

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 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.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of our living hostages and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. Three hostages' remains are still in Gaza: Ran Gvili, Dror Or, and Sudthisak Rinthalak, May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

We were very excited this week to receive an email from cousins that their oldest grandson, who is studying for Semikhah at Yeshiva University, has just become engaged. Hannah and I are thrilled to be joining the family for the wedding soon in Lakewood. Our cousins, who divide their time between Los Angeles and Israel, are children of Holocaust survivors. My grandparents sponsored my cousin's family to immigrate and move to Los Angeles in the early 1950s, when my cousin and her three sisters were very young. I remember my parents taking us to meet my cousin, (who was a young girl at the time), her next younger sister, and their twin baby daughters (the latter two in a crib) – when I was probably around eight years old. These cousins have always been special to us. We shared numerous simchas growing up, attended their children's simchas (all their weddings), and normally stay with them for Shabbat when we travel to Los Angeles.

Our cousins are a natural topic for this parsha. Last week was the anniversary of Kristallnacht, the beginning of the worst horrors of the Holocaust. Our cousins, with their large frum family and so far two Orthodox rabbis, are the best part of our revenge for Hitler. We Jews remember the horrors of the Nazis, encourage large families, study our holy texts, and encourage our children to make aliyah. Chayei Sarah is part of the story of Avraham Avinu (whose name I carry) and his efforts to purchase property in Israel (Canaan) and to establish a legacy for our people.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander explores the diverse legacies of Moshe, David, and Avraham. Moshe spent much of his adult life communicating with God, teaching His mitzvot to the people, judging issues that arose, and initiating an oral tradition to clarify issues that are not obvious in the written Torah. To be available to Hashem at any time of day or night, Moshe lived apart from his wife and children. After the Exodus, the Torah does not mention Moshe's children. His burial location is hidden, and no Jew attempts to visit and pay respects to Moshe. Rabbi Brander considers King David's relationship with his children to be passive. Others in David's environment must tell him when one of his sons is attempting to take over from their father's royal duties.

In contrast with Moshe and David, Avraham devotes considerable time and attention to his sons. Yitzhak learns enough from his father to repeat many of Avraham's experiences and approaches, including not telling foreign rulers that he is married and redigging and giving up again some of the wells that his father had originally dug. Avraham directs his servant Eliezer how to find a wife for Yitzhak, and Yitzhak sends Yaakov to his same cousins in Haran to search for a wife. Even this Shabbat, nearly 3700 years later, many Jews spend Shabbat Chayei Sarah in Hebron, at the tombs of Avraham and Sarah, because of the close connection we Jews feel to their kever.

Rabbi Haim Ovadia explores Avraham's brilliant negotiation with the Hittites for a burial spot, a *Kever Akhuzah* (a permanent holding in the land). Since the people of Canaan would not sell any land to a foreigner, Avraham could only purchase a permanent holding of land by shaming Ephron ben Zohar into selling a corner of his property for an extremely high price. The purchase of this first permanent holding is so important to the Jewish legacy in Israel that all the details are in the Torah.

Our connection to fellow Jews continues after thousands of years. Rabbi Mordechai Rhine writes beautifully to Avraham and Sarah, whom he feels are his parents, even after nearly 3700 years. We see this long connection of fellow Jews as our relatives in other contexts. This Shabbat marks seven years since a murderous anti-Semite broke into the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh and killed eleven congregants during morning services. In the past week, the Goldin family and Israel could finally remember and bury the remains of Lt. Hadar Goldin, whom Hamas murderers dragged into Gaza eleven years ago. Hamas finally returned his body, because IDF discovered the location and were a few feet away from reaching and returning his remains to Israel. IDF kept working to discover and recover Lt. Goldin's bones. Jews in Pittsburgh have kept alive the memories of the eleven members of the Tree of Life Congregation. These efforts demonstrate that we Jews continue to build and reinforce a legacy of B'Nai Yisrael, whom we consider all to be part of our family.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, reminds us of the immensely difficult task that Holocaust survivors had to rebuild a life after their horrific experiences. (Our hostages from Gaza and their families face a similar task.) Jews who survived the Nazi horrors frequently would not speak of their experiences for decades – some never would address the topic. I cannot imagine how I would have had the strength to get up in the morning and create a new life if I had been in either situation. Hashem promises that we shall endure, but with our enemies at our gates. I count my blessings that my grandparents made their way to America, that my parents were the first generation born in this country, and that my sisters and I could live in a free and protected period. Those who came before us, and those living now during a time of wicked anti-Semitism, have much more difficult tasks. I wish them koach – and may those of the current generation understand that they must be careful lest history repeat for them and their children.

We should always cherish those who make us aware of our legacy. I wrote the following words three years ago, and I cannot improve on them: A Rebbe is like a father, and my Rebbe/father figure for decades was Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, who earned my weekly dedication of these Devrei Torah to his memory – many times over during our friendship. He was my mentor for nearly fifty years. Rabbi Cahan and his beloved wife Elizabeth taught Hannah and me to find deeper appreciation for the many levels of insights in the Torah. Shabbas and Yom Tov with the Cahans was always special, something that we have tried to pass on to our children. Avraham and Sarah built a legacy that has lasted for more than 3500 years. Dedicated Jews like the Cahans renew and reinforce the Jewish legacy each generation – and that is why we Jews have survived so long and shall always be around, always fulfilling Hashem's promise to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov. May our children and grandchildren always appreciate this lesson.

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 Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeevi Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata

Lana, 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; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, 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.

Haftarat Parshat Chayei Sarah: Leadership and Family

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

The Charif Family of Sydney, Australia dedicates OTS For You Devrei Torah this week in honor of David Katz's Birthday – ad me'ah v'esrim.

This week, thousands of Jews will spend Shabbat at the burial place of Sarah Imenu and Avraham Avinu as we read the parsha that narrates their deaths and foreshadows the legacy they leave. This custom is unique, as far as drawing large numbers of people to a biblical burial place at a certain time, year after year. It illustrates how Avraham and Sarah are still embraced as our national parents. This concept is spiritually powerful, and also contains important lessons about family, especially the way that leaders balance their communal roles with the roles and responsibilities they have in their own families.

