips with my family history. My aunt recently completed a family tree going back centuries; many of its branches end abruptly in the late 1930s and early 1940s. These names, no more than entries on a piece of paper to me, represent my heritage, my family — much of it lost in the hollow corridors of concentration camps. I can only imagine how my life would have been different had my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins never experienced the merciless brutality of the Holocaust.

My grandparents shared bits and pieces of their experiences with me as I grew up, careful to say only as much as they thought I could handle. One day, while riding around on my grandfather's lap in his electric wheelchair, I asked him, "What is that number on your arm?" Transforming a physical characteristic designed to make him less human into a source of feigned pride, he told me it was a number that made him unique because he was the only person in the world who had it. Only later, as I approached my teenage years, did my grandfather tell me that a fellow prisoner tattooed the number — 117022 — on his left forearm when he arrived at Auschwitz.

Four years ago, on the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht, I spoke publicly about my grandparents' experience for the first time. Standing in the rotunda of the Minnesota Capitol, I read my grandfather's account of being transported on a freight car to Auschwitz, stripped of civilian clothes upon arrival, and forced to run naked through a cold April rain.

My grandfather had the uncommon gift of being able to see the light of human generosity in the midst of near-total darkness. He recounted his experience at the camp hospital, sick and malnourished: German nurses reported to their superiors that they had discharged my grandfather when they in fact transferred him to another room until he was able to recover. Their kindness, he said — which they undertook at great risk to their own lives—saved him from the gas chamber.

My grandfather again saw the best and worst in humanity after he agreed to participate in an escape plot. The guards captured three co-conspirators, who were hanged in the middle of the camp as a prisoner orchestra played German songs to accompany the spectacle. The men took the secret of my grandfather's involvement to their graves.

Only after years researching their stories and reflecting on their lives do I understand the message my grandparents had tried to impart — one of hope and gratitude, not bitterness or pity. As my grandfather said in a memorial service speech in 1979, we remember those who "lost their lives while fighting for their freedom, the freedom of us and the freedom of mankind." He emphasized that "we, the survivors, have to let the world know that we will never again allow another Holocaust" and told the audience that "you, and you alone, have the responsibility to speak up for our fallen relatives and friends."

My grandparents always said they were the lucky ones, and that they were left on earth to speak for those who had perished. Their guidepost was humanity, not indulgence in their own sorrow and suffering. They spoke for their friends and family members who were not "lucky" enough to make it, and to ensure that the stories of those who perished did not become footnotes in a dusty history book in the library. Theirs was a message of optimism, intended to ensure that their children and grandchildren were able to lead a life free from the atrocities that they had witnessed. I get it now, grandma and grandpa, and I hope the world gets it now too.

* Justice Stras serves on the Minnesota Supreme Court and is a nominee for the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Reprinted from Wall St. Journal, November 9, 2017, p. A17, to observe the 79th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

Note: from my archives.

Remembering Rabbi Dr. David de Sola Pool

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Rabbi Dr. David de Sola Pool was the pre-eminent Sephardic rabbi in America during the mid-twentieth century. Born in England in 1885, he died on December 1, 1970, the first week of Kislev 5731, after having served Congregation Shearith Israel in New York for a period spanning 63 years.

Dr. Pool was the quintessential Sephardic rabbi of the Western Sephardic tradition. He was eloquent and dignified, and yet friendly and approachable. He was a fine scholar and author, and was also an admirable and respected communal leader. During his impressive career, he was an ardent spokesman for Zionism; a devoted spiritual guide to American Sephardim; a foremost voice in interfaith dialogue; a historian of American Jewry; editor and translator of the Sephardic and Ashkenazic prayer books.

When I began my service to Shearith Israel in September 1969, I was still a 24 year old rabbinical student. That first Rosh Hashana, I sat next to Dr. Pool on the synagogue's Tebah, reader's desk, where the congregation's clergy are seated. Dr. Pool was 83 years old, frail, and in declining health. After services on the first night of Rosh Hashana, Dr. Pool placed his hand on my head and gave me his blessing, wishing me a happy and meaningful ministry.

That was a special and sacred moment for me. When I shook Dr. Pool's hand, I was shaking the hand of a great spiritual leader who had begun his service to Shearith Israel in 1907; he had taken over from Dr. Mendes who had begun service to Shearith Israel in 1877. I was one handshake away from 1877! And just a few more handshakes separated me from Rev. Gershom Mendes Seixas who had begun serving Shearith Israel in 1768. I felt the weight of centuries, the incredible continuity of a magnificent tradition.

I remember Dr. Pool's aura of dignity and serenity, even in his elderly years when he was increasingly frail. He was a genuinely pious and humble man who served his community with selfless devotion.

Dr. Pool had maintained Shearith Israel's traditions during his many years of service to the congregation. He not only followed in the footsteps of his venerable predecessors, but set the standard for his successors. Dr. Pool taught by example. He instructed his immediate successor, Dr. Louis C. Gerstein, who passed on the traditions to me. I learned that the Rabbis of Shearith Israel, as well as the Hazanim, conducted the synagogue prayer services and read the Torah with precision. The synagogue's pulpit was reserved only for the synagogue's rabbis. (On rare occasions, guest Orthodox rabbis were invited to preach from the pulpit.) Sermons were to be instructive and inspirational; frivolity was never allowed from the pulpit, nor was the pulpit to be used to advance a political candidate or to criticize anyone by name. The rabbi was to set an example to the congregation of proper devotion in prayer — no engaging in idle chatter or silly gestures, no reading books other than the prayer book during worship. The rabbi was to be at services punctually, not missing unless prevented by illness or a serious scheduling conflict, or unless away from town. The rabbi was to set the tone for orderliness and decorum, for neatness and respectfulness.

The rabbi was to set an example for social justice, communal activism, righteous behavior. The rabbi was to be a scholar, teacher, and pastor. The rabbi was to speak with his congregants, not at them. Dr. Pool insisted that each Jew take responsibility for his and her religious lives. In September 1922, Dr. Pool wrote to his congregation: *"We do not, we cannot, all think alike, and there is no one of us that dares dogmatize for others in the realm of religion. If you expect your Rabbi vicariously to think through the problem of living for you, you will weaken and paralyze your own spiritual nature, just as surely as you will destroy your Judaism if you leave it to your Rabbi to live a Jewish life for you."*

In a sermon delivered at his grandson's Bar Mitzvah in May 1962, Dr. Pool spoke of the need for the generations of Jews to live their Judaism actively:

"We must not allow ourselves to become decrepit veterans dreaming of past victories in the struggle for holiness. We have to be something more than feeble survivors of once glorious days...Our life as Jews must be the result of something more than inertia based on the physical fact that we were born into the Jewish people....Within every one of us who is worthy of bearing the Jewish name there must be a conscious sense of a divine call to serve our fellow men for

today and tomorrow.... Weaklings among us may fall away as they have done in every generation. But the true spiritual descendants of Abraham, of Moses, and of all our heroic sages and saints keep the Jewish light kindled, and hand it down from generation to generation."

In 1966, he and his wife Tamar published a book, *Is There an Answer?*" They made the following observation:

"It is we ourselves who can and who must make life worth living. In the face of the harshest realities, we must cling to life and exalt it by giving to its positive values a commanding place in our consciousness. ...To look constantly on the seamy side of life is false to the totality of existence. We must gratefully remember life's goodness and blessings. We must discern what is transient in experience and what is abiding in our consciousness" (p. 23).

Dr. Pool died in December 1970, a bit over a year after I began my service to Shearith Israel. Yet, I seemed to feel his guiding hand throughout my rabbinic career. I read all his publications; I went through his sermons; I edited a collection of his sermons, addresses and writings. Throughout my many years of rabbinic service, Dr. Pool has surely been an important influence. Even now, as rabbi emeritus of Shearith Israel, I still seem to feel Dr. Pool's hand on my head and I still seem to hear his words of blessing and encouragement. They mean as much to me now as when I first heard them at age twenty four. Perhaps even more.

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/remembering-rabbi-dr-david-de-sola-pool>

Stages of Life: Thoughts for Parashat Hayyei Sarah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

When the Torah records the death of Sarah, it states that she was then aged *"a hundred years and twenty years and seven years."* Since the Torah repeats "years" each time (instead of simply stating one hundred twenty seven years), a rabbinic interpretation was given: *"She was as beautiful at one hundred as at the age of twenty; and as sinless at twenty as at seven."* (See commentary of Rabbi Joseph Hertz.)

But perhaps the Torah is alluding to something else. We might gain insight by looking at our own photo albums.

Take a look at a picture of yourself when you were a child. Then look at another photo when you were in your twenties. And then look at a recent photo of yourself, or just look in the mirror. You are the same person in each of these images; and yet you also seem to be a different person at each stage.

When we were children, we lived day to day under the protection and guidance of our parents. We had little or no idea of how our lives would unfold — where we would live, who we would marry, or what career we would choose in the years ahead. In a sense, life was uncomplicated.

When we entered adulthood, we took on responsibilities. We decided on education, marriage, career, place to live and raise children etc. Life was no longer simple. We were not little children. We made decisions on our own.

When we grew older, we were entering a new stage in life. Our current photos may show us with grown children and grandchildren. The older we grow, the more of our lives are in the past rather than in the future. We are not children; we may no longer be at the peak of our active years; we can look back from the mountain of time at what we did — and did not — accomplish in our lives.

When the Torah records Sarah's death, it is actually reviewing stages in her life. As a child of seven, she was being raised in a pagan family in Ur Kasdim. In her innocence, she could not possibly have imagined how her life would be transformed when she grew older. As she matured, she married Abraham and joined him in a remarkable mission that changed human history. They left the land of their births and started a new life in Canaan — a Promised Land. The childless couple taught others to worship the One God and to live righteous, compassionate lives. The Midrash states that Abraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women.

In old age, Sarah remarkably gave birth to a son, Isaac, who was to become heir to Abraham's teachings and blessings. She could now look back at the mission of her life and sense fulfillment in her work with Abraham. She could also take satisfaction in her son who would go on to make his own mark in history.

Although Sarah was the same person from childhood to old age, she was very different at the various stages of life. She died when she was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years — each of the "years" signifying a new stage in life. Don't we all go through various stages in life? Aren't we all the "same person" throughout our lifetimes; but aren't we also different?

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3290>

Chayei Sorah – Your Golden Years

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

The Torah tells us that Sorah lived for 127 years. Rashi tells us, "They were all equally good."

When we consider the awesome challenges that Sorah endured, it is bewildering to declare them equally good. Were the years of travel, childlessness, and challenge with Hagar and Yishmoel all equally good? Were the incidents with Paroh and Avimelech included in this goodness?

During the period of Czarist Russia, there was a situation in which Jewish boys, known as Cantonists, were kidnapped from the Jewish community to serve in the Russian army. This situation was part of the Czar's plan to destroy Russian Jewry by assimilation and attrition. The Chofetz Chaim was a leading activist in trying to assist the boys. He arranged "Kosher Kessel," (Kosher Pot) to provide the boys with kosher food. He also wrote a remarkable book addressing the boys, guiding and inspiring them to remain loyal Jews despite the adverse circumstances that they found themselves in. The Chofetz Chaim wrote, "If you will be strong, in years to come you will look back and see these years as the best years

of your life."

What the Chofetz Chaim was sharing with these boys is that situations in life might not be what we would have wanted. But if we embrace the life we have been given, we will experience great life satisfaction. Life is like a puzzle; each piece is different. It is the uniqueness of each piece — and the appropriate resistance we encounter when we try to make everything fit — that forms the mosaic that our lives were meant to be. Attitude is crucial.

There is a famous quote regarding situations that seem less than ideal. We ask, *"Do you see the cup as half full or half empty?"* Meaning, *"Are you noticing the good in your life?"* (There certainly is some.) Or *"Are you only noticing the problems and what is missing?"*

Rabbi Avigdor Miller took this to a higher level. To the question, *"Do you see the cup as half full or half empty?"* he responded, *"It is most definitely totally full. It is half full with liquid, and half full with air. Apparently, precisely the way it was meant to be."*

The ability to see life as precise enables us to declare, *"Gam Zu Litova -- This too is for the good."* When something we would not have chosen occurs, we are able to pray and conduct ourselves by the saying, *"To change what can be changed, to accept what can't be changed, and to have the wisdom to know the difference."*

For example, I knew two couples, where the husbands were both in wheelchairs. One couple regularly voiced the perception that he was confined to a wheelchair and lamented that this is the sorry state of their "Golden Years." The other couple stayed active, stretching wheelchair mobility to its limits. The gentleman and his wife became leading volunteers in the community and became a paradigm of a couple's love and support for each other. The gentleman's exuberant smile as he sat in his wheelchair and held the door open for others is forever etched in my heart.

Rabbi Akiva asked, *"How did Esther come to rule over 127 provinces. It is because of her ancestor Sorah who lived for 127 years."* What is the connection?

When Esther was taken against her will to the palace of the king, she undoubtedly searched for inspiration in our matriarchs to be able to survive loyally as a Jewess. Esther found that inspiration in Sorah. *"If Sorah could do it (for one night), I can do it successfully, too."* Instead of Esther succumbing to her sorry plight, she took the cue from Sorah, whose years of life are described as "equally good." She chose an attitude that allowed her to rule over the 127 provinces and not have her plight rule over her.

At one point in my childhood, my parents did some construction on the house. The contractor they hired had an interesting habit. Whenever he or his workers were told of a mistake they made, he would quickly respond, "It is better this way."

I'm not quite sure that the contractor was always right. But if a person sees each day of life as G-d's tailor-made blessing, designed precisely for what we need right now, then it is better this way, and all our years are Golden.

Sorah did not want to be taken to the king's palace; it was against her will. Yet, by embracing the challenge calmly, confident that G-d was with her, she became a role model for her descendant, Esther, who would be trapped in the king's palace for years. Eventually Esther would be called upon to fulfill the task for which G-d had so precisely positioned her. As a loyal Jewess, she ruled the situation of 127 provinces; she did not let them rule her. She was therefore ready and able to proceed in confidence and strength to fulfill her destiny and plead the case for the Jewish people.

With heartfelt blessings 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 and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Chayei Sarah – Intended Emotions

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

When the Torah tells us of Sarah's passing, it describes how Avrohom eulogized and cried for his wife immediately upon her passing, even before he had secured her burial spot. We can only imagine the grief that gripped Avrohom at that moment. He had devoted his life to changing the world's understanding of G-d, a lone voice preaching monotheism in a polytheistic world. Sarah had joined him in that cause and they had stood side by side in that effort for decades, supporting and caring for each other with true love, respect and devotion. His grief and anguish at that moment was surely overwhelming.

Rabbeinu Bechaye notes that the Torah says, "*Avrohom came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her*" (Beriehsis 23:3), yet it does not tell us where he was coming from. He explains that "coming" in this context does not refer to traveling, but rather to arousing one's self and bringing themselves to act. The Torah is telling us that after Avrohom learned of Sarah's passing he actively aroused his emotions and intentionally brought himself to eulogize Sorah and to cry for her.

This reading of the passuk is very difficult to understand. Why would Avrohom need to arouse himself to eulogize and cry for his wife? Wasn't his natural response to cry for his wife and give her the full proper respect due for such a great woman? What else would he have done when he heard the devastating news?

It appears that Avrohom was not satisfied with his natural response. As deep and penetrating as his grief may have been, he wanted to arouse himself further and to feel the pain more acutely before he began to eulogize and cry for her. He stopped, focused, intentionally and actively aroused his emotions, and only then was he ready to eulogize and cry for Sarah.

There are many lessons we can learn from this simple act of Avrohom. First of all, we can learn from Avrohom the value of intent and focus. In this initial period after Sarah's sudden and unexpected passing, Avrohom's entire mind must have been consumed with his loss. Yet, Avrohom felt that the natural emotional response wasn't enough. He could add more by taking a few moments to stop and actively focus on what he had lost. A few moments to collect and focus his thoughts, actively arousing himself, made a difference.

Yet, even if it made a difference, how much of a difference would it make? How much more grief would Avrohom feel by taking that moment to focus and arouse himself? It couldn't have been a significant increase, but it did make a difference – and if there was more emotion that he could muster, then that had to be done. Even overwhelming grief wasn't enough. If he could add any more feeling into his eulogy and mourning, that was worth the time and effort. Every ounce of emotion he could muster was important.

While we are certainly not on Avrohom's lofty level of spirituality and nobility, we can still learn from Avrohom's example. We often do mitzvos, daven and help others simply because it is natural. We should remember Avrohom's example and the power and significance of a few moments of focus. With a few moments of focus, we will increase our commitment to Hashem and to helping others, and that increase – no matter how small – is important.

There is another message we can learn from Avrohom's action in this time of overwhelming grief. When one faces such intense loss, it is easy to lose one's self to the grief, and to simply follow our instincts as we try to process the loss. Yet, Avrohom rose above that, and found the inner strength to consider his actions.

There are many times we find ourselves overwhelmed by circumstances and unexpected events. Here, too, we should remember Avrohom's example. Knowing the strength of our forebearer and recognizing where we come from can sometimes give us the added strength we need to hold ourselves together.

* Rosh Kollel, Savannah Kollel, Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Haye Sarah - Matchmaker, Deal Maker
A 3.7 K Years Old News Report

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

Dear readers, I am glad to publish here, for the first time, an article from the Haran Inquirer describing the intriguing events leading to the marriage of Yitzhak and Rivka. The events reported here took place approximately 3,700 years ago, and it is indeed a miracle this newspaper clip was somehow preserved.

Before you read the clip, however, let us consider the following questions)it would be a good idea to do this around the Shabbat table. Brainstorm! Get the Tanakh out and look for clues and answers(:

- Why did Abraham search for a bride in Haran instead of Canaan?
- If Abraham thought that the people of Haran were superior, why was he so vehemently opposed to the idea of his son moving to Haran in case the woman does not want to come to Canaan?
- Abraham asks his servant to take an oath, but the servant speaks of a curse. Why?
- The servant did not search for Abraham's family when he got to Haran, but rather went to the water well. Why?
- The servant gave Rivka the jewelry, practically sealing the deal, before he knew anything about her. Why?
- If you were Rivka's parents, would you let her travel to a far-flung land with an unknown man?
- What did Rivka's relatives receive in return for their agreement to let her go to Canaan?
- Why did they change their mind on the morning of her departure and ask her to stay in Haran?

The answer to all these questions is that the servant misled us, as he did Rivka's relatives, to believe that he was sent to find a bride for Yitzhak from within Abraham's extended family. We were also misled to believe that the cultural and religious atmosphere of Haran was superior to that of Canaan. Rashi even adds, based on the Midrash, that the servant was Eliezer and that he wanted Yitzhak to marry his daughter, only to be rejected by Abraham who tells him that the Canaanites are cursed and the blessed offspring of Abraham will not marry one of them. This Midrash is in stark contradiction to the rabbis' description of Abraham as proselytizer. What is the point of Abraham's efforts, according to the Midrash, to convert people to Monotheism, if he considers them second-class citizens of his religion, worthy of obeying his laws but not of marrying his daughter?

Abraham, then, was not a proselytizer. He understood that the process of spreading the knowledge of Monotheism and its

revolutionary concepts, including the image of God, rest on Shabbat, and rejection of idolatry, cannot be promulgated through a mass movement. It had to be an in-depth, one-on-one education, which passes from parent to child and which will be finalized in the Egyptian exile, where the nation will learn the importance of freedom and the possibility of hope and redemption.

Abraham's rationale in sending the servant to Haran was that if Yitzhak marries a local woman, she will be tethered to her parents and family, and will never be able to fully adopt the new religion. Abraham therefore decides to send his servant to a foreign land, so the future bride will have a full immersion in the Abrahamic theology. But finding a woman who will be willing to abandon her family and come to Canaan, knowing that she probably will not see her family very frequently, was not going to be an easy task. The solution was to go to Haran, where Abraham had tribal ties, and where there were more chances of convincing the bride to migrate. Abraham tells the servant:

Go to my land and to my clan...)24:4(

He does not mention family because it is not of the essence.