This balance, a perennial challenge faced by community leaders throughout the ages, is what we today may call “work-life balance.” The many pressing needs of the community often compete with the needs of the leader’s own family – a spouse and children, who look to their partner or parent for love, care, and attention. It is true that a life of leadership can offer wonderful opportunities for one’s family not available to others. In such families, children often witness firsthand a rich and multifaceted Jewish experience, as they live within a home engaged in community needs, that takes stands on important issues, and is involved in education and chesed.

Yet this very life of purpose can sometimes come at a cost. The demands of public service can strain devotion to one’s own family – a tension faced by three of the most important figures in Jewish history: Avraham Avinu)our patriarch(, Moshe Rabbeinu)our teacher(, and David Hamelekh)the king(. Each of them responded to the challenge in a different way, allowing us to study and learn the consequences of their different strategies.

Let us begin with who is often seen as the prime example of total devotion to the Jewish people, even at the expense of family: Moshe Rabbeinu. The Midrash)Sifrei Bemidbar 99(informs us that to remain constantly in a state of readiness for prophecy, Moshe separated himself completely from his wife Tzipora. Although we are told the names of Moshe’s two sons, the Torah records not a single interaction between him and them after the exodus. In the Jewish tradition, the consequences are clear: According to one midrash)Bemidbar Rabbah 21:14(, Moshe’s sons distanced themselves from Torah study, and another)Mekhilta Derabbi Yishmael, Massekhta De’amalek 1(suggests that one even turned to idolatry. Apart from an ignominious part that they played in the story of Micha’s idol)see Judges 18:30 and Rashi ad loc.(, their descendants would recede into obscurity, not playing any major role in subsequent books of Tanakh.

Significantly, after Moshe dies at the close of the Torah, we are told: “No one knows his burial place”)34:6(. This is because a person’s gravesite is primarily meant to be a place for his or her own descendants to honor their ancestor’s memory. But since Moshe’s connection with his children was severed, the place of his burial was never preserved. Perhaps it was Moshe’s great responsibilities and dedication to the Jewish people that caused this chasm. However, as students of Moshe Rabbeinu, we need to learn from all sides of his personality: from his amazing virtues, such as his leadership, his dedication, and extreme selflessness, but also from the important things he sacrificed along the way that we might want to work to preserve ourselves.

In contrast to Moshe, our parsha presents the Jewish people's first patriarch, Avraham Avinu, as a model of balance. Avraham was famously renowned for his hospitality and devoted considerable resources to outreach and moral leadership. But in our parsha, he shows no less zealous attention to those closest to him, mourning and tending to Sarah's burial, making sure that Yitzchak finds a proper wife, and proactively providing for his other children (Genesis 25:6). It therefore comes as no surprise that Avraham's burial place – *Maarat Hamachpela* – is extremely well known and visited constantly by thousands of people of numerous faiths, most of whom count themselves among his descendants.

In our haftara, we are given a third model: King David. A visionary and passionate monarch, David wrote and compiled the book of Psalms, founded Israel's first ruling dynasty, and paved the way for the building of the Temple. Yet when it came to his family, David often found himself caught off-guard. A rebellion initiated by his charismatic son Avshalom temporarily succeeded in toppling his reign (II Samuel 15). And in our haftara, an aging David is initially unaware while his son Adoniya attempts a similar coup.

David, while not fully withdrawn like Moshe, tends to his family's needs in a reactive, rather than a proactive, way. He does not devote independent energy to engaging with his children and ensuring their futures like Avraham has done. Fittingly then, David's burial spot lies somewhere between the two extremes. While a modest site, known as "David's Tomb," exists outside the Old City of Jerusalem, it serves as a site of pilgrimage and visitation to only a few, and its authenticity is disputed by many, including important Jewish religious authorities.

A comparison of the three figures of Moshe, Avraham, and David thus teaches a valuable lesson. **The endurance of the legacy we leave – symbolized in this case by our burial sites – is proportional to the time and energy we devote not only to our communities, but to our families.** We must make space for the continuity of the values most precious to us through the people most precious to us – our spouses, children, and grandchildren – because it is through them that those values live on. Our prioritizing family is not, heaven forbid, an act of selfishness. On the contrary, by demonstrating the importance of this most basic building block of Jewish continuity, we can exemplify to the community at large what God desires from each and every one of us. In doing so, we will guarantee not only our own personal future, but that of our nation as a whole.]emphasis added[

* Ohr Torah Stone is 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@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

After 11 Years, Lt. Hadar Goldin Is Finally Laid to Rest: 'The Circle Is Closed'

By United with Israel Staff (November 11, 2025)

"Rest in peace, Hadar. The path of righteousness you left behind will continue to guide us, with your image engraved on the nation's heart."

Thousands gathered in Kfar Saba on Monday to accompany Lt. Hadar Goldin on his final journey, 4,120 days after his body was dragged into a Gaza tunnel during Operation Protective Edge in 2014.

Eleven years later, Israel finally laid to rest one of its most beloved sons — a symbol of courage, faith, and the unbreakable spirit of the Jewish nation.

At the funeral, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Eyal Zamir eulogized Goldin.

Speaking before a sea of mourners, Zamir said, "An entire nation stands today as one great formation of Hadar. We accompany him on his final path — a path he was worthy of long ago. The IDF never gave up for a moment. Hadar's return was made possible through the operational might of our forces. I pledge that we will continue to uphold this sacred duty."

Zamir continued, "The circle is closed. Operation Protective Edge has ended. Rest in peace, Hadar. The path of righteousness you left behind will continue to guide us, with your image engraved on the nation's heart."

Hadar's father, Prof. Simcha Goldin, spoke with quiet pride and deep pain. "Hadar was unique in his way — he touched people. This great crowd is proof of that. A person like him deserves to be remembered, and each of you should take something of Hadar with you from this day forward. If we live by his example, we will lift the people of Israel to a higher level."

He urged the nation to follow his son's legacy of moral strength and unity. "Walk in the way of righteousness," he said. "Do not hate one another. Hadar asked his mother to teach him to sew, and he embroidered by hand the words 'Strength and Humility.' He was a Jewish warrior."

His mother, Leah Goldin, recalled finding a note her son had written at age 16 to his Bnei Akiva youth group. "You wrote, 'We strive for greatness, but in reality we see darkness. We see a tribe that is broken and divided. What should we do? We must begin to work, to gather rays of light, and slowly reach our goal.'" Fighting back tears, she concluded simply, "You know that I love you. Rest in peace, my son."

Hadar's siblings — who for over a decade carried the family's mission to bring him home — spoke with passion and defiance. His brother Hemi turned toward Gaza in his eulogy: "To the vile creatures there, who call themselves Hamas — you are made of mud and filth. Look closely at this people and this family standing here today. The family of Israel is not to be messed with. We bring everyone home."

His sister Ayelet addressed the soldiers who took part in the mission to recover her brother's remains. "I don't know you, but I wish I could shake your hands and hug each one of you. You brought my brother back. Not Hamas — you. 'Thank you' feels too small; we need a new language for gratitude."

His brother Tzur spoke of Hamas's strategy of psychological warfare. "Hamas's kidnapping terror is aimed not only at soldiers but at our families, to break Israeli society from within — to force us to choose who is worth more. Our victory in this war will be when the title of Israeli society is clear: we never abandon one another."

As the ceremony drew to a close, the mourners joined in singing Hatikva, the Israeli national anthem. The familiar melody echoed across the cemetery, mingling sorrow with pride — a reminder of the hope that has sustained the Jewish people through generations, and of the sacrifice of those like Hadar Goldin who gave their lives so that Israel could live.

After 11 long years, Lt. Hadar Goldin was finally laid to rest in his homeland. His courage, faith, and love for his people will forever remain a beacon for Israel — a testament to the nation that never forgets its sons.

[Ed. note: The dedication of Israelis to returning the bodies of all who fall outside the country while defending our people illustrates the point that Rabbi Brander makes. Dedication to all members of our Israeli family is an important part of what keeps us Jews together with our past and our future.]

Chayei Sarah: Torah is Real Gemilas Chassadim

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5780

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5780-chayei-sarah/>

A Sojourner or a Resident?

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018

[ed. note: seven years ago, the attack in Pittsburgh shocked everyone. Today we would be horrified but not shocked, because this sort of attack has become much too common.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Significantly, in this closing, Rav Moshe speaks not just to the halakhic and moral obligations to be scrupulous in these matters, but also to our responsibility as citizens. It is not just one to live up to the laws of the land, but also to be model citizens for all, to show that a life of Torah translates into not only a moral life, but one that lives up to the ideals of what it means to be a citizen of the country that we are in and in which we have been recognized and treated as equals.

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

Shabbat Shalom!

[A jury found Robert Bowers, who killed 11 members of the synagogue October 27, 2018, guilty and recommended the death penalty in 2023, nearly five years later.]

From my archives

Paired Perspectives on the Parashah **

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

* National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. From Rabbi Angel:

The weekly Torah reading invites us not only to study sacred text but to listen to the many voices through which Torah has been understood across the generations. In this new column, we will explore the parashah through paired perspectives: the classical teachings of our Sages and the medieval exegetes alongside literary and historical insights from modern scholarship. Our goal is not to smooth over differences, but to deepen understanding by letting these approaches speak to one another. Each edition will center on one verse or theme and ask: How do different paths within Torah study open new ways to encounter the divine word?

I hope you enjoy this new column and that it opens new avenues of Torah study and reflection.

** Rabbi Angel wrote to tell me that he intends to write a column on alternate weeks, and I plan to run them in this space. Rabbi Angel has numerous articles on various topics relevant to Judaism and religion. His archives are available on the jewishideas.org web site, and he has much to teach us in his writings.

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Plaques, Memorials...and Us: Thoughts for Parashat Hayyei Sarah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Many years ago, when I was scholar-in-residence for an Orthodox congregation in the American Midwest, I learned something important from the synagogue's president. He told me that he was raised in a non-Orthodox home that had very little in the way of religious observance.

When he was college age, he attended a community-wide service for Yom HaAtsmauth that was held that year at the Orthodox synagogue. He noticed a plaque on the wall with the names of founders of the congregation — and he spotted the name of his maternal grandfather, a man he never knew since he had died long ago. His mother confirmed that her father had been a founder of the Orthodox synagogue but that she had left Orthodoxy as a teenager.

The grandfather's name on the plaque struck a chord with the young man. He started to learn more about his grandfather and decided to reconnect with his grandfather's ideas and ideals; he became religiously observant; joined the Orthodox synagogue; and went on to become president of the congregation his grandfather had helped to establish.

This man's life was transformed because of a name on a memorial plaque.

Memorial plaques and monuments are visible symbols of lives that have passed on to their eternal reward. But these inanimate memorials can impact deeply on us.

This week's Parasha tells of Abraham purchasing a burial place for Sarah. Although the Torah had previously recorded the deaths of many people, this is the first time we read of eulogy, mourning and creating a burial site. The Torah underscores the uniqueness of the occasion: we read the details of the burial transaction — the specific site, the negotiations, even the amount paid by Abraham.

Abraham understood that Sarah was the matriarch of a new people, which he and Sarah founded at the behest of God. He wanted to establish a permanent memorial so that future generations would draw inspiration and feel a personal connection with Sarah (and later with the other patriarchs and matriarchs buried at that site.)

In the summer of 1968, my wife and I traveled to Israel for the first time. We visited Hebron and stood at the gravesites of Sarah, Abraham and the other matriarchs and patriarchs of our people who are buried there. (When Hebron was under Jordanian rule, Jews weren't allowed into the burial room but had to stay outside the building. When Israel reclaimed Hebron in the war of June 1967, Jews were once again allowed into the burial site.) Standing at these tombs was an inexpressibly powerful experience. In some mysterious way, we felt a direct connection with the patriarchs and matriarchs who had died thousands of years ago.

This week's Parasha is entitled "*Hayyei Sarah*," the life of Sarah; yet it focuses on her death and burial. A Talmudic teaching has it that the righteous are called living even after they have died. Memorial plaques and gravestones testify to the lives of those who have passed away. But they also have the capacity to inspire the living, to evoke memories, to link the generations.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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The Two Lives of Sarah: Thoughts for Parashat Hayyei Sarah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

The Torah doesn't tell us too much about Sarah's life. She generally is described as a tag along with Abraham, who is the real hero. In almost all stories, Sarah is passive, even when Abraham twice tells her to pose as his sister rather than his

wife thereby endangering herself to save him. She grows into a childless elderly woman, with her handmaid Hagar giving birth to a son — Ishmael — for Abraham.

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

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

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

Answer: Abraham's eulogy was essentially given to himself. With Sarah's passing, he finally realized that Sarah wasn't simply a subservient participant in his life: she was in fact the vital force for his family's future. If Abraham was going to become a forefather of a great nation as God had promised, it was only through Sarah that this would come to pass. Abraham finally saw the "two lives" of Sarah — the compliant wife, and the princess (Sarah means princess) of his people. Without her, Abraham himself would have been an empty and forgotten old man.