Both Abraham and the servant, though, foresaw a possibility of failure. The servant asked if in such a case he could take Yitzhak to Haran, and Abraham forbade him from doing so.]editor's note: After the Akeidah, Yitzhak had the status of a korban and therefore could not leave the holy land of Canaan.[It was then that the servant understood the difficult task lying ahead and realized that he was chosen because of his superb negotiation skills. We can reconstruct this concept by comparing the way the events unfolded with the story the servant told the family at the negotiation table.

The Torah does not mention Abraham's servant's name, and though it might have been someone other than Eliezer, one thing is certain. He was an astute negotiator.

The servant arrives at the water well and devises the famous Kindness Test: who will be the one who offers water to all my camels? He does not ask around for Abraham's family because that will limit his choices. If they say no, he will not be able to approach other people, since they will reason that if Abraham's own family does not want to let their daughter go, they should not trust him.

Rivka now comes to the well. We watch how she is approached by the man, hears his request, and passes the test. The servant showers her with gifts, before asking for her name, to lock in his win. When he finds out that she is a relative, he publicly praises God who guided him in his journey, thus making the choice of Rivka at the well a sign of the divine will, which the family, hopefully, will be afraid to ignore.

When the servant arrives at the family's house, he refuses to eat before speaking, thus showing that he is not at the mercy of the host and that he owes them nothing. He describes his master's wealth and prosperity, an obvious sales pitch, and then throws in the first distortion of truth. He says that his master told him:

You must go to the house of my father and to my family, to take a wife for my son.)24:38(

When he puts it this way, stressing Abraham's loyalty for and respect of his family, it becomes harder for the family to say no. Now that he softened them by playing the good cop, he turns around and becomes the bad cop, using threats. Originally, Abraham asked the servant to take an oath as a promise that he will follow his instructions, but added that if the woman refuses to come with him, the oath is nullified. Abraham also admonishes the servant: beware, do not take my son back to that place)24:8(.

When the servant reports this exchange to the family, however, he makes three subtle adjustments. He said that his master said:

*You will be absolved of my curse if you come to my family, and if they refuse to give [her to you]
you will be absolved of my curse.*

The changes are so minute that had the family possessed a recording of Abraham's exact words, the servant could still have defended his version. Let us see what he does:

- He omits Abraham's objection to Yitzhak's returning to Haran, since it will hurt the narrative of familial ties and loyalty.
- He changes the neutral שבועה – oath, to אלה – curse. It is not a promise that he makes, but a curse which threatens him. But if the family refuses to let the woman go, the implication is that the curse will now dwell on them.
- He also moves the yoke of responsibility from the woman to the family.

Whereas Abraham said: "*if the woman refuses to go*," the servant said "*if the family refuses to let her go*." The servant's clever manipulation continues as he recounts the encounter at the well. In his version of events, he first asks for the girl's name, and only after finding out that she is a relative of Abraham, gives her the jewelry. He also alters his expression of thanks and praise. He originally praised God for guiding him to his master's family, but he tells the family)24:48(that he praised God for: *Guiding me in the path of truth to take the daughter of my master's brother [as a wife] for his son...*

The Path of Truth is unequivocal. In the servant's narrative, a divine hand pointed at Rivkah, leaving no other possibility. According to him, his proclamation already confirmed that she is the future bride of Yitzhak. The family is not asked to consider a completely novel idea, but rather to add their seal of approval to a deal brokered by God Almighty, the rejection of which, they were told, will have dangerous consequences.

The servant now delivers the final blow, feigning neutrality and innocence:

If you wish to show true loyalty to my master tell me, and if not, let me know and I will search right and left...)24:49(

Her brother and father then respond, acknowledging that they have been cornered and were left no other choice:

It is God's decree! We cannot speak to you evil or good.)24:50(

Upon hearing that, the servant, after thanking God, finally opens the coveted trunks which he brought with him. The price of the exchange was never discussed, but it was assumed that the family is going to be rewarded, and the servant cleverly directed the negotiation so he gets an approval before setting a price. The family's eyes widen with anticipation of the precious gifts they are going to receive, but to their utter shock and dismay, the gold, silver, and fine garments are given to Rivka, while they receive only pastries and sweets.

This was not because of stinginess. The servant wanted to frame the deal as one of good will and acceptance of God's decree, and not as the sale of a woman to the highest bidder. The family is obviously distraught, and in a last-minute attempt to make some profit, tries to delay the "delivery" date with the hope of more negotiations. The servant rebukes them for interfering with God's plans, but they still insist and say that while they have no objection to Rivka's immediate departure, she would probably want to linger with the family. Alas, Rivka, who already realizes that her family is willing to sell her away, decides to go with the servant, who can now sigh relief and declare: Mission accomplished.

We learn several lessons from this intricate narrative:

Abraham wanted to create an influence-free environment for the education of his future daughter-in-law. We sometimes have to alienate ourselves from bad influences.

The servant was a master of communication, and his success teaches us how easily the truth can be manipulated. We have to be careful in our dealings with others and with ourselves, and to try and seek the true intention and details, as much as possible.

Finally, we learn that had the family consulted Rivka before saying yes to the servant, they might have gotten their share. We should be cautious when making decisions for others, to not ignore their will and opinions.

I hope you enjoy reading the lost newspaper clip from the Haran Bugle and discussing the ideas raised here.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/ham-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Emulate Avraham and Encourage Time to Stop

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

In our culture, we can usually sound more interesting when we refer to a chunk of time in Latin. In the year 2000, we celebrated a new "millennium." When someone turns 100, we call them a "centenarian" from the Latin word "cent" which means 100.

In that same vein, let us say that our Matriarch Sarah was a "supercentenarian" or someone who reached 127 years old. Our Patriarch Abraham passed at 175 years old, which also made him a "supercentenarian."

Both pass away in this week's portion, Chayeis Sara, and both lived a full life. In their honour, let's allow ourselves to find some meaning in the numbers of their years.

Both of their ages combine to equal 302, which is the same name word numerically as the Hebrew word for "lightning")BaRak(.

The Midrash says that Abraham was able to delay the Angels, who travel like lightning, from destroying Sodom because of his plea on their behalf for mercy. The Angels usually travel as fast as a lightning bolt, but were stopped until Abraham's prayer was done.

Perhaps here we can sense a little of what makes Abraham and Sarah so special. Sometimes our world feels like it is hurtling toward some foregone conclusion. Our fate sometimes seems sealed. It can't be stopped -- like a lightning bolt can't be stopped. But Abraham and Sarah never stopped no matter what the setback. Granted, it took centuries for their vision to materialize, but that is due to their efforts against the perceived inevitabilities of their world.

Let us take encouragement and never stop fighting for what we believe is right even if it takes another Millennium.

Whether it's like lightning or thunder, we can always fight our way through it.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

Rav Kook Torah

Chayei Sarah: The Torah of the Patriarchs

Even the Sages were puzzled why the Torah describes with such detail the story of Abraham's servant and the search for a wife for Isaac. Why are so many verses devoted to the servant's encounter with Rebecca at the well, as well as his subsequent report of this event to Rebecca's family? The Torah is so parsimonious with its words — important laws are often derived from a single letter. Why such verbosity here?

Due to this textual anomaly, the Sages made a bold claim: *"The conversation of the Patriarch's servants is superior to the Torah of their descendants"*)Breishit Rabbah 60(.

What does this mean? Is their everyday discourse really more important than the Torah and its laws?

Lofty Torah The of the Patriarchs

In fact, the 'conversations' of the Avot, the Patriarchs, were also a form of Torah. This Torah was more elevated than the later Torah of their descendants, as it reflected the extraordinary holiness and nobility of these spiritual giants. If so, why did the Sages refer to it as mere 'conversations'?

A conversation is natural, unaffected speech. The Torah of the Avot was like a conversation, flowing naturally from the inner sanctity of their goals and aspirations. Holy ideals permeated the day-to-day lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to such a degree that these ideals were manifest even in the everyday discourse of their servants.

The Torah of their descendants, on the other hand, lacks this natural spontaneity. It is a thought-out religion based on willed-holiness, a compendium of detailed rules and regulations calculated to govern all aspects of life. This is especially true for the development of Torah law during the long years of exile, when Torah was limited to governing the religious life of the individual.

Torah of Redemption

With our national return to Eretz Yisrael, we also return to the Torah of Eretz Yisrael. The generation of national rebirth has no patience for the feeble lights of Judaism as it exists in the exile. The people seek lofty ideals and great deeds. They aspire to build a model society, to correct injustice, and restore the Jewish people to a state of autonomy and independence. There is an inner Divine spirit driving their brazenness, as they reject the paltry lights of exilic Judaism, lights that glow faintly, like candles in the brilliant midday sun.

What will satisfy the spiritual needs of the generation of rebirth? They will gain new life from the comprehensive Torah of the Patriarchs. The daily Amidah prayer makes this connection between the Avot and the era of redemption:

"[God] remembers the Patriarchs' acts of kindness, and lovingly brings the redeemer to their descendants."

It is the *"Patriarchs' acts of kindness"* and their vibrant, natural Torah that will redeem their descendants in the final generation. The Messianic light will shine forth, and out of the darkness of heresy and denial, a supernal light will emanate

from the lofty Torah of the Avot, a Torah of authenticity and greatness which will redeem the generation.

The lofty tzaddikim must recognize this secret. Their task is to combine these two Torahs, that of the Avot with that of their descendants. Then they will reveal a Torah crowned with honor and strength, beauty and splendor.

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Orot*, pp. 66-67.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/VAYERA59.htm>https://ravkooktorah.org/CHAYEI_67.htm

Chayei Sarah – Beginning the Journey (5774, 5781)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

A while back, a British newspaper, The Times, interviewed a prominent member of the Jewish community and a member of the House of Lords – let’s call him Lord X – on his 92nd birthday. The interviewer said, “*Most people, when they reach their 92nd birthday, start thinking about slowing down. You seem to be speeding up. Why is that?*” Lord X’s reply was this: “*When you get to 92, you see the door starting to close, and I have so much to do before the door closes that the older I get, the harder I have to work.*”

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

The purchase of the Cave of Machpelah is evidently a highly significant event, because it is recorded in great detail and highly legal terminology, not just here, but three times subsequently in Genesis)here in Gen. 23:17 and subsequently in Gen. 25:9; Gen. 49:30; and Gen. 50:13(, each time with the same formality. Here, for instance, is Jacob on his deathbed, speaking to his sons:

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

Something significant is being hinted at here; otherwise why specify, each time, exactly where the field is and who Abraham bought it from?

Immediately after the story of land purchase, we read, “*Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything.*”)Gen. 24:1(Again this sounds like the end of a life, not a preface to a new course of action, and again our expectation is confounded. Abraham launches into a new initiative, this time to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac, who at this point is at least 37 years old. Abraham instructs his most trusted servant to go “*to my native land, to my birthplace*”)Gen. 24:2(, to find the appropriate woman. He wants Isaac to have a wife who will share his faith and way of life. Abraham does not stipulate that she should come from his own family, but this seems to be an assumption hovering in the background.

As with the purchase of the field, this course of events is described in more detail than almost anywhere else in the Torah.

Every conversational exchange is recorded. The contrast with the story of the Binding of Isaac could not be greater. There, almost everything – Abraham’s thoughts, Isaac’s feelings – is left unsaid. Here, everything is said. Again, the literary style calls our attention to the significance of what is happening, without telling us precisely what it is.

The explanation is simple and unexpected. Throughout the story of Abraham and Sarah, God promises them two things: children and a land. The promise of the land)“Rise, walk in the land throughout its length and breadth, for I will give it to you.” Gen. 13:17(is repeated no less than seven times. The promise of children occurs four times. Abraham’s descendants will be “a great nation”)Gen. 12:2(, as many as “the dust of the earth”)Gen. 13.16(, and “the stars in the sky”)Gen. 15:5(; he will be the father not of one nation but of many)Gen. 17:5(.

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

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

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

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

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

Leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow a life with immortality.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAYEI SARAH

-]1[Why does God use tzimtzum)self-limitation(?
-]2[Does this essay inspire you to action? If so, how?

]3[What actions do you want to take to ensure you have begun the journey?

* <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/chayei-sarah/beginning-the-journey/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. Footnotes are not available for this Dvar Torah.

Life Lessons from the Parsha: Shrouds Don't Have Pockets

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 5785

There's an old Yiddish expression, in tachrichim iz nishto kein keshines, "*Burial shrouds don't have pockets.*" In other words, you can't take your stuff with you.

So what does come with us? The answer is found in the title of this week's Torah portion.

Chayei Sarah means "*the life of Sarah.*" One would therefore assume that this portion is all about the life of Sarah. The second verse, however, talks about Sarah's passing, and the rest of the portion discusses events that took place after her death. How could this portion be about the life of Sarah when we have 105 verses that talk about what happened after the life of Sarah?

In answering this classic question, we learn **a profound life lesson: the life of a righteous person continues even after their physical passing.** [emphasis added]

Our sages tell us that wicked people, "*even when they are alive, they are considered dead.*" The wicked have no continuity, no eternity. Righteous people (t zaddikim), on the other hand, "*even when they pass away, they are considered living.*"¹

The classic example of this teaching is, "*David Melech Yisrael chai vekayam*" – "*David, King of Israel, is alive and well.*" Yet we know, of course, that King David was buried thousands of years ago. Why, then, do we sing about him being alive and well? Because only his physical body was interred; his true essence, the "real" King David, remains alive and well, and we are waiting for Moshiach, a descendant of David, to lead us out of exile.

Another example of this teaching is our patriarch Jacob. The Talmud (quoted by Rashi) tells us, "*Our patriarch Jacob did not die. Just as his children are living, he, too, is living.*"²

Who Was Sarah?

Sarah was many things: a righteous woman, a prophetess, the wife of Abraham. But above all, Sarah was our matriarch. And not only that, she was our first matriarch. It was Sarah who brought about the fulfillment of G d's promise that her son, Isaac, would carry forth Abraham's legacy.³

"*For I have known him,*" says G d about Abraham, "*because he commands his sons and his household after him, that they should keep the way of the Lord to perform righteousness and justice.*"⁴ As Rashi explains, "*For I have known him*" implies love. To know him is to love him. Why does G d love him? Because Abraham and Sarah established continuity for G d. And to this day we are called the children of Abraham and Sarah.

Life is not the pleasures we encounter; those are transient, passing. What is permanent in life are those things that live forever.

That's why this portion is called Chayei Sarah, because it teaches us about what is real in life.

Transient vs. Eternal

There are two contrasting perspectives regarding reality:

One approach suggests that if something cannot be perceived with any of the five senses, then it does not exist. Only if you can see it, hear it, smell it, taste it, or touch it, then it is real.

The other perspective is that anything that can be perceived with the senses is temporary. Here today, gone tomorrow. Only intangible experiences, it is argued, can represent eternity.

Seven-layer cake is delicious, but it's not forever. An idea, a belief, a mathematical axiom – one plus one equals two – those are forever.

This explains why even the mightiest of governments have failed to eradicate certain ideals, values, and aspirations.

Chayei Sarah teaches us that the true "*life of Sarah*" lies in the good and the G dly aspects of life, or as we know it, in studying Torah, performing mitzvot, and living as a Jew. These are eternal realities.

Place of Life

According to Jewish law, a person must be buried when they pass. In Hebrew, there are three different expressions for the word "cemetery":

- *Beit hakevarot*, meaning "*place of graves*." Life is life, and death is death. When you die, it's over.
- *Beit olam*, or "*place of eternity*." Humankind was created from earth and returns to it. "*For dust you are, and to dust you will return*."⁵ Although the body is interred in the ground, the soul, the true consciousness of the person, the essence of the person, especially a righteous person, lives on forever. That is why it is referred to as a "*place of eternity*."
- *Beit hachaim*, the "*place of life*." Now, that sounds strange! Why call a cemetery a place of life? One might think it's facetious, but it's not. The soul is eternal. The blessings that emanate from souls are eternal. A person spends 70, 80, 120 years – or in the case of Sarah, 127 years – and then the body is returned to the earth. But the soul remains alive; the real person continues to live.

How? Firstly, by their accomplishments, their mitzvot, and their Torah study. And secondly, through their children, their grandchildren, and all their descendants until the end of time.

The Only True Friend

A poignant parable often comes to mind whenever I study this mishnah. It is about a man who was summoned by the king. Back then, if the king wanted to see you, it was never a good sign. Overwhelmed with fear, he sought solace from his three closest friends.

"Listen," he said to his first friend, *"I received a summons from the king. I'm terrified. Can you accompany me?"* His friend immediately reassured him, *"Of course I'll come with you! I'm your friend. I will walk with you all the way to the capital city,"* he said, *"but that's as far as I can go. I hope you understand."*

He made a similar request of the next friend. *"Of course I'll come with you,"* the friend responded,

“but I can only go until the palace gates. I hope you understand.”

Finally, he turned to his only remaining friend and implored, *“You are my dearest friend. Will you come with me? I am so scared.”* In a resolute voice, the devoted friend declared, *“I will accompany you to the capital city, through the palace gates, and even into the king’s court. I will stand by your side even when the king is interrogating you. I am with you; I will never leave your side.”*

Who are these three best friends that a person has?

The first friend is the wealth and possessions we’ve amassed in this world — our stocks, bonds, securities, real estate. When the time comes for us to depart to the next world, we ask our money to come with us. The money, however, says, *“I’ll accompany you, but only until the cemetery.”* Hearses don’t have luggage racks. Shrouds don’t have pockets. You can’t take it with you.

The second friend is our family. We turn to our spouse, children, grandchildren, and siblings, and plead, *“Please come with me!” Our loved ones assure us, “Of course we’ll accompany you. We love you. We’ll come to the cemetery and even attend the funeral. We will escort you all the way to your grave.”*

“But then,” our relatives continue, *“we’ll need to go home and eat bagels and eggs, and other round things, representing the cycle of life. We’re going to have a party at the shiva house. And maybe we’ll fight over the inheritance.”* With a sense of despair, the person exclaims, *“Hey! I can’t take my money with me, and my relatives can’t come with me either?!”*

So we turn to our only remaining friend — the Torah we studied, the mitzvot we performed, and the good deeds we amassed. The person asks, *“Will you come with me?”* The Torah and the mitzvot reply, *“Not only will we go with you, but we’ll be with you all the way. We will accompany you wherever you go.”*

Experiencing Eternity

Let us always be mindful of what is transient, and what is eternal. May our acts of kindness and goodness, our Torah study, and our performance of mitzvot be our guiding light, illuminating the path of eternity. May we all be blessed to lead lives that are engaged in the pursuit of the eternal.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Berachot 18b.
2. Taanit 5b.
3. Genesis 21:12.
4. Genesis 18:19.
5. Genesis 3:19.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6158963/jewish/Shrouds-Dont-Have-Pockets.htm

Chayei Sarah: How Can We Bless G-d?

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

The Power of Blessing

Eliezer is sent by his master, Abraham, to find a wife for his son Isaac. He meets Rebecca who gives water to Eliezer and his caravan. When he finds out that Rebecca was Abraham's grand-niece, Eliezer blesses G-d for having granted him success in his mission.

He said, *"Blessed be G-d, G-d of my master Abraham, who has not withheld His kindness and truth from my master. G-d has guided me along the road to the house of my master's brothers."*
)Gen. 24:27(

We can easily understand how we can praise G-d or give thanks to Him. But how can we bless Him? What blessing can we mortal humans bestow upon Almighty G-d?