Thank you Sarah.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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

Chayei Sora – Dear Mom and Dad

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shleima for Cholei Yisroel

Dear Mom and Dad,

I know you love me although we never met. I know so much about you because our family treasures the memory of your lives and the beautiful home which you built together. To the world you became other-worldly heroes. But in our family, you are so real, our beloved parents whom we hold most dear. Even today, three thousand years later, you are our parents. Even if someone doesn't know the name of his father or mother they are still connected. They will invariably identify as your child, as the son or daughter of Avraham and Sarah.

I remember, Dad, when you had to part from your nephew Lot, my cousin. It wasn't easy. Lot wanted to choose a different path. He wanted to experiment with the ways of Sodom. You couldn't have him in our house anymore. So, you told him that you must part ways. You said, "*Choose to the right and I'll go to the left; choose to the left and I'll go to the right.*" But quietly you told him, "*Although we are parting ways, I still love you. If you ever need me, you can call upon me. I will be*

glad to help you." And indeed, when the four mighty kings came and captured Lot you went out to wage war against them to rescue Lot.

I remember, Mom, when you were told that you would be blessed with a child, despite your old age. At first you were surprised. But then you worried. You worried about all the people who craved having a child and couldn't. They found solace in you, the righteous one who also did not have children. I recall how you davened and cried bitterly so that when you were blessed with a child so should they be. And they were. And you declared, *"All who hear of the good news will rejoice."* There would be no jealousy of your joy because they too were blessed with children. Only then was your happiness complete.

I remember, Dad, on the day that you found out that Sodom would be destroyed. Hashem told you, and you realized that only you, with your special relationship with Hashem, could possibly avert the decree. You didn't want us to know that you were davening and bargaining for them because you didn't want us to think they were in the right and mistakenly emulate them. But we found out. Wow, did you daven for them! Even though they always made fun of you and tried to establish a counterculture opposing all you represented.

I remember how for all those many years you were a bit of an oddity in the world. You believed in Hashem; the rest of the world did not. When Dad went to town to do business, people would always have what to say. Some were curious and listened to what Dad taught; but most were downright angry with him, and sometimes even threatened him. There was even a name coined to describe you, my dear parents. *"Ivri – On the other side."* Because it seemed like the whole world was standing against what you believed and taught, and you were on the other side. It was only years later that people began to respect you. But during those long years you strengthened each other. You opened your house in hospitality with such generosity. Your home was your staging ground to try to save people from the foolishness of idol worship that was so rampant in your days.

But perhaps, Dad, your greatest impact on our lives was the way you handled the Akeidah. There was literally nothing in your life that was not dedicated to Hashem. There was nothing that you wouldn't sacrifice for Him. So, when He chose to test you, He had to choose the only thing that would be a challenge to you. He asked you to bring your beloved son, Yitzchak, up on the altar for Him. Hashem never actually wanted you to kill Yitzchak. He only wanted to see if the one thing that was challenging to you was something that you were willing to do. In fact, the challenge was so real that when Mom heard about it, she died from shock. She knew your loyalty to Hashem and believed it possible. You personally heard the voice of Hashem, and you were loyal. You were not looking for fame and followers. So, you proceeded to the mountain upon which we would later build the Beis Hamikdash, the love palace between us and Hashem. On that day of the Akeidah, Dad, you taught us that nothing in the world is worth as much as integrity of relationship between us and Hashem.

Yes, Mom and Dad, I know you even though we never met. And I know that you love me. Every year we study the story of your lives and delve deeper in appreciation of your legacy. So, this year, as we study about the eulogies Dad said for Mom, and about both of your passing, I decided to write you a letter. I want you to know that never does a day go by without us invoking a memory or a merit from your lives. I look forward to the day of *Techiyas Hameisim*, the Resurrection when we will get to meet in person. But meanwhile I just wanted to say *"Thank You"* for the great role models and parents that you were and are to me. I hope that we will make you proud.

With best wishes,

Your loving son.

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 – Beyond Challenges

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

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

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

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

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

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

I believe that Rabbeinu Yonah is teaching us just how difficult great character is to achieve. Avrohom certainly understood that the land did not belong to him. This was not the challenge. The challenge was that life was not going as expected. Hashem had promised him the land of Israel, and even had him walk the entire land. This would normally lead a person to feel a certain sense of entitlement. Although consciously Avrohom knew he would have to wait, he still might have felt that he had certain rights. If Avrohom had fallen prey to such feelings, then he would have been distraught at having to pay

such a high price for what will be his in the end, anyway. Yet, the thought never occurred to Avrohom. As Rabbeinu Yonah says, "He did not think on the matter."

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

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Haye Sara – Wrestling a Piece of Canaan: The Burial of Sara

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

[23:1] Sara lived a hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years. The repetition of the word "years" was interpreted by the Midrash as alluding to special quality traits of Sara. However, the same formula is used regarding Avraham)25:7(and Ishmael)25:17(. It would have probably been used for Yitzhak as well, but since he lived to a hundred and eighty)35:28(, there are only two segments: a hundred years, and eighty years. When speaking of the life span of most people in Genesis, the Torah counts the ones separately but combines the tens and hundreds: Yaakov lived seven years, and hundred and forty years. It is interesting to note that biblical references to people's life span are almost exclusively in the Torah, of which 98% are in Genesis, and Sara is the only woman whose age is specified.

[23:2] Sara died in Hebron, and Avraham came to mourn her. The myth about Yitzhak being thirty-seven years old at the time of the Akedah has no textual proof, other than the juxtaposition of the stories about the Akedah, Rivka's birth, and Sara's death. It is illogical to assume that they occurred at the same time, since historical accounts are not a minute by minute coverage, and only salient events are mentioned. This verse serves to repudiate the claim that Sara died immediately after, and maybe as a result of, the Akedah. Avraham departed from Be'er Sheva and returned to Be'er Sheva, and there is no indication that Sara did not live with him back then. In this verse, however, she dies in Hebron and he comes from another, unspecified place, to mourn her. He is clearly not a resident of Hebron, while she apparently is, because if she were not, we would find a discussion of her dying away from home, as was the case with Rahel. One can only speculate why Sara and Abraham lived in different cities.

[23:3] Avraham rose from in front of his dead and spoke to the Hittites. The narrative shifts from mentioning Sara by name to referring to her as "Avraham's dead." This term repeats seven times in the negotiation between Avraham and the Hittites, and only after the deal is completed do we read that Avraham buried his wife Sara)23:19(. The shift is meant to signal Avraham's transition from the emotional state of mourning to a practical mode of negotiating. His goal was to purchase a burial site, as this would make him a permanent resident in the land, and he took advantage of the fact that he had a dead person to bury. The leverage he had did not stem from emotions but from a code of honor, which obligates one to take care of his dead. The possessive label shows that it was Avraham's responsibility to arrange a proper burial for his relatives, and it would be disrespectful of the Hittites not to cooperate. Avraham knew very well that a burial site means ownership of the land, which the Hittites were not willing to relinquish, and he spoke to their code of honor. Only after he secured the deal does the Torah return to speaking of Sara by name. Avraham says:

[23:4] I am a sojourner, a temporary resident among you, but I would like to purchase a burial stronghold to bury my dead. He states his intention to have קבר אחוז – from the root אחז – to grasp or hold onto. The Hittites understand his intention but refuse to grant him the status of permanent resident. They cannot ignore the code of honor, however, so they offer a compromise.

[23:6] Listen to us! Sir, you are a chieftain of God among us, you can bury your dead in the choicest of our graves. The words "listen to us" are followed by the trope sign Pasek, which indicates full stop and separation. The verb שמע – hear, or understand, repeats six times in the story, signaling that there was no mutual understanding. The Hittites

tell Avraham that he must stop and listen to them. He is highly regarded as a religious leader but not as a clan or a nation; he is a chieftain of God. They are willing to give him a gift, thus honoring his dead, without making him the full owner of the burial site. Avraham understands their intention and presses harder, not before bowing down:

][23:8-9[If you truly wish to bury my dead, who is lying in front of me, listen to me and plead with Ephron ben Zohar. Let him give me the cave of Machpela he owns, the one at the corner of his field, let him give it to me for the full price, as a burial stronghold for me in your midst. Avraham pulls no stops. He subtly casts doubt on their commitment to the code of honor. He makes all those present his delegates in pleading with Ephron. He specifies the name and exact location of the plot he would like to purchase, and he rejects the offer of a gift, saying that he will pay the full price. He also states that it will be his stronghold in their midst, making him a permanent resident.

Ephron, who was present in the meeting and could have been directly addressed by Avraham, tries to get out of the corner he was pushed into by saying **][23:11[: No sir, listen to me! I have already given you the field, as well as the cave which is in it, I have done so in front of my people.][You can now[bury your dead.** Ephron strongly rejects Avraham's offer. He says that the gift can be considered as already given, and it was done in front of the assembly, so it is official. He concludes by alluding that Avraham is stalling the burial to influence the Hittites and says that now nothing holds Avraham back from carrying out the burial.

Avraham retorts, again after bowing to the assembly **][23:13[: If you would only listen to me, I have already given the money for the field. Take it from me and let me bury my dead.** Avraham, the Hittites, and Ephron are struggling over the question whose voice will sound louder. Avraham insists: you say that you have already given the field? Well, I have already given the money! By telling Ephron to take the money, Avraham signals that he is the giver and Ephron the taker, and not the opposite as Ephron tried to argue.

Ephron, in a last and desperate attempt to thwart Avraham's clever offensive, cites an exorbitant price **][23:15[: Sir, listen to me. The land is worth four hundred silver coins, it is insignificant for both of us, bury your dead.** Note that Ephron does not ask for a price. He rather states the value of the field and says that it should not be an obstacle for his relationships with Avraham. In that manner, he would be able to avoid criticism by his kinsmen, whom he fears will blame him for succumbing to Avraham. He can argue in his defense that he never invited Avraham officially to buy the field. However, Avraham pays the full price, and the field becomes his. The Torah describes in detail the location and boundaries of the field, as befitting a legal transaction. The field is declared Avraham's burial stronghold, and now that the deal is done, the term "Avraham's dead" is gone, to be replaced by the more personal Sara, Avraham's wife. Thus, this twenty-verse long paragraph teaches us of Avraham's struggles to gain permanence in Canaan. It is also a marvelous example of the complexity and subtlety of the biblical narrative.

Shabbat Shalom.

* 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 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.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community: The Way Parashot Get Their Names

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation *

The names of the weekly parashot usually come from a word or two found in the first pasuk)verse(of the portion. Often,

this name gives us a hint about the main theme or story of the parsha.

For example:

Bereshit – “In the beginning” – the story of the creation of the world.

Noach – the story of Noach and the flood.

Lech Lecha – Avraham and Sarah’s journey.

And so it continues through most of the Torah.

But this week’s portion feels a bit ironic. Chayei Sarah means “*The Life of Sarah*,” yet it begins with Sarah’s death, followed by her burial and Yitzchak’s marriage. Sarah herself is barely mentioned and when she is, it’s only in reference to her passing.

This week’s question for ‘Around the Shabbat Table’: What is our life after death? What can we learn from this story about how life continues and the legacy we leave behind?

B’Ahavat Yisrael.

[Editor’s note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message?]

Shabbat Shalom.

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

Rav Kook Torah

Chayei Sarah: Princess of Her People and the Entire World

Universal Message

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

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

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

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

Abraham's Thought, Sarah's Torah

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

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

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

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

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

https://ravkooktorah.org/HAYEY_SA59.htm

Chayei Sarah – A Call from the Future (5776, 5783)

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

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

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

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

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

was still unmarried at the age of thirty-seven. Abraham had every reason to sit and grieve.

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

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

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

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

Two people in the Torah looked back, one explicitly, the other by implication. Noah, the most righteous man of his generation, ended his life by making wine and becoming drunk. The Torah does not say why, but we can guess. He had lost an entire world. While he and his family were safe on board the ark, everyone else – all his contemporaries – had drowned. It is not hard to imagine this righteous man overwhelmed by grief as he replayed in his mind all that had happened, wondering whether he might have done something to save more lives or avert the catastrophe.

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

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

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

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

age of ninety-two.

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

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

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

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE: Questions to Ponder

[1] How can building the future help with your grief over a past event?

[2] Can you think of examples of Jews who have followed Avraham’s lead, and built for the future despite the trauma of the past?