We can answer this question by noting that the verb "*to bless*" in Hebrew means "*to bend down*," "*to draw down*" or "*to extend*." By acknowledging G-d's presence and involvement in our lives, we draw Him down into the world, so to speak. G-d created the world in such a way as to hide His presence, making it our mission to overcome this concealment. It is in this sense that we can "*bless*" G-d, enabling Him – through us – to be more revealed in the world than would be naturally possible.

Thus, reciting a blessing over good news, over food, or over the opportunity to fulfill some commandment is much more than thanking G-d. By acknowledging G-d's presence in our lives, we draw down and expand Divine consciousness within the material world, thereby "*blessing*" G-d with ever greater manifestation throughout reality.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Good Shabbos.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on parshat Ma'sei, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z''l

Abraham: A Life of Faith

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.

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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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Significance of a Grave

"My lord hearken to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me." (Genesis 23:14)

A significant part of this Torah portion deals with Abraham's purchase of the Hebron grave-site from the Hittites in order to bury Sarah, his beloved wife. In painstaking detail, the text describes how the patriarch requests to buy the grave, how the Hittites wish him to take it for free, and – when Efron the Hittite finally agrees to make it a sale – he charges Abraham the inflated and outlandish sum of four hundred silver shekels. The Midrash seems perplexed: why expend so much ink and parchment – the entire chapter 23 of the book of Genesis – over a Middle-Eastern souk sale? Moreover, what is the significance in the fact that the very first parcel of land in Israel acquired by a Jew happens to be a grave-site? And finally, how can we explain the irony of the present day Israeli-Palestinian struggle over grave-sites – the Ma'arat HaMakhpela in Hebron where our matriarchs and patriarchs are buried and Joseph's grave-site in Shechem – which were specifically paid for in the Bible by our patriarchs?

In order to understand our biblical portion, it is important to remember that throughout the ancient world – with the single exception of Athens – the only privilege accorded a citizen of any specific country was the 'right' of burial, as every individual wanted his body to ultimately merge with the soil of his familial birthplace. Abraham insists that he is a

stranger as well as a resident (ger toshav) of Het; he lives among, but is not one of, the Hittites. Abraham is a proud Hebrew; he refuses the 'right' of burial and demands to pay – even if the price is exorbitant – for the establishment of a separate Hebrew cemetery. Sarah's separate grave-site symbolizes her separate and unique identity. Abraham wants to ensure that she dies as a Hebrew and not a Hittite.

Interestingly, the Torah uses the same verb (kikha) to describe Abraham's purchase of a grave-site and to derive that a legal engagement takes place when the groom gives the bride a ring (or a minimum amount of money).^[1] Perhaps our tradition is suggesting that marriage requires a husband to take ultimate responsibility for his wife – especially in terms of securing her separate and unique identity – even beyond her life and into her grave.

This parsha reminds me of two poignant stories. First, when I was a very young rabbi, one of the first "emergency" questions I received was from an older woman leaning on a young Roman Catholic priest for support. She tearfully explained that her husband – who had died just a few hours earlier – was in need of a Jewish burial place. He had converted to Catholicism prior to having married her, and agreed that their children would be raised as Catholics. The Roman Catholic priest was, in fact, their son and she had never met any member of her husband's Jewish family. Even though they lived as Catholics during thirty-five years of their married life, his final deathbed wish had been to be buried in a Jewish cemetery....

Second, when my good and beloved friend Zalman Bernstein z'l was still living in America and beginning his return to Judaism, he asked me to find him a grave-site in the Mount of Olives cemetery. With the help of the Chevra Kadisha (Sacred Fellowship) of Jerusalem, we set aside a plot. When he inspected it, however, he was most disappointed: "You cannot see the Temple Mount," he shouted, in his typical fashion. I attempted to explain calmly that after 120 years, he either wouldn't be able to see anything anyway, or he would be able to see everything no matter where his body lay. "You don't understand," he countered. "I made a mess of my life so far and did not communicate to my children the glories of Judaism. The grave is my future and my eternity. Perhaps, when my children come to visit me there, if they would be able to see the holiest place in the world, the Temple Mount, they will be inspired by the Temple and come to appreciate what I could not adequately communicate to them while I was alive..."

Likutei Divrei Torah

For each individual, their personal grave-site represents the past and the future. Where and how individuals choose to be buried speaks volumes about how they lived their past lives and the values they aspired to. Similarly, for a nation, the grave-sites of its founders and leaders represent the past and reveal the signposts of the highs and lows in the course of the nation's history. The way a nation regards its grave-sites and respects its history will determine the quality of its future.

Indeed, the nation that chooses to forget its past has abdicated its future, because it has erased the tradition of continuity which it ought have transmitted to the future; the nation that does not properly respect the grave-sites of its founding patriarchs will not have the privilege of hosting the lives of their children and grandchildren. Perhaps this is why the Hebrew word, kever, literally a grave, is likewise used in rabbinical literature for womb. And the Hebrew name Rvkh (Rebecca), the wife of Isaac who took Sarah's place as the guiding matriarch, is comprised of the same letters as hkvr, the grave and/or the womb, the future which emerges from the past. Is it then any wonder that the first parcel of land in Israel purchased by the first Hebrew was a grave-site, and that the fiercest battles over ownership of the land of Israel surround the graves of our founding fathers and mothers? And perhaps this is why our Sages deduce the proper means for engagement from Abraham's purchase of a grave-site for Sarah – Jewish familial future must be built upon the life style and values of our departed matriarchs and patriarchs. The grave is also the womb; the past is mother to the future.

[1] Cf. Kiddushin 2a-b

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Attitude & Expectations Are the Secret to Happiness & Contentment

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).

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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 Chessed.” 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 Avinu. 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.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

The name of the main character is missing. That’s what we find in Parshat Chayei Sarah. Let’s say a school were putting on a play of this week’s Parsha and a child came home and said, “I’m going to play Eliezer.” I think his parents would be exceptionally proud of him, because we all know that Eliezer is the key character in the portion, which includes within it the longest chapter of the book of Bereishit.

However, let’s have a look at the names that are mentioned in the Parsha. The name of Avraham is featured thirty seven times. Yitzchak, is mentioned thirteen times. Rivka twelve times, Sarah nine, Ephron nine, Bethuel four, Lavan three and Eliezer, zero.

Yes, he’s the main character, but he’s called either Ha’aved – the servant or Ha’ish – the man. His name does not appear.

And the enormous message conveyed to us by the Torah is that sometimes the greatest contributions to humankind are made by people whose names are not in neon lights. And that was Eliezer.

That’s why, in the Talmud, we are taught: Gadol Sichatam Shel Avdei Avot MiTorotam Shel Banim – the everyday conversation of the servants of the founders of our faith is more significant to us than the Torah, than the formal instruction given to descendent of those

Because when it comes to the literal Torah, we find that the Torah is so concise, and we have to work out what every word says, what every letter means.

But here, the Torah expands on everything that Eliezer said and what he did, because we can learn so much from him. And indeed, this is what we are finding right now in the midst of a tragic war in Israel.

The contribution to the Jewish people is being made by so many Eliezers. We don't know their names, but the whole Jewish people is one mishpocha, we're one single family right now and we feel the pain of those who are suffering, and everybody is helping in such an extraordinary way.

And you know something? Eliezer's name says it all. We're helping, we're contributing from the depths of our hearts.

But – 'Eli-ezer' – ultimately, it is God who will help because that's what Eliezer means – Hashem is my help!

Ohr Torah Dvar Torah

From a Burial Site to a Nation Rooted in Kindness - Rachel Eilon Kochva

Parshat Chayei Sarah opens with a sorrowful event: the death of Sarah, our Matriarch. "And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hevron, in the land of Canaan, and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her."

What was Avraham's emotional state at this time? We can only imagine, as the Torah, true to its characteristic brevity, provides few descriptive details. However, I believe that a close reading of the verses may offer a glimpse into Avraham's inner world after Sarah's passing.

Following her death, Avraham seeks to purchase a burial site, and the Torah meticulously describes his negotiations with the sons of Chet and Efron. Intriguingly, the passage opens with the word *vayakom*—"and he arose": "And Avraham arose from before his deceased." The shift from the previous verse, where Avraham mourns and weeps, to the practicalities of acquiring Me'arat HaMachpelah, marks a sudden and jarring transition. How long did Avraham remain in his mourning? (After the year we've collectively experienced, we all know that mourning can be a profoundly long, drawn-out process.) In his search for a place to bury Sarah, Avraham arises—implying he had previously been in a low place, sitting in despair, overcome by grief and inaction.

The term *vayakom* ("and he/it rose") recurs three more times in this passage. The second instance describes Avraham rising to bow before the sons of Chet, while the latter two instances relate to the field: "And Efron's field rose to Avraham as a possession," and "the field and the cave within it rose to Avraham." Between these repetitions, Avraham buries Sarah. Perhaps the Torah's decision to describe the acquisition process with *vayakom* hints at the intimate bond which begins to form between Avraham and the land he purchases. Avraham transitions from passive mourning to decisive action, while the field itself, previously unremarkable, transforms into the first tangible piece of the Promised Land. Until now, Avraham had witnessed only the fulfillment of the promise of descendants; now, he also starts to inherit the land itself. This fulfillment of the Divine promise is both a moment of triumph and a moment of heartbreak—Sarah, who walked this journey with Avraham, could not live to see the promise of the land taking root.

When does the field gain its full significance? Ostensibly, once the transaction with Efron is concluded. The Torah notes that the field "arose" as Avraham's property, yet this word is repeated once again, perhaps underscoring that, though legally his, the field's deeper meaning is only realized with Sarah's burial within it.

In contemplating Avraham's rising and the field's transformation, we see that Avraham made the conscious decision to act upon the Divine promise in the wake of Sarah's passing. Although he could have accepted one of the existing graves offered by the people of Chet, he chose instead to secure a burial plot of his own. This choice indicates that, unlike the miraculous fulfillment of the promise of descendants (which Sarah was able to witness in her lifetime), the promise of the land would require his active participation.

Moreover, Avraham did not rely solely on Divine providence to secure his lineage; he took steps to ensure his son Yitzchak would marry. In the midst of mourning, Avraham resolves to rise and act, advancing the realization of God's promises. How arduous this shift must have been—moving from profound grief to purposeful action and a renewed focus on the future. This transition must have demanded remarkable inner fortitude. For Avraham, this meant both purchasing the burial field as well as finding a suitable wife for Yitzchak.

As a nation, we feel as though we are reliving an "Akeidah" experience, witnessing death and burial, our sacred connection to the land, and the sacred duty to bury our loved ones in it. How challenging it is to rise from such grief

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and work toward the future. How, indeed, do we even begin to rise?

I sense a subtle hint in the continuation of the parsha—a signpost from Avraham's servant, who faithfully carries out his master's mission. Though he receives minimal guidance regarding the ideal wife for Yitzchak—simply that she must come from a "good family"—the servant, having spent time in the household of Avraham and Sarah, intuitively understands that the defining trait he must seek is kindness. He sets out to find a wife who will join Yitzchak in building a home rooted in kindness, in alignment with God's description of Avraham as one who "will command his children and household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (Bereshit 18:19). Rivka, as we know, proves herself to be just such a woman.

Why do I see this as a signpost for how to rebuild and focus on our own future? Because kindness inherently compels one to step beyond personal grief, to briefly shift away from sorrow, desolation, and anxiety, in order to recognize the existence of others. Kindness, in its fullest expression, can only be realized when those in need acknowledge that someone genuinely wishes to help and open themselves to accepting support. The Torah envisions a nation founded upon kindness—a people walking in God's ways, dedicated to righteousness and justice. Perhaps kindness marks the turning point between death and life.

Our bond with the Land of Israel cannot remain confined to the mere ownership of burial plots. It is meant to foster a vibrant, living nation committed to kindness, justice, and righteousness. My heartfelt prayer and hope, inspired by the spirit of our wondrous people, is that we may indeed become such a nation—building a society in our sacred land that stands as an exemplar of righteousness and justice. Amen, may it be so.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

The Acquisition of Mearat Hamachpelah and the Centrality and Indispensability of Eretz Yisrael to Our Ancestral Values and National Identity

Parshat Chayei Sarah details with striking specificity the negotiation for and acquisition of Mearat Hamachpelah, the legacy kever (burial place) initially of Sarah and eventually of the rest of the avot and imahot (except Rahel). The midrash emphasizes the surprisingly expansive presentation of these developments—*"kama deyutot mishtaphot, kamah kulmesin mishtabrin kedai lichtov benei Cheit"*, (Bereishit Rabah 58:2), noting that the apparently gratuitous phrase "benei Cheit" alone recurs ten times, suggestively paralleling the omni-significant ten

commandments, "ve-asarah peamim katuv benei Cheit, asarah keneged aseret hadibrot"! While this midrash attributes the aspirational association to the vital importance of assisting a tzadik of Avraham's magnitude in even his most apparently mundane endeavors - "lelamdecha she-kol mi shemevarer micho shel tzadik keilu mekayem aseret hadibrot" - others (see, for example, Chidushei Hagrim, Bereishit 23:19), recognizing that this was the first formal stake in Eretz Yisrael and undoubtedly inspired by Avraham's recurring use of the term "achuzat kever" (23:5, 10, 20) project that this equation reflects the singular stature, and monumental role of Eretz Yisrael in Jewish life and law.

This perspective on Mearat Hamachpelah is encapsulated by Ibn Ezra (Bereshit 23:19) who notes that the successful transaction immediately established the property as a legacy purchase for all future descendants - "umeaz nitkayem ha-sadeh le-achuzat kever". He elaborates that the entire parshah conveys Eretz Yisrael's inimitable status that impacts not only the living, but the deceased, as well - "lehodia maalat Eretz Yisrael al kol ha'arazot le-chaim u-lemeitim"! Ibn Ezra adds that this acquisition fulfilled Hashem's commitment to Avraham that he would be awarded "nachalah" (heritage-legacy). [See, also Ibn Ezra Bereshit (33:9) when Yaakov purchased in Shechem - "lehodia ki ma'aloh gedolah yesh be-Eretz Yisrael u-mi she-yesh lo chelek bo hashuv ke-chelek olam ha-ba". It is interesting to compare this formulation with his comments above. As Chidushei Hagrim notes, Ramban does not dispute this application, perhaps as it is focused on the living.]

It is curious that even as Ramban (23:19) magnifies the Torah's repeated location of Chevron in "Eretz kena'an" in the very beginning (23:2) and conclusion (23:19) of this episode to credit the fact that Avraham and Sarah dwelled primarily in Eretz Yisrael, specifically that the "tzadeket" merited burial there, and that the burial plot of "avoteinu ha-kedoshim" is deserving of special attention and respect, he takes issue with Ibn Ezra's dual contention that there was particular significance to the extension of Eretz Yisrael's role to the deceased and that this constituted an important expression of "nachalah" ("ki mah ma'aloh la-aretz bazeh, ki lo yolichenah el eretz acheret le-kavrah, u'devar Hashem le-Avraham al kol ha'aretz hayah, venitkayam rak bezaro"). Although Ramban is certainly one of the most articulate and impassioned advocates of an outsized role of Eretz Yisrael in all facets of Jewish life, he was puzzled by the Ibn Ezra's expansive view regarding the purchase of Mearat Hamachpelah. [It is ironic if understandable that the formulation in Chidushei Hagrim, alluded to previously, is inspired by Ramban's consistent and pervasive

doctrine articulated in Vayikra (18:25) and throughout all his writings, notwithstanding his Ibn Ezra critique in this context.]

Upon reflection, Ibn Ezra's position which roots the national legacy status of Eretz Yisrael in all generations in a transaction that honors the lives of spiritual giants, founders of the nation, by accentuating the impact and transcendence of their existence and contributions, that promotes national history, and that specifically crystalizes the incalculable impact and transcendent role of the avot and imahot, is profound and compelling. Ma'aseh Avot siman le-banim (the history of our forefathers and foremothers is a guidepost to all Jewish generations), a theme particularly embraced by Ramban, establishes that halachic values are timeless, and that the personas, policies, and perspectives of our forefathers are an indispensable relevant treasure in every generation, a critical component in the ongoing destiny of Klal Yisrael. The "achuzat kever" initiated "lareshet achuzah" (Vayikra 25:46).

It was not merely nostalgia that impelled Yaakov to insist (Bereshit 49:30) not merely "al tikbereni be-Mitzrayim" (47:29), but "kviru oti el avotai el ha-mearah asher bisdei Efron ha-Chiti." The fact that Yaakov repeats, seemingly gratuitously, the history of the transaction and its description (49:31-33) - "bamearah asher bisdeh hamachpelah asher al penei mamrei bi-Eretz Kenaan asher kanah Avraham et ha-sadeh meieit Efron ha-Chiti la'chuzat kaver" - reinforces this analysis. In his final words, Yaakov-Yisrael updates the history of this "achuzat kaver" - "shamah kavru et Avraham..." - noting that it has become the physical locus of the avot and imahot, the initial stake in the national homeland, as it was designed to be. As the bechir ha-avot departs the physical world his last bequest reflects his acute awareness of the link between the national homeland and the legacy of its inimitable paradigmatic forefathers. It was reciprocally crucial that taking title in Eretz Yisrael, the corporate national homeland of Klal Yisrael, be initiated by and embody the imprimatur and enduring contribution of the avot and imahot.

As we channel all our material and spiritual resources in support of Israel in this time of crisis, it is important that we fully recognize and appreciate our national homeland's central role in all facets of Jewish life and destiny. The torrent of vicious antisemitism that has been experienced world-wide in the aftermath of an unequivocally obscene and evil massacre in Eretz Yisrael sadly reinforces this halachic principle in a very concrete way. The fate and destiny of world Jewry and Israel are inextricably intertwined in principle and practice. In the final analysis, we are fighting

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for the eternal halachic values of sanctity, dignity and spirituality, the aspirations of a maximal avodat Hashem. Indeed, these are the exceptional legacy of our magnificent forefathers and foremothers, whose "achuzat kever" necessarily initiated and encapsulated nachalat Eretz Yisrael. May their merit (zechut avot) and the merits of our own multidimensional efforts bring a yeshuah bekarov.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

All the Good that Was Done

...and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her. And Abraham arose from before his dead, and he spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, "I am a stranger and an inhabitant with you. Give me burial property with you, so that I may bury my dead from before me." (Breishis 23: 3-4)

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

Avraham Avinu endured ten great tests in his lifetime and most probably millions of micro tests as well. Most everyone agrees, however, that the height of heights, the test of all tests, was when Avraham was told to bring his son, his only son, the son he loved, Yitzchok to be brought up for an offering at the Akeida. Yet, Rabeinu Yona counts the purchase of a burial plot for Sarah as the 10th test. How is anything a test after the Akeida?

A little more than a week ago I was invited to speak at a meeting of local Rabbanim who were gathering to lend support and encouragement to the county DA that was up for election, Mr. Tom Walsh. He was visibly shaken up because he had taken a principled position in favor of a Jew that some other local authorities desperately wanted to make an example of. Since making his unpopular decision he and his staff were subjected to intimidation and threats. This was all very new and uncomfortable for him. I think they asked me to speak because they felt I could relate to this old Irishman best with my all-American background. It comes in handy once in a while.

I told him, "Tom, I want to speak a language that I don't think the Rabbanim here will understand, but you will. I would like to tell you about one of my greatest heroes. He was most famous for what he didn't do. At the turn of the century Sport Illustrated crowned him the athlete of the century. He was disproportionately more successful in his game than any other athlete in their sport. A Jewish

boy, a baseball pitcher for the Brooklyn and Los Angeles Dodgers, Sandy Koufax. In 1965 he didn't pitch in the 1st game of the world series which fell on the holiest of days, Yom Kippur.