[3] What do you see as your own tefikid? What is God calling on you from the future to do?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/chayei-sarah/a-call-from-the-future/> 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 Devar.

What Was Isaac Doing in the Field?

By Mordechai Rubin *

In Parshat Chayei Sarah, as Abraham’s servant Eliezer returns with Rebecca to meet Isaac, we encounter a puzzling phrase:

*And Isaac went out lasuach in the field toward evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw — behold, camels were approaching.*¹

The Hebrew phrase “lasuach” לַשׁוּאֵחַ is uncommon, and its exact meaning is debated. What exactly was Isaac doing out in the field at that moment? Let’s explore some of the explanations found in various commentaries.

Prayer in the Field

This word can mean to “speak” or “converse.” What kind of conversation was it? Rashi² writes Isaac was praying, citing the Midrash³ which points to the verse, “*He pours out his complaint)sicho(before the L-rd,*”⁴ as evidence that the word connotes a conversation with G d.

Although not cited by Rashi, the Talmud asserts that Isaac was praying the afternoon Minchah service.⁵

Why the field? Soforno adds that he turned away from the road so that he could pray in peace without other travelers bothering him.⁶

Rabbi Abraham, the son of Maimonides, perhaps an early leader of Chassidei Mitzrayim, a group that promoted meditation and spiritual practices, adds that he was engaged in hitbodadot — solitary contemplation.⁷

A Walk in the Field

On a more pedestrian level, Ibn Ezra notes that lasuach is related to the word siach, meaning “plant” or “shrub.” Ibn Ezra explains that Isaac went out “*to walk among the trees)shrubs(.*”⁸

This links back to Genesis 2:5, which uses *siach hasadeh* to mean “*shrub of the field.*” According to Ibn Ezra, the verse is painting a simple scene: toward evening, Isaac took a leisurely stroll among the plants of the field. Brachot 26b.

Inspecting His Field

Rashi’s grandson, Rashbam, similarly interprets *lasuach basadeh* in a down-to-earth way. Rashbam writes that since Isaac had been away, he did not know the status of the work in his fields. As such, he went out “to plant trees and to inspect the work of his laborers.”⁹

Conversing with Companions

Nachmanides offers a slightly different explanation. First, he draws attention to the verse immediately prior: “*Isaac had just come from Be’er-Lahai-Roi.*”¹⁰ Nachmanides notes that Be’er-Lahai-Roi was the well where Hagar encountered an angel of G d and was therefore a sacred place. He suggests that Isaac frequented that site for prayer, since G d’s presence had been revealed there. Nachmanides thus agrees that Isaac was engaged in prayer, having gone to a known holy site to pray.

However, Nachmanides’ main interpretation of “*Isaac went out lasuach in the field*” is slightly different: after visiting Be’er-Lahai-Roi, Isaac was on his way home and stopped in a field. There, “*He went out toward evening to converse in the field with his friends and loved ones who were there.*”

In his view, lasuach is from the root sicha, meaning ordinary conversation. Isaac was relaxing at the day’s end, chatting with companions in the field. At that very moment, he “*lifted his eyes*” and saw the camels arriving.

Nachmanides thus manages to incorporate both dimensions: Isaac had a spiritual habit of prayer)especially at Be’er-Lahai-Roi, a fitting place to seek G d(, yet the Torah’s immediate context describes him engaged in everyday talk or a stroll – during which G d’s answer to those prayers)Rebecca(appeared.¹¹

Footnotes:

1. Genesis 24:63.
2. Rashi, Genesis 24:63.
3. Genesis Rabbah 60:14.
4. Psalms 102:1
5. Brachot 26b.
6. Soforno, Genesis 24:63.
7. Rabbi Abraham ben HaRambam, Genesis 24:63.
8. Ibn Ezra, 24:63.
9. Rashbam, Genesis 24:63.
10. Genesis 24:63=2.
11. Nachmanides, Genesis 24:62.

* Content editor and staff writer at Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/7105171/jewish/What-Was-Isaac-Doing-in-the-Field.htm

Chayei Sarah: A Personal G-d

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

G-d of Heaven and Earth

I will bind you by an oath to G-d, G-d of heaven and G-d of the earth, not to take a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites in whose midst I live.)Gen. 24:3(

Abraham calls G-d here the G-d of both heaven and earth, whereas when he later describes his original entry into the Land of Israel, he calls G-d only the G-d of heaven.

This is because typically, people are initially only prepared to accept the existence of an abstract, remote “G-d of heaven.” The idea of an intimate, personal “G-d of the earth,” who may encroach upon our private lives, can be much more intimidating. It was thanks to Abraham’s educational efforts that his disciples eventually became ready to accept the existence of a “G-d of the earth,” who is present within all aspects of reality and is concerned with our personal lives, as well.

Our challenge, too, is to ensure that G-d be just as much the “G-d of the earth” as He is the “G-d of heaven,” i.e., that we be just as conscious of Him when we engage in our physical pursuits as we are when we engage in explicitly spiritual activities.

* — from *Daily Wisdom* #3

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parashat Chayei Sarah from our *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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** Rabbi Friedman's posting did not arrive by my printing deadline, so I am running an archive submission.

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via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Next Chapter

One of the most striking features about Judaism in comparison with, say, Christianity or Islam, is that it is impossible to answer the question: Who is the central character of the drama of faith? In both of the other Abrahamic monotheisms the answer is obvious. In Judaism, it is anything but. Is it Abraham, the founder of the covenantal family? Is it Jacob, who gave his name Israel to our people and its land? Moses, the liberator and lawgiver? David, the greatest of Israel's kings? Solomon, the builder of the Temple and the author of its literature of wisdom? Isaiah, the poet laureate of hope? And among women there is a similar richness and diversity.

It is as if the birth of monotheism – the uncompromising unity of the creative, revelatory and redemptive forces at work in the universe – created space for the full diversity of the human condition to emerge. So Abraham, whose life draws to its close in this week's Parsha, is an individual rather than an archetype. Neither Isaac nor Jacob – nor anyone else for that matter – is quite like him. And what strikes us is the sheer serenity of the end of his life. In a series of vignettes, we see him, wise and forward-looking, taking care of the future, tying up the loose ends of a life of deferred promises.

First, he makes the first acquisition of a plot in the land he has been assured will one day belong to his descendants. Then, leaving nothing to chance, he arranges a wife for Isaac, the son he knows will be heir to the covenant.