In spite of all his athletic accomplishments, when you look him up on Wikipedia already in the 2nd line it is written that he didn't pitch in the 1st game of the world series in 1965 because it fell out on Yom Kippur. His behavior sent a shockwave down the spine of the Jewish people and the entire world. He delivered a message, "There is something more important than baseball". I was also an aspiring baseball pitcher and this stirred around within me for a long time and made a huge difference in my life. You can only imagine the pushback and heat he took from teammates and management and fans. Some people, the Talmud tells us, acquire their entire world in one move. I don't know what else he did with his life but this single deed will stand out forever.

Mr. Walsh, Tom, by taking a principled stance and doing what is just and right, you are now facing the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and I know it's not easy. What you did sent a shockwave across Rockland County and delivered a message that, "There is something more important than politics". Some people earn their entire world in one move. I want you to do me a favor, Mr. Walsh and that is, please do not regret for a moment what you have done. You have a giant diamond. It is priceless. The more you struggle because of what you did, the more valuable that diamond becomes. You have something more than the endorsement of these Rabbanim and the Jewish community. You have a blessing from the Creator of Heaven and Earth!"

Why did I ask him not to regret what he did? The Rambam writes that just as someone can erase a sin with regret, so too a person can erase a Mitzvah with regret. A wealthy businessman once told me that he knows someone who gave away tens of millions of dollars to Tzedaka and then his fortunes reversed. He heard a little voice chirping in his head saying, "If only you had not given away all that money you would have plenty now!" He shouted at that voice, "QUIET!" He never gave it another thought. It would not bring his money back but it might erase the merit of all he had achieved. So it was that Avraham lost Sarah because of the Akeida, Rashi tells us. He had to tell that voice chirping in his head, "QUIET!" Sadness won't bring Sarah back and regret may undo all the good that was done!

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's

Derashot Ledorot

On Remaining Unperturbed*

Of all the names that have been given to the period of history through which we are currently living, the most appropriate and descriptive is the "age of anxiety." Indeed, it is anxiety that most accurately describes the inner life of man in our era, his unceasing tension, and the whole range of psychosomatic ills which symbolize that tense inner life. Anxiety has even been incorporated into philosophy by some thinkers of the French Existentialist school. It is the mood which dominates all of modern man and is his most characteristic emotion.

What, if anything, does Judaism have to say about this phenomenon? It is true, of course, that Judaism should not be understood as an elaborate prescription for "peace of mind." We, of course, do not conceive of religion as a "need" to be fulfilled. And yet, I do not doubt for a moment that Judaism has a definite judgment upon this, our problem. First, because Judaism is good for people, even though that is not the reason we ought to accept it. And second, it can be shown that ultimately a good part of the emotional life of man is based upon his ethics, his spiritual character, and his religious conception.

The teaching of Judaism that is most relevant to the problem of modern man's anxiety is expressed in two words, *hishtavut hanefesh* – equanimity, stability, keeping on an even psychological and spiritual keel. This attitude of *hishtavut hanefesh*, of the constancy of personality, is eventually based upon a religious conception – that of faith. If a man has faith, he will not be upset either by very good news or by very bad news, he will yield neither to the temptations of affluence nor to the threat of adversity – for the same God is the source of both opposites. If he is a success in his endeavors and receives compliments, he will remain largely unimpressed with his own triumph. And if he is criticized until it hurts, he will remain largely unperturbed and unshaken in his faith.

This Jewish teaching was brilliantly expounded in the comments on our sidra by the Reszher Rav, Rabbi Aaron Levine of blessed memory, who was a great scholar, a great preacher, and a senator in the Polish parliament. The Torah tells us at the very beginning of our portion (Genesis 23:1) that Sara lived 127 years, and then repeats, in the same verse, "These are the years of the life of Sara." Our rabbis wondered at this repetition and Rashi, quoting our sages, remarked: "All these years were equally for the good." What Rashi meant is explained by the Reszher Rav as *hishtavut hanefesh* – the lesson of stability both of mind and of soul. Sara's life had its ups

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and its downs, she reached very high points and very low points, there were sharp changes of fortune. In her early youth she found herself uprooted from her home, wandering from town to town and city to city following her husband. When she came to Egypt she was separated from her beloved husband, abducted by an immoral Egyptian potentate. Later, she rejoiced as she and her husband attained great wealth, and finally, at the climax of her good fortune, when God awarded her with a son in her old age, fully realizing the ambition of a lifetime. And yet, despite these vicissitudes, "All these years were equally for the good" – her basic character of goodness remained unchanged throughout. Her character was unaffected. She became neither arrogant as a result of her success and triumph, nor despairing and crushed by her failure. She knew and practiced the Jewish quality of *hishtavut hanefesh*.

Is this not a message that we moderns ought to seek out and observe in our own lives? Far too many people in our day and age have lost this capacity for psycho-spiritual stability. In conditions of adversity they have become demoralized, confused, and perplexed. They lose faith and blame their defeat upon God. And in times of prosperity, they turn arrogant, lose perspective, regard themselves as "self-made," and decide that they no longer need faith. Perhaps that is why religion suffers most during times of great stress, when circumstances are either very good or very bad. Both war and famine, and conversely, economic prosperity and well-being, cause attrition in the ranks of religious people. How right, then, was Rabbeinu Tam, the grandson of Rashi, who wrote in his *Sefer haYashar* that true character comes to the fore only in times of crisis and violent change, whether the change is to the good or to the bad. For crisis is the litmus paper of character, and change in fortune the barometer of a man's soul.

The rabbis of the Talmud saw this quality of *hishtavut hanefesh* as based upon and as a symbol of the final and greatest of the three requirements of man by God as enumerated in the famous verse by the prophet Micah: "It has been told to you, O Man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you – but to do justice and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). And commenting upon that last requirement, the Talmud (Makkot 24a) tells us that "to walk humbly" refers to the two opposite occasions of accompanying the bride to the bridal canopy and accompanying the deceased on his last trip – at the funeral. What our sages meant to tell us is that if you want to know if a man is indeed devout, if he is indeed a religious personality, if he "walks humbly with his God" – then test his reaction, his attitude, and his strength of character at these crucial times of either great happiness or

great grief, of great joy or great tragedy. To walk humbly with God means to achieve, on the basis of a religious outlook and profound faith, the quality of hishtavut hanefesh. This refers to the inner stability that is retained even when life moves us back and forth across the spectrum of experience from the deep blue of misery and depression to the bright red of cheery optimism, joy, and happiness. That is why at the occasion of a death, our tradition teaches us that we must mourn and weep, for otherwise, in the words of Maimonides (*Hilkhot Avel* 13:12), we are merciless and hardened. But at the same time, tradition teaches us that we must not overdo our mourning, we must not prolong it more than is necessary, for otherwise, again in the words of Maimonides, it is a sign of spiritual foolishness, a symbol and symptom of the lack of faith in God and a lack of hope in the future. That is why, too, at the occasion of a wedding, we break the glass in memory of the destruction of the Temple. At sad occasions we introduce a note of optimism, and at happy occasions a sobering note reminiscent of life's harshness. In this manner we attempt to attain hishtavut hanefesh – of not being over-impressed by triumph and not being perturbed by defeat. And therefore, for the same reason, on Passover, the great holiday of liberation, we eat the maror – the symbol of bitterness, while on Tisha beAv, the day of great tragedy, we do not recite the Tahanun prayer, for the halakha regards even this great day of tragedy as a mo'ed – a sort of holiday.

No wonder a great Hasidic teacher taught that every man must have two pockets; in one he must carry a note upon which are written the words of Abraham, "Behold I am only dust and ashes" (*Genesis* 18:27), and in the other must be the statement of the rabbis in the Mishna (*Sanhedrin* 4:5), "For my sake was the world created."

So if there is anyone who has had fortune smile upon him, who has achieved a degree of satisfaction and success – let him not forget that ultimately man is only dust and ashes; let him remember to walk humbly with his God. And conversely, if there is anyone who somehow suffers silently, whose heart is wounded with grief, and whose soul bears some painful sores, who perhaps has received criticism that hurts, let him not yield to self-pity or despair, let him not lose faith and submit to moodiness and especially not to the feeling of his own worthlessness. Let him remember that although he may walk "humbly," nevertheless every man and woman still walks "with his God" – and what greater consolation is there for any human being than to know that he has the dignity of having been created in the image of God, and the hope that there is a God above who listens to the

heartbeat of every human being as a father listens to the pleading voice of a child.

And as this is true of us generally as individuals, certainly ought this to be true of us as Jews. How beautifully our rabbis (*Genesis Rabba* 58:3) describe an incident which, in its inner meaning, refers to this quality of hishtavut hanefesh. Rabbi Akiba was preaching and found himself beset by an audience which was falling asleep – an occurrence not unknown in the life of a speaker, and an occupational risk generally anticipated by any preacher. And so he tried to awaken them by telling them: How comes it that Queen Esther ruled over 127 countries? The answer is that she was the great-granddaughter of Sara, who lived 127 years.

I believe our rabbis had a special message in this relation and in this narrative. Rabbi Akiba lived at a time when his people were in danger of "falling asleep." This was the era of Hadrianic persecutions, when the Roman Empire forbade the study of Torah and the practice of Jewish observances. The people had only recently suffered the national catastrophe of the Temple's destruction and the loss of independence. And so, our ancestors at that time were about to fall asleep, to yield to despair and to hopelessness and to a feeling of their own worthlessness. At a time of this sort, the great Rabbi Akiba tried to wake them up, he tried to stir them into activity, he tried to get them out of the sullen mood in which they found themselves. It was he, Rabbi Akiba, who was the patron and the organizer of the Bar Kokhba rebellion against the might of imperial Rome. So he tried to urge them into a happier frame of mind and a more activist approach by reminding them that they were the descendants of Esther, and that it was Esther who herself went through a great number of vicissitudes in her life. When she was young, very young, she was already an orphan – reared by an uncle much older in years, lacking the warmth of maternal love and paternal concern. Then suddenly she found herself with the crown of Persia upon her head, the absolute monarch of 127 lands. Shortly thereafter she was faced with the catastrophic possibility of her own and her people's destruction by Haman, only to be saved at the last moment by an opposite edict by the king and the great triumph of Israel which resulted in the celebration of Purim. And yet, during all these extreme changes of fortune, our rabbis told us, "Hee Ester, 'She is Esther' (*Esther* 2:7); she remained the same Esther both when she was queen and when she wasn't" – the same sweet, gentle, modest young woman who was only an orphan in her uncle's home, retained her good character when she was the queen of Persia, of 127 lands. She did not change. She had acquired the quality of hishtavut hanefesh, of psychological, spiritual, and emotional

Likutei Divrei Torah

stability. And where did she get this quality from? From Sara, of course, who was the model of such behavior.

Would that we, descendants of those strong personalities, would learn this marvelous faith. Like Sara, like Esther, like Rabbi Akiba – we must learn to take life in stride without at any time upsetting the apple-cart of character. We must never be insensitive, but we must be strong and powerful of faith. We must neither yield to wild abandon or relaxation of effort when we behold the victory and triumph of the State of Israel, nor submit to defeatism and pessimism as we ponder the bitter fate of Russian Jewry. We must not turn giddy with delight when some gentile scholar or politician praises us, nor ever submit to chagrin and turn apologetic when some gentile criticizes either our people or our faith.

"Ashreinu ma tov helkeinu, uma na'im goraleinu, uma yafa yerushateinu." Happy are we not only that our lot is tov – good, ethical, true; but that in addition, our destiny is na'im, pleasant – it is satisfying and makes for a healthy mind and a healthy soul; and above all – happy are we that yerushateinu, our heritage, the great Jewish tradition, is so beautiful.

Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's "Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Genesis" co-published by OU Press, Maggid Publishers, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern

*November 27, 1959



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>
& Allen Klein <allen.klein@gmail.com>

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Parshas Chayei Sarah A Rare Biblical Hesped for a Rare Biblical Personality print

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1312 – Lying About Someone's Age When It Comes To Shidduchim. Good Shabbos!

It says in the beginning of Parshas Chayei Sarah, "Sarah died in Kiryat-Arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her." (Bereshis 23:2). The sefer Me'orei Ohr makes an interesting observation. In the entire Torah, there are only two hespedim (eulogies): One for Sora Imeinu and one for Yaakov Avinu. When Miriam died, a hesped is not mentioned.

Likewise, when Aharon Hakohen died, the Torah says that "the entire House of Israel cried" but there is no mention of a hesped. Similarly, the Torah does not mention hespedim for Avraham or Yitzchak when they died. And again, although it says that the "House of Israel cried" for Moshe, there is no mention of a hesped.

Apparently, it was not such a common practice in Biblical times that hespedim were made when a person passed away. What then was so special about Sora that Avraham formally eulogized her?

A famous Gemara in Sanhedrin discusses whether hespedim are primarily for the honor of the living or for the honor of those who have departed. Clearly, in a hesped we speak of the fine attributes of the deceased – but why do we do that? Is it to honor the dead or perhaps it is because when people hear the hespedim, they become inspired to live more meritorious lives themselves? As Shlomo says,

"It is preferable to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting." (Koheles 7:2).

At funerals, we hear things about people that we don't necessarily know about them. Invariably, when I walk out of a funeral after hearing the hespedim, I think to myself "You know, I never knew that about this person." The purpose of hesped is to inform the audience who this deceased person was. Chazal say that the hesped that Avraham said for Sora was the chapter "A woman of valor who can find?" (Mishlei 31:10-31). That was the hesped, because if there was one defining attribute of Sora, it was that "Behold, she is in the tent." (Bereshis 18:26). She was extremely tzanua (private).

Therefore, we can assume that people really did not know much about Sora. It was not until her hesped that Avraham Avinu let the world know who she was.

The author of Me'orei Ohr cites an incident involving Rav Yeruchem Levovitz. He was once in a shtetel and he heard that an old woman who lived by herself passed away. He was told that there probably would not be a minyan at her levaya. Even though Rav Yeruchem didn't know the woman, he figured that this was somewhat akin to a mes mitzvah (because no one would be at her funeral). Therefore, even though he didn't know her, the great Mirer Mashgiach went to this lady's levaya. To everyone's surprise, there was a large gathering of people there. It turned out to be a tremendous levaya and even people from other cities came.

Initially, people could not figure out why so many people came. It eventually emerged that unbeknownst to almost anyone, this woman did acts of chessed for dozens and dozens of people. Everyone, however, thought that "I am the only one for whom she does this." So everyone said "She was so good to us, she would take care of us, she would give us money and give us food... so I need to go to her levaya." Rav Yeruchem Levovitz – the great Mashgiach – did not want to let this event pass without sharing the mussar message within it to his yeshiva talmidim (students) in the Mir.

He returned to the yeshiva and told them: It is the way of people to not hide things from the public that are not valuable. A person's everyday silverware and dishes are never hidden away in a closet under lock and key. However, the fine china is stored behind the breakfront. The crystal gets hidden away even further and the gold is kept in the vault. We don't want anyone to see that.

We hide the things that are most dear and precious to us. The most precious things to this woman were the things she did for other people. As a result of that, she hid them, like people hide gold and silver. This is what Rav Yeruchem learned from that story of the old woman in the shtetel.

That is why Avraham Avinu felt the necessity to eulogize Sora. Everybody knew Avraham. "You are a prince of Elokim in our midst..." (Bereshis 23:6). Yitzchak was also well known. When Yosef died "he was the ruler throughout the Land of Egypt." Aharon and Moshe's greatness were known throughout the "entire House of Israel." Who needed to, and in fact, who would be able to say hespedim, on such great and well-known individuals?

However, Sora Imeinu's greatness, because of her incredible tznius and privacy, was not as well known. Therefore, Avraham Avinu had to let the world know who she really was.

As far as the fact that Yaakov Avinu was also eulogized, the Me'orei Ohr explains that this was because Yaakov Avinu led a troubled life. He had to run away from his brother who wanted to kill him. He had to put up with a cheating father-in-law for twenty-plus years. He had

the aggravation of the apparent loss of his beloved son, Yosef. Everyone looked at Yaakov Avinu and thought "Nebach, a troubled life." That is why, this author suggests, there was also a necessity to eulogize Yaakov.

I think that perhaps there may be another reason why they said a hesped for Yaakov. The pasuk says "They came to Goren Ha'atad..." (Bereshis 50:10) The Gemara says that all the kings of Canaan took their crowns and put them on the coffin of Yaakov Avinu. Who was the hesped for? In that case, the hesped was for the benefit of the nations of the world. The "Jews" there were just Yaakov's family, who already knew who he was. The purpose was so that everyone else should know who he was. In either event, there was a special necessity for saying a hesped in Yaakov's case. But the bottom line is that hespedim are needed when there is a special reason to let the world at large know who this person was. With Avraham, Yitzchak, Moshe, Aharon, and Dovid, there was not such a need. It was the same with the other Matriarchs. But the world needed to know about Sora: "A woman of valor who can find?" because of her exceptional attribute of tzniyus / privacy.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org 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 listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Chayei Sora is provided below: Looking into a Shidduch – How Important is Family? (2022) – Breaking A Shidduch / Engagement 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. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Support do you have a question or comment? Feel free to contact us on our website. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> to get your own free copy of this mailing or subscribe to the series of your choice. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> – see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig –

Changed Names and Roles: Avraham, Sarah and Yehoshua

Rabbi Mordechai Willig Changed Names and Roles: Avraham, Sarah and Yehoshua I

"Hashem Who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth... you will take a wife for my son there" (Bereishis 24:7). Rashi renders my father's house, from Charan. In fact, Eliezer went to Aram Naharayim, to the city of Nachor (24:10). The Ramban (11:28) identifies the city as Charan, where Nachor, Avraham's brother, lived, and where Terach lived and died (11:31,32). Rashi renders "the land of my birth", from Ur Kasdim. The Ramban disagrees and posits that Avraham was born in Aram, where he and his ancestors dwelled.

"Your name shall no longer be called Avram. Your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of abundant nations (av hamon goyim)" (Bereishis 17:5). Rashi explains that Avram is a contraction of Av Aram, Avram was the spiritual father of the land of Aram where he lived and, according to the Ramban, he was born. The letter reish (ר) did not move from its place, even though now he is the father of the whole world. The Sifsei Chachamim explains that the contraction of av hamon is Avham, but the reish remained so it would not complain to Hashem. This refers to the continuation of Rashi: For even the letter Yud (י) of Sarai complained to Hashem when it was removed from her name ["Do not call her name Sarai, for Sarah is her name (17:15)"], until He added it to the name of

Yehoshua, as it says (Bamidbar 13:16) "Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua."

II

When Avraham became the father of the whole world, Aram feared that his new position as a universal leader would destroy his special, particular relationship with his original homeland. Thus, had his new name been Avham, the reish, symbolizing Aram would have complained. Therefore, his new name was Avraham implying a dual role. His new responsibility as the father of the whole world would not detract from his primary role as the father of Aram.

Avram and Sarai took men and women, respectively in Charan, a city in Aram, and converted them from idolatry to monotheism (Rashi 12:5). When their names changed to Avraham and Sarah they continued their special connection to the people of Aram who accompanied them to Eretz Yisroel.

Years later, Avraham's particular responsibility shifted to a much closer, personal, and significant one. [The converts drifted away, presumably because they served Hashem only based on the rational persuasion of Avraham, and not on pure faith in Him (Darash Moshe, Bamidbar 25:1; Shefa Chaim, Torah U'Mo'adim p. 213)]. Avraham became the progenitor of Am Yisroel. His main preoccupation for which Hashem loved him, was commanding his descendants to keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice (18:19, see Rashi). According to Chazal, Avraham kept the entire Torah before it was given (Kiddushin 82a), as it is said (26:5), "because Avraham obeyed My voice, and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees and My laws." The Ramban adds, based on Bereishis Raba (95:3) that he taught Torah to his children. It was passed to Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef and beyond.

The reish of Avram which originally referred to Aram, now applies to Am Yisrael in general and to one's community and family in particular. As descendants of Avraham, the father of the whole world we still have universal responsibilities. As Avraham was the av hamon goyim, we are to be or lagoyim, a light unto the nations (Yeshaya 42:6), so that Hashem's salvation will extend throughout the world. (49:6).

However, our primary responsibility is to Am Yisroel, even at the expense of universalism. As Avraham remained av Aram, we must focus on our own communities. As he was mostly concerned with his own children and family, we must devote ourselves the most to ours. Notwithstanding communal obligations, one must prioritize commitment and connection to one's spouse, children and their spouses, grandchildren, siblings and the greater family.

III

Similarly, the yud of Sarai complained. Sarai, as the possessive yud denotes, means my leader. As Avram converted the men of Charan, she converted the women. As Rashi (17:15) explains, Sarai means my leader, for me but not for others. Sarah means she is the leader over all (Sarah al hakol), the equivalent of av hamon goyim. The yud complained fearing the loss of the special relationship Sarah had with Aram.

Hashem allayed the fear by moving the yud of Sarai to Yehoshua, as Moshe added it to Hoshea bin Nun. What does this mean?

Rashi (Bamidbar 13:16) teaches that Moshe prayed for him "May Hashem save you from the plot of the spies." What was their plot and how would the yud save Yehoshua?

"We were like grasshoppers in our eyes and so were we in their [the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael] eyes" (13:33). The Be'er Yosef

Interprets "grasshoppers" based on the Rashi (Bava Kamma 116b s.v. tz'latzal). A grasshopper is a thief that consumes the produce of the landowner.

The spies viewed themselves like thieves coming to steal the land from the rightful inhabitants. "The fourth generation will return here (Rashi, Bereishis 46:12), for the sin of the Amorites will not be full until then" (Bereishis 15:16). Rashi explains that the four generations began from Yaakov, who went down to Mitzrayim. Calev, son of Chetzron (Sotah 11b), son of Peretz, son of Yehuda (Bereishis 46:12) (from whom the count began see Sifsei Chachamim) was among those who came to Eretz Yisroel.

The spies thought that the sins were not yet complete. Yehoshua and Calev argued "the decent ones among them have died, do not fear them" (Bamidbar 14:9, see Rashi). The time has come for the fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham that his descendants will be given Eretz Yisroel (Bereishis 12:7).

Sadly, the spies ignored them and viewed themselves as thieves. Not surprisingly, the inhabitants agreed. Rashi (Bereishis 1:1) records that the nations of the world will say to Am Yisrael "you are thieves." We will respond "the whole earth belongs to Hashem. He created it. He took Eretz Yisrael from them and gave it to us." Am Yisrael should not have a guilty conscience, feeling that the land rightfully belongs to others (Nachalas Yaakov, see Saperstein edition foot note 5).

The possessive yud of Sarai was attached to Yehoshua to save him from the universalism of the spies who denied their particular right to Eretz Yisrael and viewed themselves as thieves. This parallels the Raish of Avraham which denotes the particular connection to Aram, and later to his family, notwithstanding his new role as the father of the whole world.

Sadly, the sin of the spies, unchecked universalism, has plagued our nation repeatedly. Workers of the world unite! Socialism and communism. And now anti-Zionism which views Jews as "occupiers" in our own land (See Chet Hameraglim: Then and Now). If we consider ourselves thieves, the nations will certainly concur, as happened to the "grasshopper" spies of old.

IV

This week, the Yeshiva world lost a unique masmid, rebbe, and rav, my close cousin Harav Yehoshua HaLevi Kalish zt"l. From early youth, his soul thirsted for Torah. After attending and graduating H.I.L.I. in Far Rockaway and RJJ on the Lower East Side, he learned in the Philadelphia Yeshiva. His parents, my beloved uncle and aunt, objected strenuously. They wanted him to learn by day and attend college at night, like his older brother, and most b'nei Torah in 1963. He responded that he is willing to forgo the comforts associated with a college degree for the sake of Torah.

After a brief stint in Mir Yerushalayim, he learned in Lakewood for many years. Like Avraham Avinu he retained his special relationship with his birthplace, and returned to the Far Rockaway/ Lawrence community with his wife, appropriately named Sarah, who shared his willingness to sacrifice for Torah, and children.

He taught in Yeshiva of Far Rockaway for nearly fifty years and subsequently founded a halacha kollel. He served as the rav of Beis Medrash of Harborview for nearly thirty years, and together with his rebbezin, developed an unusual mutual love and admiration with their mispalelim.

But what made him unique was his extraordinary devotion to learning and reviewing Shas. After teaching daf yomi in Lawrence

before it was popular, which he continued to the end, he embarked on a regimen of seven blatt a day, completing all of Shas annually. In sum, he finished Shas more than forty times!

His public roles and prodigious hasmada spread his name and fame throughout the Yeshiva world. His universal dimension included the interests of his American youth: tennis, skiing, Scrabble, and his beloved accordion among others. He used them all to advance Torah and enhance tefilah in his yeshiva, his shul, and in Camp Heller, and abruptly abandoned an interest in baseball when it interfered with his primary, particular focus.

The yud in Yehoshua, taken from the possessive of Sarai, was most apparent in his connection to his prized talmidim and beloved balebatim. To their greater family, Hagaon Harav Yehoshua and Sarah insisted on being called (Uncle) Josh and (Aunt) Beaty. His super-tight relationship with his children and their spouses and children, was exceeded only by the exemplary closeness, and mutual devotion, to his eishes chayil.

In his final year, he published Penei Levana, compared (Bava Basra 85a) to Penei Yehoshua, his ancestor and namesake. It contains a comment on every single daf of Shas! Sadly, his life was cut short by illness, but in his last few weeks he expressed how happy and fortunate he is to have lived a full life, from youth to old age, toiling in Torah. His lifelong good name (shem tov) reflected his constant service of Hashem. His soul ascends on high, accompanied by every daf that he learned, reviewed, and wrote about, He will merit continuing his lifelong song of Torah in the next world. Indeed, Harav Yehoshua HaLevi was and will be happy and fortunate in both worlds.

I conclude this brief tribute with three ashreis, meaning both happy and fortunate, excerpted from his beloved Shas:

ברכות (ז). - אֲשֶׁרִ מֵשָׁגֵל בַּתּוֹרָה וְעַמְלָוּ בַתּוֹרָה וְנַשְׂאָה נַחַת רֹוח לִיּוֹצָר, וְגָדֵל בַּשְּׁמָ טָוב וְנוֹפֵט בַּשְּׁמָ טָוב מִן הָעוֹלָם בְּבָא בְּתְרָא (י): - כִּי הָא דָיוֹסֵף בְּרִיהָ דָרְיָהוֹשׁ חַלְשָׁ, אַינְגָדָ. אַל אַבּוֹה: מָאִ חַוִּתָּ? אַל: עַולְם הַפְּנַךְ בְּעַלְיָהוֹת (הַיכִּי חַוִּתִּינָן? [אַל]: כִּי הַיכִּי דְחַשְׁבִּין הַכָּא חַשְׁבִּין הַתָּם (פָּרָשָׁי) חַשְׁבּוּבִים וּנְכָבְדִים) וְשַׁמְעַתִּי שְׁהִיו אָמָרִים: אֲשֶׁרִ מֵשָׁבָא לְכָא וְתַלְמוֹדוֹ בִּידָו.

פִּי מַהְרָשָׁא, "יְשׁ לְפָרֵשׁ כִּי עַקְרֵב הַלִּימֹוד וְשַׁנְעָנָה בּוֹ רֹשֶׁם הַוְּלִימֹוד הַבָּא סְנַהְדָּרִין (צָא): - אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשָׁעָבּוֹן לֹויִ: מַנְיָין לְתַחְיִתִים מִן הַתּוֹרָה - שְׁנָאָמֵר אֲשֶׁרִ יְוֹשָׁבֵי בִּתְרַע עַד יְהַלּוֹךְ סָלָה, הַיְלָלָךְ לְאַלְאַיְלָלָךְ - מִכְאָן לְתַחְיִתִים מִן הַתּוֹרָה. וְאָמַר רַבִּי יְהֹוֹשָׁעּ בּוֹן לֹויִ: כֹּל הָאָמֵר שְׁרָה בְּעוֹלָם הַזָּה - זָכָה וְאוֹמֶרֶת לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, שְׁנָאָמֵר אֲשֶׁרִ יְוֹשָׁבֵי בִּתְרַע עַד יְהַלּוֹךְ סָלָה.

פִּי מַהְרָשָׁא, שִׁירָה שְׁבָעוֹה"ז לְאַהֲזָר בְּקָרָא דְאֲשֶׁרִ יְוֹשָׁבֵי בִּתְרַע, ذְקָאָמֵר קָרָא דִיְהַלּוֹךְ הַיְנָיו לְעוֹהָבָ"בּ, ذְקָאָמֵר רַבִּי לְגַפְיָה מִכְאָן לְתַחְהָמָן מִן הַתּוֹרָה. אֶלְאַמְלָת עַד דָּרִישׁ לְיהִי, דְלָשָׁן עַד נַפְלֵל בְּדַבְּרֵי הַנּוֹסֵךְ עַל הַרְאִישׁ, ذְהִיָּנוּ שְׁהַלּוֹךְ עַד לְעוֹהָבָ"בּ.

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The Mysterious Personality of Lot

By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss –

20 Heshvan 5785 – November 21, 2024 0

Photo Credit: Jewish Press One of the more enigmatic personalities in the Torah is Lot, Avraham's nephew and Sarah's brother. On the one hand we know that all the while that Lot was together with Avraham, the Shechina didn't speak with Avraham. We also know that Lot made the very poor decision of choosing to live in the very sinful environment of Sodom and Amorah, a decision that would cost him his wife and most of his family. On the other hand, he was the ancestor, through his daughter, of David HaMelech and the eventual Melech HaMoshiach.

I'd like to suggest what was so special about Lot that he merited to be an ancestor of royalty. In one of the most perplexing actions cited in the Torah, when the mad rabble descended upon Lot's home and demanded that he deliver to them his forbidden guests, Lot did something truly mystifying. He made them a counter proposal.

"Hinei na li shtei vanos asher lo yadu ish. Otzi'ah na es'hen aleichem, va'asu lahen katov bei'ei'neichem. Rak la'anashim ha'eil al ta'asu davar, ki al kein ba'u b'tzeil korasi, I have two daughters who are pure. Take them instead and do with them whatever you want. Just leave these guests alone since they came under the protection of my roof." What father, when approached by a crazed gang, offers his daughters to save some visiting strangers? The Ramban writes that this shows ro'ah lei'vav, a cruelty of heart on behalf of Lot. He maintains that, while most parents would give their own lives for their daughters, Lot was willing to throw them to the mob to save some strangers.

I would like to suggest a different understanding of Lot's perplexing behavior. The angels had revealed themselves to Lot and told him that they had come to destroy Sodom. Rav Miller, zt"l, zy"a, used to say that there were three million people in the five cities of Sodom. Lot embarked on a desperate mission to try to save these millions of people. Rashi reveals she'kol halaila haya meileitz aleihem tovos, the whole night Lot was interceding on behalf of the people of Sodom with favorable information. When the mob wanted to molest the guests, Lot knew that if they actually succeeded in attacking them, it would have been curtains for three million people. Instead, he asked his daughters if they would be willing to sacrifice themselves as a last-ditch attempt to save three million others. The daughters agreed and thus became worthy to be the ancestresses of royalty.

This is not farfetched, as Lot indeed succeeded where Avraham failed. While Avraham was not able to save any of Sodom (except for Lot and his family), Lot saved one full city, the city of Tzoar. The name Lot has always troubled me. What does it stand for? It sounds similar to the word layit, which means to curse. That certainly is not the thrust of the name. However, Lot read backwards is tal, and it means to protect, like the Targum says, b'tzeil korasi, in the protection of my house, and the Targum renders b'tzeil as bitlal, a cloak of protection. Indeed, Lot tried to be a protector of Sodom. The Gemara tells us that if one should encounter the pillar of salt which Lot's wife turned into, he should make two blessings: Baruch Dayan HaEmes, Blessed is the true Judge [Who punished Lot's wife], and Baruch Zocheir tzaddikim, Blessed is He who remembers the righteous. The common understanding is that the righteous refers to Avraham Avinu, in whose merit Lot was saved. I would like to suggest that it is in the plural, tzaddikim, because it also refers to Lot and his daughters who valiantly tried to save Sodom and in the end succeeded in saving the city of Tzoar. "Kol hamatzil nefesh achas

miYisrael ki'ilu matzel malei, Whoever saves one soul in Israel it is as if he saved the entire world," and Lot saved (at least for two years) the entire city of Tzoar.

Finally, I'd like to suggest that Lot was saved in the merit of yet another tzaddik, and that was his father Haran. Remember, after Nimrod threw Avraham in to the kivshan ha'eish, the fiery furnace, Nimrod then asked Haran if he would bow down to the idol or go into the furnace, and Haran chose to enter the furnace. Although Haran died because he only did it after seeing Avraham come out successfully, he still died al kiddush Hashem, sanctifying G-d's name. I'd like to suggest that since Haran honored Hashem by going into the fire, his sacrifice saved his son Lot and his family from the fires and sulfur of Sodom.

In the merit of judging Lot favorably, may Hashem bless us with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiiyy@theyeshiva.net>
reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net

date: Nov 21, 2024, 7:52 PM

subject: What Comes First: Love or Marriage? - Essay by Rabbi YY
What Comes First: Love or Marriage?

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

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Isaac and Rebecca

The first marital ceremony described in the Torah is the one between Isaac and Rebecca, in this week's portion, Chaye Sarah. It is also the first time the Torah depicts the love between a man and a woman: "And Isaac took Rebecca, she became his wife, and he loved her."^[1]

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

Of course, Abraham and Sarah enjoyed a profoundly loving relationship. Married for many decades without children, they trailblazed together a new trail in history. They heeded the voice of G-d to leave behind their families and chart a new path to change the world. Sarah risked her life twice for Abraham when she maintained she was his sister, not his wife. Abraham refused to cohabit with her maid Hagar, but after she insisted that he does, "Abraham heeded the voice of Sarah."^[3] Abraham listened to Sarah's advice

to expel Ishmael from their home, even when he personally disagreed.[4] After Sarah's death, one senses the depth of Abraham's grief and his intricate negotiations to grant his wife her final honor by burying her in the cave where he too would one day be interred.

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

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

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

No Friction

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

In contrast, between Isaac and Rebecca, no friction is ever recorded. This was not because they never disagreed. To the contrary, the Torah states, that Rebecca loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esau. While Isaac wishes to bless Esau, Rebecca instructs Jacob to dress up like his brother and obtain the blessings for himself.^[9] That could have easily resulted in a quarrel—but it did not.

Dawn and Darkness

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

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

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

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

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

Jacob, in contrast, embodies the night of Judaism. The kingdom of night is full of mystique, solitude, darkness, drama, and romance. Jacob's life is riddled with darkness, uncertainty, loneliness, and struggle, fraught with drama and mystery. Already emerging from the womb he struggles with his

twin brother; later he wrestles with a mysterious adversary, and in the process he receives a new name, Israel, which means struggling with G-d. In the words of the prophet Isaiah:^[16] "Why do you say, O Jacob, why declare, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is ignored by my G-d'?"

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

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

The Monotony of Afternoons

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

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

It is the story of Isaac.

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

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

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

Therein lies his singular uniqueness.

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

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

Isaac is the founder of the afternoon prayer, the "mincha" of Judaism. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at dusk," the Torah states in this week's portion.[26] Isaac tapped into the spiritual energy of the "afternoons", showing us that a relationship with G-d does not consist only of the spontaneous exuberant morning inspiration, or of the drama and romance of the night. A relationship with G-d is expressed even more profoundly in the daily commitment and sacrifices we make for truth, love, goodness, and holiness. He bequeathed us with the internal resilience and strength to bring G-d into the dull and tedious journeys of life.

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

A Tale of Three Marriages

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

When we meet our soulmate, a new dawn overwhelms our heart's horizon. We are overtaken by the newness and freshness of the experience. We are excited, inspired, full of hope of what our joined future might look like. This is the "Abraham" of marriage, the morning—shacharis—of a relationship. Marriage also has those special moments of moonlight mystery and drama. The passion and electricity that comes from the unknown, from discovering the untold layers of depth in our spouse's soul; the special awareness that is born from dealing with struggle and uncertainty. This is the "Jacob" element of marriage, the evening—"maariv"—of a relationship.

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

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

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

A Tale of Two Loves

What is the difference between the two loves?

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

This is not a "boring" marriage. Rather, its intensity is profound and enduring, because it is contained and integrated into the fabric of daily life, and into the experiences of two human beings confronting the full spectrum of our emotions and circumstances.

The first marriage described in Torah is the one of Isaac and Rebecca, in order to teach us one of the most important principles in marriage: Passion and romance are awesome, and we can all use a nice dose of them, but as our

circumstances change, they can fade away. A marriage must be built on good judgment, sound reason, an appreciation of the inner, enduring qualities and values of the other person, and it must possess the enduring commitment of a couple to each other, day-in, day-out, in a bond of steadfast, and simple faithfulness and trust. It is the capacity to hold your boundaries while connecting to the other person as a mature adult.

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

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

Footnotes [1] Genesis 24:67 [2] Ibid. 2:24 [3] Genesis 16:2 [4] Genesis chapter 21 [5] Genesis 24:67 [6] Ibid. 29:18 [7] Ibid. 16:5 [8] Ibid. 30:2 [9] Ibid. 25:28, and chapter 27. [10] Berachot 26b [11] See Talmud ibid. Rabbi Yossi son of Rabbi Chanina said: The prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices... It has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Yossi ben Chanina: Avraham instituted the morning prayer, as it says, "Avraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood." Yitzchak instituted the afternoon prayer, as it says, "Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field at dusk." Yaakov instituted the evening prayer, as it says, "He encountered [vayifga] the place," and "pegiah" means prayer. Rabbi Yitzchak Zaler, in his commentary Minchas Yitzchak to the Talmud ibid, adds a nice hint in their names: The second letter of our three forefathers are: אברָהָם (Avraham), בִּצְחָק (Yitzchak), and עַבְרָהָם (Abraham), alluding to the Hebrew terms: "בָּקָר" (morning), "צָהָרִיּוֹם" (afternoon), and "עַרְבָּה" (evening). These correspond to the time of day at which each one instituted a different prayer. [12] See Beis Yosef Orach Chaim Chapter 4: A man upon awakening in the morning is like a new creature, as it is written: "The souls are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:23). Cf. Torah Or Lech Lecha Maamar Magen Avraham. Likkutei Torah Beha'aloscha Maamar Miksha. [13] Maamarei Admur Hazaken Haktzarim p. 553. [14] Genesis 19: 27 [15] See Ethics of the Fathers ch. 5 [16] 40:27 [17] Genesis 32:24 [18] Ibid. 31:38;40 [19] Gen 28:11 [20] Ibid. 12 [21] Genesis 28:16 [22] See Rambam Laws of Avodah Zarah chapter 1. Rashi Genesis 24:7. Introduction of Meiri to Pirkei Avos. [23] Genesis 23:6 [24] Genesis chapter 26 [25] He also lives longer than his father and child: 180, not 175 or 147. [26] Ibid. 24:63 [27] See Talmud Berachos 6b: One should always be careful to pray the Mincha prayer for Elijah was only answered (when he prayed for a fire to come down and consume his sacrifice) during the Mincha prayer. Rabbi Moshe ibn Machir, in Seder Hayom, Page 32, explains: The prayer of Mincha deserves to be answered because it is a time when everyone is busy in their work and carried away with their doings and needs. Hence, when during such a time one instead runs after the needs of G-d and prays and beseeches before the Master of the world—thus recognizing his Master's greatness, while seeing himself only as a dedicated servant devoted to His service—it is appropriate to recognize this humble man who is careful with the word of G-d whom it is fit to look at him.