Astonishingly, he remains full of vigour and takes a new wife, by whom he has six children. Then, to avoid any possible contest over succession or inheritance, he gives all six gifts and then sends them away before he dies. Finally we read of his demise, the most serene description of death in the Torah:

Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. Gen. 25:8

One is almost tempted to forget how much heartache he has suffered in his life: the wrenching separation from "his father's house," the conflicts and aggravations of his nephew Lot, the two occasions on which he has to leave the land because of famine, both of which cause him to fear for his life; the long drawn-out wait for a son, the conflict between Sarah and Hagar, and the double trial of having to send Ishmael away and seemingly almost to lose Isaac also.

Somehow we sense in Abraham the beauty and power of a faith that places its trust in God so totally that there is neither apprehension nor fear. Abraham is not without emotion. We sense it in his anguish at the displacement of Ishmael and his protest against the apparent injustice of the destruction of Sodom. But he places himself in God's hands. He does what is incumbent on him to do, and he trusts God to do what He says He will do. There is something sublime about his faith.

Yet the Torah – even in this week's Parsha, after the supreme trial of the Binding of Isaac – gives us a glimpse of the continuing challenge to his faith. Sarah has died. Abraham has nowhere to bury her. Time after time, God has promised him the land: as soon as he arrives in Canaan we read, "The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land ""(Gen. 12:7).

Then in the next chapter after he has separated from Lot, God says "Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you" (Gen. 13:17). And again two chapters later, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it" (Gen. 15:7).

And so on, seven times in all. Yet now Abraham owns not one square inch in which to bury his wife. This sets the scene for one of the most complex encounters in Bereishit, in which Abraham negotiates for the right to buy a field and a cave.

It is impossible in a brief space to do justice to the undertones of this fascinating exchange. Here is how it opens:

Then Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, "I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can

bury my dead." The Hittites replied to Abraham, "Hear us, my lord. You are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead." Genesis 23:3-6

Abraham signals his relative powerlessness. He may be wealthy. He has large flocks and herds. Yet he lacks the legal right to own land. He is "an alien and a stranger." The Hittites, with exquisite diplomacy, reply with apparent generosity but deflect his request. By all means, they say, bury your dead, but for that, you do not need to own land. We will allow you to bury her, but the land will remain ours. Even then they do not commit themselves. They use a double negative: "None of us will refuse . . ." It is the beginning of an elaborate minuet. Abraham, with a politeness to equal theirs, refuses to be sidetracked:

Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you." Genesis 23:7-9

He takes their vague commitment and gives it sharp definition. If you agree that I may bury my dead, then you must agree that I should be able to buy the land in which to do so. And if you say no one will refuse me, then surely you can have no objection to persuading the man who owns the field I wish to buy.

Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. "No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the

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cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.”

Again, an elaborate show of generosity that is nothing of the kind. Three times Ephron said, “I give it to you,” yet he did not mean it, and Abraham knew he did not mean it.

Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land and he said to Ephron in their hearing, “Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there.” Ephron answered Abraham, “Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between me and you? Bury your dead.”

Far from giving the field away, Ephron is insisting on a vastly inflated price, while seeming to dismiss it as a mere trifle: “What is that between me and you?” Abraham immediately pays the price, and the field is finally his.

What we see in this brief but beautifully nuanced passage is the sheer vulnerability of Abraham. For all that the local townsmen seem to pay him deference, he is entirely at their mercy. He has to use all his negotiating skill, and in the end he must pay a large sum for a small piece of land. It all seems an impossibly long way from the vision God has painted for him of the entire country one day becoming a home for his descendants. Yet Abraham is content. The next chapter begins with the words:

Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed him in all things. Genesis 24:1

That is the faith of an Abraham. The man promised as many children as the stars of the sky has one child to continue the covenant. The man promised the land “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates”[1] has acquired one field and a tomb. But that is enough. The journey has begun. Abraham knows “It is not for you to complete the task.” He can die content.

One phrase shines through the negotiation with the Hittites. They acknowledge Abraham, the alien and stranger, as “a prince of God in our midst.” The contrast with Lot could not be greater. Recall that Lot had abandoned his distinctiveness. He had made his home in Sodom. His daughters had married local men. He “sat in the gate”[2] of the town implying that he had become one of the elders or judges. Yet when he resisted the people who were intent on abusing his visitors, they said, “This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge!” (Gen. 19:9).

Lot, who assimilated, was scorned. Abraham, who fought and prayed for his neighbours but maintained his distance and difference, was respected. So it was then. So it is now. Non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. Non-Jews disrespect Jews who disrespect Judaism.

So, at the end of his life, we see Abraham, dignified, satisfied, serene. There are many types of hero in Judaism, but few as majestic as the man who first heard the call of God and began the journey we still continue.

[1] Gen. 15:18

[2] Genesis 19:1

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

What Makes Laban Run?

“And Rebecca had a brother, and his name was Laban, and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well.” (Genesis 24:29)

Laban is undoubtedly one of the most perplexing characters in the Torah. On the one hand, the Pesach Haggada focuses on Laban as someone even more wicked than Pharaoh himself:

Pharaoh merely attempted to murder the male children, whereas Laban sought to uproot everything – the entire nation.

Apparently, our Sages are saying that our greatest enemies are not necessarily the Pharaohs who threw the male children into the Nile, or the Nimrods who threw Abraham into the fiery furnace for believing in one God. Rather, oftentimes it is those much closer to us, sometimes even ‘members of the family’ who, in their own devious and assimilating ways, present a far greater danger to our survival than our sworn enemies.

Yet despite the Haggada’s corroboration of the wickedness of Laban, he nevertheless serves as a model for many of our marriage customs. The very words with which he blesses his sister Rebecca, just prior to her departure to meet her betrothed Isaac, is what every groom says to his bride prior to the wedding ceremony, when he places the veil over the bride’s head in the ceremony known as ‘the badeken’ (Yiddish for ‘a covering’):

“Our sister, be thou the mother of myriads of ten thousands, and let thy seed inherit the gate of those that hate them.” (Gen. 24:60)

Moreover, Laban’s argument – when he deceived Jacob by giving him in marriage his elder daughter, Leah, rather than the preferred and betrothed younger daughter, Rachel (for whose hand the ardent suitor had worked for seven years) – that “in our locality we do not give the younger before the older” (Gen. 29:26) stands as legitimate custom amongst traditional Jewish families to marry off the

Likutei Divrei Torah

older daughter before the younger. Why would the Torah honor Laban by having his actual words serve as the introduction at such a significant moment in every couple’s life, and by maintaining a custom which he, in effect, initiated in an act of deception? How do we reconcile the contemptible Laban of the Haggada with the model Laban for marriage ceremonies?