Morals and Meanings in Chayei Sarah Inbox

Rav Immanuel Bernstein <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

Thu, Nov 21, 7:14 AM (17 hours ago) to Chaim

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Chayei Sarah Nisayon

A central theme throughout the life of Avraham is that of nisayon — tests or trials. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos[1] tells us that Avraham was subjected to ten trials and passed them all. The Mishnah does not specify what the trials were, and this is the subject of some discussion among the commentators. A very interesting question is: which was the final test? Although many are of the opinion that it was the binding of Yitzchak, Rabbeinu Yonah[2] maintains that that was in fact the penultimate test. The final test, he says, was the burial of Sarah.

This position is somewhat difficult to understand. We assume that the tests got progressively more difficult as they went along, for it

seems unreasonable that Avraham would be tested with something easier after already having accomplished something harder. Are we to understand, then, that the burial of Sarah was harder than the binding of Yitzchak? Without taking anything away from the difficulty which must have accompanied burying Sarah, surely they were surpassed by the notion of Avraham having to slaughter his son with his own hands!

Addressing this question will lead us to a fundamental discussion as to what may constitute a difficult test.

Often, when one is in an especially difficult situation, it is possible that the difficulty itself can serve to help the person get through it; there can be a sense of rising to the occasion. This does not take anything away from the decision to act correctly, but there may be a feeling of “if I will ever do the right thing, it will be at a time like this” which buoys the person and gives him strength and courage. Epic situations often speak to – and bring out – the epic in us.

By contrast, when faced with what is essentially a non-event, there is no sense of occasion, no drama, no external adrenaline or historic choice to be made. There is only the person himself and the right thing to do. Looked at in this way, there is something about a small act specifically which can make it a greater test, and which can better serve to define the moral level of the person.

A Half Penny for your Thoughts In a similar vein, the Gemara^[3] discusses the verse which describes Iyov as being “a God-fearing man,”^[4] and explains that his stature may be demonstrated by a certain business practice which he had. The smallest coin in the vernacular of the Gemara is a prutah. In any situation where the value of a commodity included a fraction of a prutah, Iyov would be sure to round it off in the favor of the one with whom he was doing business. If he was purchasing, he would round the price up to the next prutah; and if he was selling, he would round it down. This was done in order to ensure that he did not take even a fraction of a prutah which did not belong to him, even though such an amount is typically waived by the other party.

Why is this the most telling way to illustrate the God-fearing nature of Iyov? This business practice was hardly likely to put him too much out of pocket; even a hundred such transactions a year would still amount to only fifty pennies! Many people would be prepared to part with that amount in the interest of avoiding taking money illegally.

The answer is as per the above. When there is discrepancy of half a prutah, an amount so small there isn’t even a coin for it, the true person will be seen. Even someone who would be prepared to forgo a large amount of money that he is not entitled to may find himself routinely rounding off the half prutah in his own favor. After all, it seems like such a “small” question. There is a certain aspect of a person’s God-fearing nature which may only come out in a “half-prutah situation.” Where there is no “event,” there you will find the person.^[5]

With this in mind, we can now understand why Rabbeinu Yonah lists the burial of Sarah as the final test. We asked: Could that have been a greater test than the Akeidah, which Avraham had already passed? The answer is, indeed, the burial of Sarah was not as challenging as the Akeidah in terms of sacrifice or heroism, and that is exactly what made it the final test.

Upon returning from the stunning success of passing the test of the Akeidah, Avraham finds his beloved wife, Sarah, dead. In a state of grief and deflation, he now needs to procure a burial plot from a

swindler who is surrounded by small-minded people. It is noteworthy that the Torah devotes a good number of verses to describing the purchase of the burial place for Sarah. Most of the verses involve either Avraham or the people bowing down to each other, or him and Efron saying, “Hear me, my master, etc.” to one another. These interactions represent the protocols of courtesy and consideration that are to be accorded to the other party on such occasions. This was the anticlimax of the Akeidah, the ultimate non-event, and it was here that Avraham underwent his final test. His absolute moral worth came through not in the moment of an extraordinary once-in-a-lifetime test, but as he exercised endless patience and extended gracious courtesy at his time of depression, pain and grief, toward people who, arguably, did not deserve it.

Contemplating this idea, a crucial message emerges. Ultimately, our tests bring out the best in us and make for our spiritual and moral growth. Sometimes, we can overlook the tests that exist within everyday situations while we are dreaming about how we would fare in a “real” test, forgetting that it is the “small things” that may be the greater test of who we are: a blessing recited properly, a listening ear, an encouraging word. Learning from the final test of Avraham can help us appreciate our everyday situations for what they really are — the ongoing building blocks of our spiritual growth.

[1] 5:3. [2] Commentary to Pirkei Avos, ibid. [3] Bava Basra 15b. [4] Iyov 1:1. [5] Michtav Me’Eliyahu, vol. 4, p. 245. Copyright © 2024 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved. You’re receiving this email either because you signed up on the website or you requested to be added.

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Wedding Arrangements

Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> Attachments Mon, Nov 18, 4:34 AM (4 days ago) to kaganoff-a

Wedding Arrangements

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Wedding Arrangements By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff Question #1: Wedding Arrangements “Which sheva brochos custom is based on this week’s parsha?” Question #2: Indoor Chupah “My cousin is making his chupah completely indoors. May I attend the wedding?” Question #3: Maaser Money “I agreed to support my married children for five years. May I set aside all my maaser money for this?” Introduction: Most of this week’s parsha is devoted to the trip that Eliezer takes to find a wife for Yitzchok. This provides an opportunity to discuss some of the laws and customs about weddings and sheva brachos arrangements that we have not covered in previous articles. In his commentary on the Torah (Bereishis 24:3), Rabbeinu Bachya cites a custom that, on the day of a chosson’s wedding, the part of the Torah in which Avraham gives Eliezer his instructions is read in the chosson’s honor. This is to remind the chosson that he should choose his mate with the right considerations – so that they can grow in yiras shamayim and build a proper Torah family together – and not pick a wife for other reasons that will not

ultimately lead to proper goals. Many Sefardic communities continue this practice of reading the words of our parsha in honor of the chosson, although there are different variations of the custom. Some read this parsha when a chosson receives his aliyah to the Torah on the Shabbos of sheva brachos week, which is called the Shabbat chatan (Abudraham). On this occasion, some authorities cite a practice of reciting these pesukim accompanied by songs that praise the chosson (Sedei Chemed, Maareches Choson Vekallah paragraph 14 [Volume 7 page 33]). I have been in Sefardic batei knesset in which the custom is that, immediately after the chosson's aliyah, two members of the congregation, alternatively, read the pesukim in parshas Chayei Sarah from a chumash. Other reasons are quoted for the practice of reading this part of the Torah on the occasion of a Shabbat chatan. According to one approach, the reason is so that the chosson can read the Torah himself, as this is a reading that even a not-so-scholarly chosson would be familiar with and could easily learn. Yet another reason is that not every parsha has a pleasant and appropriate reading, so it became standardized to have a chosson read this (Tashbeitz 2:39). From a Sefer Torah or from a chumash? There are different customs regarding whether these pesukim are read from a Sefer Torah. The custom of reading this from the Sefer Torah is already mentioned by rishonim (Tashbeitz). Others mention the practice of reading it from a chumash, rather than a Sefer Torah. In the days before the printing press, this meant one of the five books of the Torah that had been hand-written onto parchment and bound like a book to be used for study. Special Sefer Torah?

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The Tashbeitz quotes the practice of taking out a Sefer Torah from the aron kodesh just for the purpose of this special reading. The chosson would be called up to read the story of Eliezer from the second Sefer Torah. Others cite a custom of rolling the Sefer Torah to the story of Eliezer after the regular Shabbos reading is complete. Others say that this special reading should be from a Sefer Torah, but whether a Sefer Torah was taken out just for this purpose depends on whether the Shabbat chatan falls on a week in which one or two sifrei Torah would otherwise be used. According to this opinion, if only one Sefer Torah would otherwise be used, then a second Sefer Torah should be taken out for this purpose. If the Shabbat chatan falls on a week that there is a need to read from two sifrei Torah, the special reading in honor of the chosson is read by rolling the second Sefer Torah to parshas Chayei Sarah after the maftir has been read (Kaf Hachayim, Orach Chayim 144:10, quoting Keneses Hagedolah). Is a brocha recited prior to reading these pesukim? In places where the custom is to read the pesukim from a Sefer Torah, does the chosson recite a brocha before reading from the second Torah? Some rishonim rule that a brocha is recited before and after this reading, just as for any other aliyah (Tashbeitz). With the Targum or without? In communities in which the Torah was read together with the Targum, different customs are quoted whether the Targum translation for the story of Eliezer was also recited, or whether only the Targum for the weekly Torah reading was recited (Sedei Chemed, paragraph 14 [Volume 7 page 33]). This practice goes back to the days in which every community read the Targum after each posuk in order to translate the Torah for the benefit of the common people, who spoke and understood Aramaic, but not Hebrew. In few places today is the Targum recited together with the Torah reading, since most people do not understand the Aramaic in which the Targum is written, although it is still performed by many Yemenite

kehillos. Customs from the parsha Thus, we can now address the first of our opening questions: "Which sheva brochos custom is based on this week's parsha?" Actually, many of the customs of our weddings and sheva brochos have a basis somewhere in this week's parsha. The one we have discussed here is an ancient and still common Sefardic practice to read the pesukim of this week's parsha in which Avraham instructs Eliezer how he is to find a wife for Yitzchok. Indoor Chupah Having mentioned a custom that is practiced by Sefardim, let us discuss a custom that is practiced by Ashkenazim. The early authorities cite several practices that are used to herald good signs that the marriage should be successful, happy and fruitful. Among these practices is a custom of conducting the chupah under the open heavens, as a sign that the couple being married should merit a large family, as many as the stars of the heavens (Rema, Even Ha'ezor 61:1). This last practice has become fairly universal among Ashkenazim, although it is virtually unheard of among Sefardim, who usually make the chupah indoors. Among Ashkenazim who follow this practice, the most common practice in Eastern Europe was to conduct the chupah in the open-air courtyard in front of the shul. In some places in Germany, the custom was to make the chupah in the shul itself, rather than under the heavens (not following the custom mentioned by the Rema).

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In nineteenth-century Hungary, with the persuasion of the Reform-influenced Neologue movement, it became a practice among assimilated Jews to conduct the weddings indoors, in the Neologue temples. In a responsum, the Chasam Sofer strongly disapproves of performing weddings indoors (Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Even Ha'ezor 1:98). At this point, let us examine the second of our opening questions: "My cousin is making his chupah completely indoors. May I attend the wedding?" There may be many very valid reasons why your cousin is making the chupah indoors. It could be that he is Sefardic, or descended from an area of Germany where chupos were traditionally made indoors. It also might be that this is a second wedding, or that the bride is beyond the age at which one would expect her to have children. In both of the latter instances, many authorities rule that there is no reason to make the chupah under the heavens. However, even should they be Ashkenazim, young, and marrying for the first time, and yet they insist on making the chupah indoors, there is no halachic reason why you cannot attend the wedding. Having the chupah under the heavens is a nice segulah, but not a mandatory halachic requirement. In this context, allow me to quote a responsum on this topic from Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even Ha'ezor, 1:93). The questioner was a rav in a community in which the common practice was not to conduct the chupah under the heavens, unlike the practice recommended by the Rema. The rav asked whether he was permitted to perform the wedding ceremony, concerned that, if he did not, he would lose his position and his source of livelihood. Rav Moshe ruled that not only may he perform the ceremony, he is required to do so, and that this is included within his responsibilities as a hired rav – to make sure that matters such as marriages are conducted in halachically correct fashion. Performing the wedding under the heavens is not a requirement instituted by the Sages, nor does it qualify as a custom that we must observe; it is simply a good omen and good advice – but the individuals involved are not required to follow this advice if they choose not to. Rav Moshe writes that this ruling is true even according to the Chasam Sofer, notwithstanding his opposition to

those who got married indoors. Rav Moshe infers from the words of the Chasam Sofer that, although he frowned on the practice of conducting a wedding indoors, he did not prohibit it; he simply felt that it was improper. Furthermore, Rav Moshe contends that the Chasam Sofer's strong disapproval of making a wedding ceremony indoors was only in his day, when this approach was advocated by the Reform, whose goal was to uproot all of the practices of the Torah. These weddings, conducted in synagogues, were intended to mimic the practices of the non-Jewish world, which held its weddings in churches. However, in today's world, when people schedule wedding ceremonies indoors for practical and personal reasons, not because they want to mimic non-Jewish practices, the Chasam Sofer would not have such strident opposition. Therefore, Rav Moshe contends that even the Chasam Sofer would have ruled that a rav who is requested to be mesader kiddushin at a wedding where the chupah is indoors should accept. Early part of the month Early authorities cite other practices that are used to herald that the marriage should be successful, happy and fruitful. Another practice common both to Ashkenazim and Sefardim is that of scheduling a wedding at the beginning of the month, which is mentioned by both the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 179:2) and the Rema (Even Ha'ezers 64:3). In the same responsum quoted above, Rav Moshe notes that this practice is not halachically required.

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Therefore, someone who chooses not to observe this practice is not violating any halacha and there is no reason not to perform the wedding. In this context, it is interesting to quote an earlier teshuvah from the Noda Biyehudah, regarding people who are exceedingly careful not to set up a shidduch in which the father of the bride and the chosson have the same name, and similar concerns based on the writings of Rabbi Yehudah Hachassid. The Noda Biyehudah writes, "I am astonished that most people have no concern about marrying their daughter to a halachic ignoramus, notwithstanding the words of Chazal about the importance of marrying her to a Talmudic scholar ...yet they are concerned about having her marry someone whose name is the same as her father's which has no Talmudic basis or source" (Shu"t Noda Biyehudah, Even Ha'ezers 2:79). Thus, we see that the Noda Biyehudah does not consider the segulos that people attach to some of these practices as important. The significant factors are those mentioned by the Gemara. The chosson should be a Torah scholar, and his bride a ye're'ah Shamayim. Maaser Money At this point, let us examine the third and last of our opening questions, this one a very universal issue for both Ashkenazim and Sefardim: "I agreed to support my married children for five years. May I use maaser money for this?" The Chasam Sofer authored a responsum (Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #231) on this subject, which is fascinating for the many different halachic issues that he clarifies. Someone had arranged the marriage of his scholarly son to the daughter of a talmid chacham with the following understanding: The father of the son accepted that he would pay every week a certain amount to his mechutan, the bride's father, who would sustain the young growing family in his home, thus enabling the son-in-law to continue his studies under his father-in- law's direction. The father of the chosson is now finding it difficult to fulfill his weekly obligation, and wants to know if he can use the maaser money from his business endeavors to provide the support for which he is responsible. The Chasam Sofer opens his discussion by quoting two opinions that seem to dispute whether it is acceptable to use maaser money for

such an expenditure. The Rema, quoting the Maharshal, contends that it is not permitted to use maaser money to pay for a mitzvah, such as donating lamps and candles to the shul, whereas the Shach states, in the name of the Maharam, that it is permitted to use maaser money for mitzvos. Thus, whether one may pay for mitzvos, other than supporting the poor, from maaser money appears to be a dispute among early authorities. The Chasam Sofer then quotes the Be'er Hagolah, who explains that the two above-quoted opinions are not in dispute. All authorities prohibit using maaser money to fulfill a mitzvah that someone is already obligated to observe. The Maharam, who permitted using maaser money for mitzvah purposes, was discussing a case in which the donor intended to use maaser money for this mitzvah from the outset, whereas the Maharshal is discussing a situation in which the donor has been using his maaser money to support the poor, in which case he cannot now divert it for other mitzvos that do not qualify as tzedakah for the poor. Thus, according to the Be'er Hagolah, whether the father can begin meeting his obligations to his son and mechutan with his maaser money will depend on whether he has already accepted the obligation on himself to pay this from other funds, in which case he cannot use maaser money for it, or if it is an obligation that he is now accepting upon himself, in which case he can specify that he wants to use maaser money to fulfill it.

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The Chasam Sofer does not consider the approach of the Be'er Hagolah to be fully correct. He (the Chasam Sofer) notes that the Maharshal wrote that maaser moneys are meant to support the poor and not for the acquisition of mitzvos. Therefore, use of maaser money for any type of personal mitzvah is inappropriate, whether he is already obligated to fulfill the mitzvah or not. The Chasam Sofer concludes that when someone begins donating maaser money, he may stipulate that, sometimes, the money will be used for a mitzvah donation, such as the lighting in shul. However, once he has begun donating his maaser money regularly to the poor, he must continue using it for tzedakah. Family first Having determined that there are definitely situations in which maaser money must be given to the poor, the Chasam Sofer then discusses when and whether money designated for the poor can be used to support an individual's extended family. There is a general rule that one is obligated to the poor to whom one is closest – close family first, more distant family next, neighbors third, members of one's city next and the out-of-town poor next. Greater needs Notwithstanding that family should be supported first, the Chasam Sofer quotes from his rebbi, the author of the Haflaah, that the rules of "closest first" or "family first" are only when the funds are necessary for the same level of need, for example, all have enough to eat but not enough for clothing. However, if some are short of food, and others have enough to eat but are short on clothing or other needs, the responsibility to make sure that someone has enough to eat comes first, even for someone out of town, regardless of whether there are neighbors or locals who are needy, as long as they have sufficient food. Yet, concludes the Chasam Sofer, this prioritization is not absolute. All needs of someone's family are considered his responsibility before the basic needs of others. In other words, the priorities should be as follows: (1) Family needs. (2) Most basic needs – food – regardless of location of the needy. (3) People of one's city. (4) The out-of-town poor. Chasam Sofer's conclusion If the father had stipulated at the time of obligating himself to support his son that he would use maaser money for this

obligation, he would be able to use it. Even then, the Chasam Sofer recommends that he use only up to half of his available maaser money to support his son. His reasoning is based on a Mishnah (Peah 8:6) which says that someone is permitted to save his maaser ani to support those that he chooses to, but he should not set aside more than half of his maaser ani for this purpose; the rest should be given to the local poor.

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However, this is only when he had originally planned to use maaser money for this purpose. Otherwise, once he created an obligation upon himself to support his son, it is similar to any other obligation that he has, and he may

from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> date: Nov 20, 2024, 10:02 AM subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 11/20/2024

Should Kiddush Levana Be Done with a Minyan? by R. Daniel Mann

Question: We usually do Kiddush Levana outside shul on Motzaei Shabbat. Is it supposed to be done with a minyan or some other minimum number of people?

Answer: Kiddush Levana is mentioned by an early Amora (Sanhedrin 42a). Early sources do not connect it to a minyan or to tefilla. The Pri Chadash (226:1) tries to prove it does not require a minyan from the fact that the mishna (Megilla 23b) does not list it as one of the things that requires a minyan. This implies that Kiddush Levana, which does not appear in Tannaic sources, was instituted before that mishna was written. Some point out that the gemara's language is singular. One way or another, there is insufficient source and/or logic to require a minyan, and the broad consensus is that one fulfills the mitzva even by doing it by himself.

That being said, many Acharonim (see Magen Avraham 426:6) have the minhag to try to have a minyan, applying to it a general rule in ritual matters: b'rov am hadrat melech (=brahm; the greater number of people who take part together, the greater the honor to Hashem). If that is the reason, it is clear why the mitzva counts without a minyan, as braham is a classical hiddur (improvement to a mitzva) whose absence does not, as a rule, disqualify mitzvot. There is an opinion that because it is a beracha of shevach (praise), and it is seen as greeting the Divine Presence, a minyan is particularly important (Teshuvot V'hanhagot I:205). (The idea of it being a birkat hashevach is not very convincing, as the gemara sounds like it resembles other berachot in which we praise Hashem for natural phenomena (e.g., on thunder, seeing great bodies of water), which are not as a group.) The way the practice has developed, there is another gain in having a minyan, since we recite Kaddish after it (see Kaf Hachayim, Orach Chayim 426:13).

There is a question about what is needed to attain braham status. There is an opinion in the gemara (Gittin 46a) that three people constitute rabim (many or public) (the other opinion says ten), and the Gra (to OC 422:2) accepts it and applies it to contexts similar to ours (see Rama, OC 422:2). Therefore, the Be'ur Halacha (to OC 426:2, based on Chaye Adam 68:11) says that the difference between doing Kiddush Levana with ten or three is not major. It is likely that the point is that is not mainly a question of what the minimum is for braham. Rather there are levels of braham and of hiddur.

Regarding under three, there is likely an advantage doing Kiddush Levana with another person. Rav Feinstein (Igrot Moshe, OC I, 146) sees precedent in the gemara that the presence of a second person shows one did not chance upon the moon but intentionally encountered it to show appreciation. Also, the Levush (626:1) points out that in order to fulfill the custom of saying "Shalom aleichem," one needs at least one other person.

Level of value is relevant regarding competing values. One such value is z'rizin makdimin l'mitzvot (it is best to do mitzvot as early as possible), which generally is more important than braham (see Rosh Hashana 32b). A third value is specific to Kiddush Levana – it is preferable to do Kiddush Levana on Motzaei Shabbat, mainly because we are usually better dressed then (Shulchan Aruch, OC 426:2). The minhag is clearly to wait for Motzaei Shabbat even though one could have done it earlier. However, some say that if earlier there is a chance to do it with a minyan, whereas he will not have one on Motzaei Shabbat, the two advantages of doing it earlier win out in that case (see Sha'ar Hatziyun 426:20). The Be'ur Halacha (ibid.) says that while it is worthwhile to wait several days (when there is not concern of cloud cover until the middle of the month) to do it with a minyan, if earlier there is a chance to do it with three, the net gain does not necessarily justify the wait.

While we have not exhausted all the permutations and opinions, we have seen the logic and extent of the preference of having several people together for Kiddush Levana.

לעילוי נשמת יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל ולצמן ז"ל

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Dear friends

Enjoy this week's schmooze and have a wonderful Shabbos.

for Rav Krieger Yeshivas Bircas HaTorah

SHAS CHAYEI SARAH 5785 Serving an Adam Gadol

By Rabbi Moshe Krieger, Yeshivas Bircas HaTorah

In Parshas Chayei Sarah, Avraham Avinu sends his servant, Eliezer, to undertake the most important task of finding a wife for Yitzchak. In the eyes of Chazal, Eliezer is a shining example of a talmid devoted to his rebbe. Eliezer had internalized Avraham's teachings and spread them throughout the world. He is called Damesek Eliezer because he was doleh umashkeh, meaning he drew up and taught all that he had learned from Avraham to the masses (Yoma 28b). Eliezer was master of all he [Avraham] possessed (Bereishis 15:2). In pshat, Avraham Avinu had entrusted all of his possessions to Eliezer, who oversaw all his affairs. Chazal (Bereishis Rabba 59:8) add depth to this expression: Eliezer had gone in Avraham's ways to the extent that he mastered all that he himself possessed — meaning, he was in full control of himself; a man of impeccable character who had purged himself of all bad middos. This leads to a question: When Avraham gave Eliezer the task of finding Yitzchak a wife, Eliezer hinted to Avraham that he himself had a daughter whom Yitzchak could marry (Rashi, Bereishis 24:39). Surely this loyal disciple of Avraham would not have hinted to such a proposal if his daughter was not at a spiritual level worthy of marrying Yitzchak. And yet, Avraham rejected Eliezer's idea with uncharacteristic sharpness: I am blessed and you [as a Canaanite, descended from Cham, whom Noach cursed] are cursed. A cursed being cannot cling to a blessed

one. Rav Dov Ze'ev Steinhause, a mashgiach in Yeshivas Kol Torah, asks: How could Avraham, the archetypal baal chessed, speak so harshly to Eliezer? Moreover, the Medrash (Bereishis Rabba 60:7) states that since Eliezer had served Avraham so faithfully, he had literally become a new person, no longer cursed but in fact blessed. If so, it seems that Avraham's rejection of Eliezer was not only scathing but even unjustified? Rav Steinhause answers that Avraham knew that Eliezer was a great man who had reached a high spiritual level, but he also knew that Eliezer's level depended on his servitude. Through being Avraham's servant, Eliezer maintained this powerful connection to his rebbe. Eliezer himself was aware of this, and therefore refers to himself always as eved Avraham. Eliezer's daughter was a maid servant in the house of Avraham and Sarah. To marry Yitzchak, Avraham would first have to free her, but once she was free of servitude, she might lose all of her greatness. This was Avraham's message, that without the yoke of servitude, both Eliezer and his daughter were apt to revert back to being cursed. This is an important lesson for us. Just like Eliezer was able to gain greatness by subjugating himself to Avraham, so too, we can reach greatness by submitting ourselves to a great talmid chacham. If you're in a yeshiva, submit yourself to the Rosh Yeshiva or Mashgiach. Heed his words and obey them, fulfill the sedarim and other requirements of the yeshiva, and do your part in order that others will do so as well. If you're out of yeshiva, make sure to be part of a kehilla and submit yourself to the Rav. Sometimes, the demands of a Rav or Rosh Yeshiva may seem to us taxing or unduly stringent, but the way to greatness is to submit ourselves to them, even when it's hard. Moreover, look for ways to serve them. If you are traveling into town, ask the Rav: I'll be in town. Is there something I can take care of for you there? If you're handy, offer: Is there anything in the Rav's house that needs fixing? Find ways to be with the Rav and serve him. If you're in yeshiva, after the shiur, ask your magid shiur if you can help him put away the sefarim he used. This is a very important form of service called *shimush talmidei chachamim*, with two important benefits (see Brachos 7b). By serving a talmid chacham, you become more connected to him and can tap into his greatness. Also, extra closeness to him enables you to observe close-up his good middos, wisdom, yiras Shamayim, precise fulfillment of halacha and more. In short, you can see his greatness and learn from it, as did Eliezer with Avraham Avinu. Even a Canaanite maid servant was able to reach an exalted level of spiritual greatness through serving one of the gedolei hador. Chazal (Mo'ed Katan 17a, see Rosh) relate that once, a maid servant of the house of Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi saw a Jew hitting his adult son (which is forbidden) and put him into *nidui* (ex-communication). Later, when this man had corrected his ways, he sought out a sage who could remove the *nidui*, but this required someone who was on a higher level than the maid servant, and no sage was sure that he was greater than her. The maid servant was no longer alive to undo the *nidui* herself, so this man remained in *nidui* for several years, until finally, several sages joined together to undo it. Look how much greatness can be achieved simply by serving an adam gadol! R' Shlomo Lorincz, during his years of service to the public, and particularly as a Knesset member of Agudas Yisrael, merited 14 years in which he was very close to the Chazon Ish. Every meeting with the Chazon Ish brought out a new, awesome dimension of his character. Sometimes, it was his utter separation from anger, no matter what the circumstances. Other times, one saw how he had nothing in this world except Torah and avodas Hashem. One always

saw his inner sense of joy and yiras Shamayim. Other times, what struck me was his wisdom. People came to him with what seemed like hopelessly complicated issues, but through the Chazon Ish's astute questions, the answers became clear without his having to tell them what to do. Every time, I came away inspired, filled with a desire to try to emulate what I had seen, if only in part. If I only came to this world for those 14 years to observe this great man — it would have been enough! said R' Lorincz. May we be zoche to serve talmidei chachamim!

Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Chayei Sarah 5776 **1.** This week's Parsha for the most part is the story of the world's most amazing Shadchan, Eliezer Eved Avraham who went to find a Shidduch for Yitzchok. As you know, when Eliezer had expressed to Avraham a desire that his daughter marry Yitzchok he was told as is found in Rashi to 24:39 (*אתה ארו*). You are inherently not suitable because you come from a Mishpacha which is under the title of Arur and therefore, go find a different Shidduch and that is what happened. Interestingly, Chazal tells us, that after this episode, Yatza Michlal Arur. Eliezer throughout this episode was so faithful, that Yatza Michlal Arur, he wasn't Arur anymore. It was too late though as the Shidduch had been done. Let's try to learn something from Eliezer Eved Avraham who was able to go from a category of Arur to non-Arur by his behavior here in the Parsha. It is said that the Chofetz Chaim could not come to a gathering and he sent instead Rav Meir Shapiro to represent him. He gave Rav Meir Shapiro the Drasha that he wanted him to deliver on behalf of the Chofetz Chaim. When he came there, they had a discussion as to who should speak first. Had the Chofetz Chaim attended, he certainly would have spoken first as the Zakein Hador and a Kohen to boot. Now that it was the young Rav Meir Shapiro, there was a discussion. Rav Meir Shapiro said I would rather speak last. I would rather speak as late as possible. Let me explain. We have the concept of *Shlucho Shel Adam Kemoso*, someone who is a Shaliach for someone else is like that person. As long as I have not delivered the speech I am a Shaliach of the Chofetz Chaim. Imagine, Kemoso, I am like the Chofetz Chaim. Let me be *Shlucho Shel Adam Kemoso* for as long as I possibly can. In this week's Parsha, Eliezer does a lot. The riddle is asked how many times does the name Eliezer appear in this week's Parsha? If you ask it at the Shabbos table you may get different guesses. But unless someone checked the number the person will get it wrong. This is because Eliezer's name does not appear at all. He is constantly called Eved Avraham. Because you see he fulfilled the *Shlucho Shel Adam Kemoso*. He wasn't Eliezer. He wasn't doing anything for himself. What he was doing was behaving as a Shaliach, *Shlucho Shel Adam Kemoso* of Avraham Avinu. By behaving that way long enough he actually turned into a *M'ain* of Avraham Avinu, a *M'ain* of Klal Yisrael. When a person raises himself to a level where he is looking to be someone better, someone more, and he actually behaves that way long enough, he raises himself even from the Klal of Arur. There is a parable told about a commoner who wanted to marry the princess. The commoner knew that he can never marry the princess. Just look at him, he had the face of an ordinary person, the face of a commoner. He decided that he would go to a master mask maker. He had the master mask maker make him a special mask. A mask which gave him the face of nobility, the face of importance, the face of wealth and prestige, and that he did. The mask maker gave him a mask and with that he was able to court the princess and marry her.

For many years he did not take off that mask. He walked wherever he went with this mask of nobility, prestige, and importance. One day an old friend came to visit him. In anger he said that is not your face. You are wearing a false face, a face of nobility, a face of importance? In his anger he ripped the mask off the face of this man and they gasped. Underneath the mask, his own natural face had turned into a face which was identical to the face on the mask. The point of the parable is that if you put on the mask of something greater, something better, something bigger, you aren't a phony. You really mean to aspire to that. You wear the mask, you act that way, then you can go from an Arur to a Baruch. You can go from something less to something more. Rav Avidor Miller used to say over that when he was in the Slabodka Yeshiva he was part of a Mussar Vaad. Every month they would work on one Middah. One month they gathered and discussed what Middah to work on. The suggestion came to work on the Middah of Emes. As Rabbi Miller said, there was one Mussarnik, an Alteh Mussarnik who said Emes? Feh! Everyone works with Emes. Let's spend this month to work on serving Hashem with Sheker. They decided that for that month they would serve Hashem with Sheker. The Sheker would be that they would aspire, they would pretend to be on a higher level. They would behave as if they were on a different level. They would say I can do this, I want to do that. For that month they worked on Sheker. Many years later, here in America, Rabbi Avigdor Miller would teach his Talmidim to work with Sheker. Say that I am doing this L'sheim Shamayim, even if you are not. Say to yourself I am doing it L'sheim Shamayim. Say it often enough and eventually you will. Eventually you will become the mask. I say the same thing to all of you Bnei Torah who go out to work. Keep the mask of the Ben Torah, keep the face of the Ben Torah. Keep the attitude of the Ben Torah. When you look in the mirror, see the Ben Torah. Aspire to it. Here you don't have to go from Arur to Baruch, you just have to be careful not to slip from Baruch to Arur. Wherever you go, wherever you Daven, wherever you learn, have that face, that Shprach, that expression. Even if in your heart you suddenly turn to care about silly things like sports and entertainment, never admit it, never express it. You will get to where you have to be. A lesson of Eliezer Eved Avraham. 2. I would like to move to a topic at the end of the Parsha in a part of the Parsha that is rarely quoted most probably because it is the least understood. We learn that after Sarah's death Avraham Avinu took another woman. This is found in 25:6 (פִּילָגְשִׁים) where Rashi says (פֶּלֶגֶשׁ אַחַת) that it is actually one Pilegesh. If you look in our Chumash you will see Pilagshim in our Sefer Torah is written Malei even though Rashi says that it should be Chaseir. That is a question for a different week. So he went and took a woman named Keturah and he had children from her. As the Posuk tells us (וּבְנֵי הַפִּילָגְשִׁים נָתַן אֶבְרָהָם מִתְהָנָה וַיְשִׁלְחוּ מִלְּפָנֵי חִזְקָה בֶּן חִזְקָה אֶל אֶרְצָ קָדְםָ) (אֲשֶׁר לְאֶבְרָהָם נָתַן אֶבְרָהָם מִתְהָנָה וַיְשִׁלְחוּ מִלְּפָנֵי חִזְקָה בֶּן חִזְקָה אֶל אֶרְצָ קָדְםָ). He sends them far away to the Far East as we understand, and these are the children of Avraham who went to the Far East and the Far Eastern cultures come from them. The Gemara says in Maseches Sanhedrin 91a (4 lines from the bottom) (מֵאַי מִתְנוֹת אָמֵר ר' יְרֵמִיָּה בֶּן) (אָבָא מַלְמָד שָׁמַר לְהָם שֵׁם טוֹמָאָה) that the Matanos he gave were the Sheim Hatumah. The powers that exist in the world that come from a negative place. The Sheim Hatumah. This is what it says in the Posuk as explained by the Gemara. There are two difficulties. 1) Why did he send his children away, they are his children? When Yishmael misbehaved as Rashi says, Yishmael was Over on Avodah Zorah and Gilui Arayos, Avraham was reluctant to send him away. Sarah

compelled him to. Why here did he send these Bnei Katura to a distant land? 2) Why did he give them the Sheimos Hatumah, it is a Davar Pele. The Pachad Yitzchok in Mamarei Pesach Maimar 83 (Pei Gimmel) says that from here we have a connection to a Yesod of the Vilna Gaon, of the GRA. The GRA talks about the idea of Brisi, Es Brisi Avraham, Es Brisi Yitzchok, V'es Brisi Yaakov. HKB'H talks about the Bris of the Avos. The GRA says that the Bris of the Avos is well-known Chesed, Gevurah, and Tiferes. There is also a Bris of the Imahos. There is also something we have from our Imahos, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah. Es Avraham, Es Yitzchok you don't say Bris Avraham you say Es Bris Avraham. The Es is Marbeh the women, the wives. As is the Derech of Nashim Tzidkonios to behave Kevuda Bas Melech P'nima with ultimate Tzniyus. So too, is the Bris hidden here in the word Es. What is the Bris of the Imahos, what is the Cheilek of the Imahos? To be a Chomeh, to be a protection. We know that there is a custom that the Kallah walks around the Chosson under the Chuppah seven times. That is based on an idea from Shir Hashirim that the wife, the Kallah is K'chomeh, like a wall surrounding or protecting the home that the Chosson and Kallah build together. It is a Chomeh. The Chomeh is to protect from spiritual dangers. The father gives the white, the mother gives the red in the language of the Gemara. The father gives the intellect, teaches the children how to learn and how to keep Mitzvos. The mother gives the red, the blood, the warmth, the heart. That is the Chomeh to be protected. We see this in the Imahos. The Bris Imahos of Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah. Sarah said protect Yitzchok from outside influences. As it says in 21:10 (אֶרְאֶשׁ קָדְמָתָה). Get rid of Yishmael, send him away. Rivka too, disagreed with Yitzchok and felt that Eisav's influence was negative and should not be included in Klal Yisrael. Even Rachel and Leah both of whom had only good children, they were the ones who understood on their own as it says in 31:15 (קָלְוָא נְכָרִיּוֹת נְקַשְׁבָּנוּ לָזָ) that they should leave Lavan's home. Yaakov only understood it when HKB'H told him B'nevuah, they understood instinctively. The Bris Imahos is to be the Chomeh in the home. Avraham lost his wife, he lost Sarah. He understood that the Chomeh was missing, and therefore, he sent away the Bnei HaPilagshim. Why did he give them Kochos Hatumah? Yishmael and Eisav were sent away but they still aspire to be Klal Yisrael. Eisav, the catholic religion of today, is a people busy saying that we are the chosen people, we are Klal Yisrael. G-d has traded the Jewish people for us. Yishmael too, built their entire religion on the basis of that which was given over by the Jewish people for thousands of years until their Navi Sheker came and said we are the ones who descend from the bible. Avraham would have none of that. He said you go with the Kochos Hatumah, do what you need to do with it. Use it for good use it for bad, you are not Klal Yisrael. And so, we learn here about the idea of Bris Imahos, when the mother wasn't in the home the father had to take drastic steps to protect Klal Yisrael from the influence of others. Today, we live in a time when the dangers of the outside world are incredible. There is no Chomeh, there is no wall, there is no protection. We need to turn to the Imahos, the women of Klal Yisrael for the major part, the women are the ones who would have less access of internet, of outside influences in a person's home. If you are fortunate to have a wife, let her be the Chomeh. Listen to her when she suggests that the house be better protected, that the house be a Seviva that is better, that is more. 3. The question of the week is: When Rivkah appears, Rashi tells us that Yitzchok saw her greatness because of three

things. One of them is that the Shabbos candles were lit from Erev Shabbos to Erev Shabbos. His mother Sarah had lit candles and they burned from Erev Shabbos to Erev Shabbos and that stopped when she passed away, and now that Rivkah came, that miraculously burning of the Shabbos Licht began again. The question is this. After Sarah passed away, didn't Avraham light the Shabbos Licht in the home? If there is no woman in the home then the man is obligated to light. Avraham's Shabbos Licht didn't burn from Erev Shabbos to Erev Shabbos? Only Sarah, only Rivkah? Halo Davar Hu! Worth commenting on. With that I wish one and all an absolutely wonderful Gevaldige Shabbos Parshas Chayeis Sarah!

<https://jewishlink.news/when-prophecy-and-morality-clash/>
When Prophecy and Morality 'Clash' By Rabbi Moshe Taragin |
November 14, 2024

Avraham's journey introduced two fundamental traditions. For nearly 2,000 years, Hashem had seemed remote and withdrawn from humanity. Dwelling in the heavens, He rarely conversed directly with people. As humanity fell into moral decline, He responded with severe judgments. Yet, during this period, communication with the divine remained limited; there was little continuous dialogue between humankind and Hashem in Heaven.

Avraham revolutionized humanity's relationship with Hashem. Unlike previous generations, who had little direct contact with Hashem, Avraham not only received multiple prophecies about his future but also engaged in direct conversations with Hashem. He prayed fervently, received oaths and promises from Hashem, and even hosted Hashem in his humble tent while he recovered from circumcision. Avraham succeeded in transforming a distant, transcendent God into an immanent presence, making Hashem a tangible, direct part of human experience. Avraham established the tradition of prophecy, confirming that Hashem speaks directly to man.

Avraham also established a legacy of moral consciousness. He discerned a moral spirit embedded within Nature and assumed that there must be a moral architect to this grand machine. He recognized that Hashem's will was not only present in the upper cosmos but also in the moral fabric of life. With this understanding, he shaped his own personality to reflect these values, becoming an agent of moral welfare for others. He ended military conflicts, negotiated peace with enemies and settled disputes graciously. He liberated his nephew Lot from captivity, hosted anonymous travelers and defended the sinners of Sodom. Every action was driven by ethical standards, establishing a moral tradition of behavior.

Throughout Avraham's life, his prophetic conversations with Hashem and his moral actions seemed aligned. Prophecy and morality were synchronous. Until they weren't.

At the end of his life, Avraham received a chilling prophecy to sacrifice his son. Had he not already been convinced of the reliability and authenticity of previous prophecies, he could not possibly have carried out such a command. However, the divine voice he heard was one he had come to recognize, and, as he had done countless times before, he responded with "Hineni"—"Here I am," ready to follow Hashem's will without hesitation. The voice he heard emanating from Heaven was a familiar one.

However, this prophetic command directly contradicted his moral principles. It implied that Hashem desired human sacrifice, a practice Avraham had long rejected as part of the pagan cultures he

renounced. How could he, a father, take the life of his own child? This divine instruction tested the foundation of his moral framework. As a deeply religious individual, Avraham accepted the prophecy. He recognized that while human morality may clash with divine command, ultimate submission to Hashem's will is essential. Religious faith sometimes requires placing human moral reasoning beneath divine instruction. Human understanding sometimes fails to grasp the full moral reasoning behind Hashem's command, and religious commitment means trusting that divine decisions are inherently moral—even when they appear incomprehensible. This is the hallmark of a devout personality, where faith and submission take precedence over personal moral judgment.

Yet despite his practical submission to divine mandate, Avraham's approach to the Akeidah was not one of emotional detachment or robotic obedience. Rather, he maintained a deep, personal connection with his son throughout the ordeal. Instead of viewing the act as an impersonal command, Avraham referred to Yitzchak repeatedly as "his son" never allowing himself to depersonalize his child. While his obedience to Hashem was absolute, he refused to sever the natural, instinctive love he felt as a father.

The midrash paints a poignant picture of Avraham's internal moral struggle during the Akeidah. Despite his willingness to submit, he prayed fervently for Hashem to rescind the decree, unable to quell the natural love and sorrow he felt for his son. The midrash further describes Avraham crying tears of a mournful father, even though his heart was overjoyed to obey divine instructions. This emotional complexity reveals the depth of Avraham's character: He did not abandon his human emotions or moral spirit. Believing that prophecy and morality could, in the end, be reconciled, he also acknowledged that such reconciliation was beyond his immediate grasp. Facing this quandary and unwavering in his faith, he submitted to divine expectation, while still acknowledging the moral moment.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Nov 21, 2024, 2:16 AM subject: Chayeis Sarah: **Rav Kook and Hebron**

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Chayeis Sarah: Rav Kook and Hebron

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

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

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

הرش"ח תשרא פ Parashat Chayei Sarah Feeding One's Animals Rabbi Michael Taubes

When Avraham Avinu's servant meets Rivkah at the well, she gives him some water to drink and then gives water to all of his camels as well (Bereishit 24:18-20). Citing a Posuk elsewhere in the Torah (Devarim 11:15), however, the Gemara in Berachos (40a) states that because that Posuk, familiar to us from the second paragraph of Krias Shema, first mentions food for animals then speaks of the person eating, one is forbidden to eat unless he has already given food to his animals. The Rambam (Hilchos Avadim 9:8) writes that the early sages indeed fed their animals before they themselves ate. Rabbeinu Yehuda HaChassid, in his Sefer Chassidim (Siman 531), takes note of the fact that a different Posuk in this Parsha (Bereishit 24:46), as well as a Posuk later in the Torah, in which Hashem tells Moshe to bring water out of the rock for the people and their animals (Bamidbar 20:8), both indicate (as does the Posuk in this Parsha cited above) that the people themselves drank before any drinks were provided for their animals. He thus explains that when it comes to drinks, human beings are to be taken care of before animals, and only regarding food do we say that animals are to be fed first, as suggested by the aforementioned Posuk recited in Krias Shema, as well as by other Pesukim in this Parsha (Bereishit 24:32-33) which state that

when Lavan invited Avraham's servant in, he first fed the animals before feeding the servant himself, and by a third Posuk found earlier in the Torah (Bereishit 1:30). The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 167:18) quotes this ruling from the Sefer Chassidim that human beings take precedence for drinking, and only tasting food is forbidden to a person until he gives something to his animals. The Machatzis HaShekel says that if the Torah bothered to present the details about Rivkah serving water to the servant and his camels, it must be to teach us that this is the proper practice. The Yad Ephraim, after quoting from the Ohr HaChaim in his commentary on the Torah (Bamidbar

ibid) that in a situation of danger, even feeding a human takes precedence over feeding an animal, suggests a reason for this distinction between eating and drinking. Despite all this, however, the Kaf HaChaim (Os 50) quotes those who say that there is in fact no difference, and even for drinking, one's animal comes first. There is, however, some question as to whether this prohibition to eat before feeding one's animals is actually a prohibition in the strict sense of the term, or more like a part of a chasidus, pious behavior, but the violation of which would not be an Aveirah. The aforementioned Rambam writes, as quoted above, only that the early sages used to feed their animals before they themselves ate, as if to suggest that to do this is a form of exemplary behavior, but is not strictly required. The Shulchan Aruch, moreover, does not explicitly record this obligation at all. The Magen Avraham cited above, however, does write explicitly that one may not eat before feeding one's animals, and he quotes a view elsewhere (Orach Chaim 271:12) that the prohibition is MideOraisa, from the Torah. The Mishnah Berurah, in his Biur Halacha (Orach Chaim 167 s.v. u'mikol makom), quotes this view as well, but he points out that the prohibition is from the Torah. Nevertheless, he does cite this prohibition in the Mishnah Berurah itself (s.k. 40), as do the Aruch Hashulchan (seif 13) and the Chayei Adam (Klal 45 seif 1), the latter implying that the prohibition is indeed from the Torah.

Rav Yaakov Emden (Shu"t She'elat Ya'avetz vol. 1 siman 17) was asked whether this prohibition applies to one who has a cat or a dog in his home. He replied that although both cats and dogs do perform services for their owners, the former keeping away the mice and the latter protecting the home from burglars, and as such they deserve to be supported with food by their owners, he believes nevertheless that one doesn't have the same level of obligation to feed them as one does to feed domesticated farm animals. He explains that this is because they can easily find their own food anywhere and anytime, such as by foraging through the garbage, and they therefore are not as Feeding One's Animals

Rabbi Michael Taubes When Avraham Avinu's servant meets Rivkah at the well, she gives him some water to drink and then gives water to all of his camels as well (Bereishit 24:18-20). Citing a Posuk elsewhere in the Torah (Devarim 11:15), however, the Gemara in Berachos (40a) states that because that Posuk, familiar to us from the second paragraph of Krias Shema, first mentions food for animals then speaks of the person eating, one is forbidden to eat unless he has already given food to his animals. The Rambam (Hilchos Avadim 9:8) writes that the early sages indeed fed their animals before they themselves ate.

Rabbeinu Yehuda HaChassid, in his Sefer Chassidim (Siman 531), takes note of the fact that a different Posuk in this Parsha (Bereishit 24:46), as well as a Posuk later in the Torah, in which Hashem tells

Moshe to bring water out of the rock for the people and their animals (Bamidbar 20:8), both indicate (as does the Posuk in this Parsha cited above) that the people themselves drank before any drinks were provided for their animals. He thus explains that when it comes to drinks, human beings are to be taken care of before animals, and only regarding food do we say that animals are to be fed first, as suggested by the aforementioned Posuk recited in Krias Shema, as well as by other Pesukim in this Parsha (Bereishit 24:32-33) which state that when Lavan invited Avraham's servant in, he first fed the animals before feeding the servant himself, and by a third Posuk found earlier in the Torah (Bereishit 1:30). The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 167:18) quotes this ruling from the Sefer Chassidim that human beings take precedence for drinking, and only tasting food is forbidden to a person until he gives something to his animals. The Machatzis HaShekel says that if the Torah bothered to present the details about Rivkah serving water to the servant and his camels, it must be to teach us that this is the proper practice. The Yad Ephraim, after quoting from the Ohr HaChaim in his commentary on the Torah (Bamidbar ibid) that in a situation of danger, even feeding a human takes precedence over feeding an animal, suggests a reason for this distinction between eating and drinking. Despite all this, however, the Kaf HaChaim (Os 50) quotes those who say that there is in fact no difference, and even for drinking, one's animal comes first. There is, however, some question as to whether this prohibition to eat before feeding one's animals is actually a prohibition in the strict sense of the term, or more like a part of a chasidus, pious behavior, but the violation of which would not be an Aveirah. The aforementioned Rambam writes, as quoted above, only that the early sages used to feed their animals before they themselves ate, as if to suggest that to do this is a form of exemplary behavior, but is not strictly required. The Shulchan Aruch, moreover, does not explicitly record this obligation at all. The Magen Avraham cited above, however, does write explicitly that one may not eat before feeding one's animals, and he quotes a view elsewhere (Orach Chaim 271:12) that the prohibition is MideOraisa, from the Torah. The Mishnah Berurah, in his Biur Halacha (Orach Chaim 167 s.v. u'mikol makom), quotes this view as well, but he points out that the prohibition is from the Torah. Nevertheless, he does cite this prohibition in the Mishnah Berurah itself (s.k. 40), as do the Aruch Hashulchan (seif 13) and the Chayei Adam (Klal 45 seif 1), the latter implying that the prohibition is indeed from the Torah.

Rav Yaakov Emden (Shu"t She'elat Ya'avetz vol. 1 siman 17) was asked whether this prohibition applies to one who has a cat or a dog in his home. He replied that although both cats and dogs do perform services for their owners, the former keeping away the mice and the latter protecting the home from burglars, and as such they deserve to be supported with food by their owners, he believes nevertheless that one doesn't have the same level of obligation to feed them as one does to feed domesticated farm animals. He explains that this is because they can easily find their own food anywhere and anytime, such as by foraging through the garbage, and they therefore are not as dependent on their owners for food. Cats and dogs, however, can roam around and find food whenever they want; the obligation to feed them is thus not as incumbent on the owners as is the obligation to feed other animals. He concludes, however, that one who wishes to be scrupulous in his deeds should feed his cat and his dog as well before he himself eats. It would seem, by the way, that the more absolute requirement to feed one's animal first would apply if one

keeps his cat or dog - or any other pet - confined to his house or yard, rendering it unable to obtain food on its own. It is worth noting that Rav Yaakov Emden makes it clear, based on several sources, that one must give food to one's animals even on Shabbos, as already codified by the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 324:11), where, interestingly enough, dogs are mentioned specifically. He also notes that it appears from the Gemara in Gittin (62a) that even if one is not at home, one may not eat anywhere unless he has seen to it that his animals at home would be fed beforehand.

Because of this requirement to feed one's animals before partaking of food oneself, the Gemara in Berachos cited above indicates, as explained by Rashi (s.v. tol), that although it is generally prohibited to speak after reciting the Beracha of Hamotzi before eating some bread, and if one does, he must recite the Beracha again, if one speaks at that point about feeding one's animals, he need not recite another Beracha. Tosafos (s.v. haba) explains that the Halacha in general is that if one talks in between the recitation of any Beracha over a food or a drink and the actual eating or drinking, one must recite another Beracha unless the talking relates to the meal; apparently, speaking about feeding one's animals relates to the meal because of this requirement to feed the animal's first and thus does not constitute an improper interruption. The Rambam (Hilchos Berachos 1:8) and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 167:6) rule accordingly. Based on the above dispute about whether this rule applies to drinking, the Kaf HaChaim, among others, discusses whether an interruption to talk about giving the animals a drink would require one to recite a new Beracha.

It should be noted that in general, the Mishnah in Bava Kamma (69b) forbids one to own a dog, or, presumably, any other potentially dangerous pet, unless it can be safely chained; Rashi (s.v. es hakelev) explains that this is because a dog bites and barks and frightens people. The Rambam (Hilchos Nizkei Mammon 5:9) accepts this ruling, adding that some animals frequently cause a lot of damage, but the Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 409:3) limits the prohibition to owning an "evil dog," a term which appears in the Gemara earlier in Bava Kamma (15b). In the aforementioned Teshuvah, Rav Yaakov Emden discourages owning dogs except for financial or security reasons, and views playing with them as a waste of time and as the behavior of non-Jews. In the Sefer Chassidim (siman 938), Rabbeinu Yehuda HaChassid writes that to raise birds is a waste of time, and that money spent on this should rather be given to the poor. The Aruch Hashulchan (seif 4), however, writes clearly, as do others, that one may own a dog (or another pet) unless it is the type which may cause harm or damage.

Parshas Chayei Sarah: The Slave's Mission

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE RESULT OF THE AKEDAH: YITZHAK BECOMES A LIVING OLAH

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

Now, let's take a fresh look at the command: Take him up to be an Olah - in other words, do not offer him up (i.e. sacrifice him), but make him an Olah - an offering which is solely dedicated to God. Indeed, Avraham's hand is only stayed with reference to Yitzhak's physical life, but, following the ruling of the Mishnah (Zevahim 9:1), once an offering has been brought up to the altar, it can never lose that sense of sanctity. Yitzhak became, from the moment of his binding, the human, living Olah. His life was no longer one of earthly concerns and interactions - he became an other-worldly man. This may be the implication of his not returning from the mountain - because, in the greater sense of things, he never "came down". He was no longer a child of Avraham and Sarah, but his own separate, sanctified being. This would explain the text's silence about his participation in Sarah's funeral. This also explains why Yitzhak, unlike Avraham and Yaakov, is not allowed to leave the holy land (see Gen. 26:3 and Rashi ad loc.) - he is, in the words of the Rabbis, an "Olah T'mimah" - a perfect Olah.

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

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

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

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

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT HAYYEI SARA:

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

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

THINK ABOUT IT:

1. The story of the purchase is told in excruciating detail. Read through the text slowly and carefully, unpacking every line. Imagine you are Avraham, telling your family or a few friends over the dinner table this story of a real estate purchase, and you'll see what I mean. Why is there so much detail? What is the message? And why is the whole story important enough to appear in the Torah?
2. The two parties to the conversation -- Avraham and the Hittites -- seem to be having trouble communicating, as each one repeatedly claims that the other side is not really listening. Why won't either side accept the kind generosity of the other side? Why are both sides trying to out-nice each other?
3. What other features of this section strike you as strange, and how do you account for them?

PARASHAT HAYYEI SARA:

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

- 1) When the Talmud and Midrash talk about sinful Jews, they often use the term, "The ENEMIES of Israel." We don't ever want to refer explicitly to our own people as sinful.
- 2) When the Talmud discusses the laws of one who curses God, the Gemara refers to the act of cursing God by its opposite: instead of calling it "cursing God," the Gemara refers to this evil act as "BLESSING God." Cursing God is something so terrible that we don't even want to refer to it as such, so we call it by its opposite.
- 3) When the Talmud refers to someone who is blind, it often uses the term, "One who has plenty of light." Of course, a blind person has no "light" at all, but instead of accenting the disability, the Gemara expresses the same thing by its opposite.

BURYING THE BODY:

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

BERESHIT 23:2-20 --

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE SWEETNESS OF THE BNEI HET:

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

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

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

- 1) Whether Avraham will acquire a gravesite through sale or as a gift.
- 2) Whether Avraham will receive an independent, permanent family burial place (an "ahuza"), or only a place within one of the gravesites of the Bnei Het.
- 3) Whether Avraham will receive the cave only (as he proposes), or the cave and the field next to it (as Efron proposes).

WHY BOTHER?

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

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

- 1) "Bnei Het": Pasuk 3 refers to them as the "Bnei Het," the "Children of Het": this is who they are in the simple sense, and this is how they are referred to throughout this section.
- 2) "Am Ha-Aretz": Pesukim 7, 12, and 13 refer to Avraham's interlocutors as the "am ha-aretz," the "people of the land." Notice that this phrase is *always* used just before Avraham speaks, not when *they* themselves speak! This hints to us that the reason they are called "am ha-aretz" is because Avraham in particular relates to them as the "people of the land"; he sees them as the "am ha-aretz" because that's exactly what he wants from them -- land!
- 3) "Those within the gates of the city": Pesukim 10 and 18 refer to the crowd of Hittite observers as "all those within the gate of the city" [i.e., everyone in town]. This description of the Bnei Het emphasizes that the whole deal takes place publicly, in front of the entire crowd of Bnei Het who live in Hevron. We will soon see why this is important.

CLOSING THE DEAL:

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

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

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

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

Let us now take the evidence and put it together:

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

* We know that he wants to pay for it and will not accept it as a gift.

* We know he views the Bnei Het as the "am ha-aretz," "the people of the land," from whom he wants land.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indeed, the Bnei Het stress the *action* of burial ("kevor meitekha") over the owning of a grave; they want to help

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

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

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

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

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

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

AVRAHAM FINALLY "LISTENS":

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

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

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

BERESHIT 35:27 --

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

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

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

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

BERESHIT 25:8-10 --

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

Shabbat Shalom

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...'

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

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

'TEN GENERATIONS' - TWICE!

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

Section One: - 5:1-32 / from Adam to Noach)

Section Two - 11:10-26 / from Shem to Terach

[Technically speaking one may be 9 generations, but it's the overall pattern that is very similar. Note also how the mishna in Pirkei Avot 5:2-3 relates to this structure.]

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

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

Note how:

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

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

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

* Avraham, like Shem, is blessed with the privilege of representing God.

* Haran's son Lot, like Cham's son Canaan, is involved in a sin relating to incest.

* Nachor's offspring Rivka, Rachel & Leah return to 'dwell within the tent' of the children of Avraham, just as Yefet is destined to dwell within the 'tent of **Shem**'. [See 9:24-27 / 'yaft Elokim le-Yefet ve-yishkon be-ohalei Shem'.]

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

TOLDOT TERACH vs. TOLDOT AVRAHAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY TERACH?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

destiny.

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

3. TOLDOT AVRAHAM

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

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

Nonetheless, the question still remains stronger than the answer.

PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH - 3 mini shiurim

SHIUR #1 - "HASHEM ELOKEI HA-SHAMAYIM"

How should one describe God?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Earth (see 24:1-4).

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

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

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

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

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

HEAVENS 'and' EARTH

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

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

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

A. RADAK - 'Helping his servant understand'

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

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

B. SFORNO - 'Scare tactics'

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

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

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

D. RAMBAN - "Eretz Yisrael"

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

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

ELOKEI HA-SHAMAYIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHIUR #2 - AVRAHAM AVINU & 'REAL' ESTATE

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

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

TWO PERCEPTIONS

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

1) Bnei Chet's perception:

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

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

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

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

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

2) Avraham Avinu's perception:

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

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

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FOR FURTHER IYUN:

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

SHIUR #3 "ZERA VA-ARETZ"

- A PROMISE, COVENANT, AND OATH

Just prior to sending his servant in search of a wife for his son, Avraham briefly reviews the various stages of his 'bechira': "Hashem Elokei ha-shamayim asher lekachani mi-BEIT AVI u-ME'ERETZ MOLADETI ve-asher DIBER li, ve-asher NISHBA li leimor - le-ZAR'ACHA ETeIN et ha-ARETZ ha-zot..." (24:7)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* "asher DIBER li" -

most probably refers to Brit Bein Ha-Betarim, which begins with "haya DVAR Hashem el Avram..."

(15:1, see also 15:4);

* while "asher NISHBA li"

refers the oath of the Akeida (22:16).

THE OATH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
Menachem