Perhaps the answer can be found in a fascinating statement of R. Haim b. Attar, in his commentary Ohr Hachayim. He directs us to an insight of the Sages that when the Torah refers to righteous people, their ‘names’ (the word ‘shem’ means both name and fame) precede them. In other words, with regard to the righteous, the verse will read, ‘and his name was...so and so,’ as we find in the case of Boaz, the judge of Israel, destined to redeem Ruth: ‘...a man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz’ (Ruth 2:1). But when it comes to the wicked, their individual given name precedes the word ‘name’, as we find regarding Nabal – where the Torah writes, “Nabal was his name...” (I Sam. 25:25). Given this distinction made by the Sages, one would have expected that Laban, the anti-hero of the Haggada, certainly deserves a negative assignation similar to that of Nabal. However, the Bible in this portion introduces him: “And Rebecca has a brother, and his name is Laban” – the word ‘name’ preceding the individual given name, as in the case of the righteous.

Ohr Hachayim explains the Torah’s adulatory means of introducing Laban in terms of a significant moral responsibility he demonstrated. We have to remember that in Laban’s world – and to this day in much of the Middle East – strangers do not speak to young women in the street. It wasn’t simply a question of decorum, but a principle that held the social structure together. But if the rule was broken and a young woman did speak to a man in the street, her brother would make it his business to find out what was going on. And if she entered the house wearing jewelry – a nose ring, or a bracelet – the family would immediately grow suspicious that something illicit had transpired, or was about to. If we follow the words in the verse closely, we note that “Ushmo Lavan...”, the usual appellation of a righteous person, is followed by the phrase describing Laban’s running outside, which was certainly a noble action on his part. After all, he was protecting his sister’s honor and chastity.

The following verse continues with the narrative and describes that when Laban

...saw the earrings and bracelets upon his sister’s hands and when he heard the words of Rebecca, ...he said [to the stranger]: “Come in,

blessed be God, why do you stand outside...?" (Gen. 24:30, 31)

Ohr Hachayim explains that here the truer and perhaps even more natural colors of Laban's character are coming to the fore. Only after he 'sniffs' gold, silver, and diamonds does he extend his hospitality, his calculating mind figuring out how he can benefit from the entire affair. Nonetheless, even though Laban is devious, his instinctive response regarding Rebecca is nonetheless recognized as positive. He was first and foremost concerned about the honor of his sister.

I'd like to suggest an expansion of Ohr Hachayim as to why the Torah includes Laban with the righteous. An overview of Laban's behavior in the Torah reveals that not only does he 'protect' his sister in our portion, but that whenever he relates to his immediate family we note a thematic consistency of sensitivity and concern – albeit at the expense of others. This may well be why our Sages eternalized Laban's words of blessing to his sister; although Laban has a mean, corrupt streak in general, when it comes to his own family, his dedication and devotion know no limitations. We see this demonstrated in relation to Rebecca, but the same is true when he consciously tricks the love-struck, hard-working Jacob into marrying Leah.

For Laban, everything is permissible for the sake of bringing his less attractive, weak-eyed, elder daughter under the marriage canopy. Later, when Jacob wants to return to the land of his forefathers, the major stumbling block in his path is his father-in-law. From the perspective of Laban, Jacob's decision to return to his father's house is bringing unnecessary danger and financial insecurity upon his daughters and grandchildren. It is a foolhardy journey. After all, Esau may well be lying in wait to ambush the brother who took the blessings. Moreover, there is no family business back there in Canaan, no partnership that Jacob can join. Here in Laban's house he genuinely believes Jacob has everything he could possibly need: a good job, a good income, a nice house, even respect from the local council. Hence, Laban will stop at nothing to prevent Jacob's departure.

And this is precisely the problem. From one point of view, his dedication to family is honorable and praiseworthy. In fact, we emulate him in our marriage ceremonies. But Laban's narrow vision is a source of grave danger to Jewish destiny. With Laban at the helm, we will never return to Israel, never turn toward God and listen to His words. Instead, we'll happily sit with our paychecks and allow Jewish destiny to be per-verted and sidetracked. We'll be assimilated, transformed, converted from the world of ladders

connecting heaven and earth with ascending and descending angels to the world of Wall Street and investment, cattle and livestock.

Laban is a runner. From the very first moment we're introduced to him, we see him on the move, running. But we must remember that his destination is not the same as ours, that he is moving on a totally different track. For us to join him would mean forsaking our God-given destiny.

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

Yes, Sarah Is in the Parsha

The opening verses in this week's Torah portion (Genesis 23:1-25:18) inform us of the death of Sarah: "The span of Sarah's life came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. She died in Kiryat Arba—now Chevron—in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and weep for her." (Verses 1 and 2)

A bit later we are told "... And then Avraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Chevron—in the land of Canaan." (Verse 19)

After that, there is no mention of Sarah in the entire parsha! How can I possibly dedicate my weekly column, which I have entitled "Person in the Parsha," to a woman whose name appears only after her death, and who plays no active role in this week's narrative?

But wait! She is indeed mentioned much later in the story, when her son Isaac takes a bride, Rebecca. There we learn, "... Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebecca as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death." (Chapter 24, verse 67)

Nevertheless, how can I justify choosing Sarah as a "person in the parsha" when she plays no "living" role in the entire episode? Yes, she is mentioned in a praiseworthy manner, but does she remain a heroine after her death?

I insist that she does, but to prove it, I will have to return to the opening verses above, where we learn of her grief-stricken husband's hesped and bechi, "eulogy" and "weeping".

To demonstrate the "presence" of the deceased person even after that person's death, I must first define the terms "eulogy"/hesped and "shedding tears"/bechi and then distinguish between them. For this purpose, I will share with you three comments upon the opening verses of our parsha by three great mid-nineteenth century commentators, all three contemporaries with each other but with three different approaches to the text. They are Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, Rabbi

Likutei Divrei Torah

Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, zecher tzaddikim l'vracha, of blessed memory.

Let me begin with Rav Hirsch, Rabbi of Frankfurt, Germany, who wrote his commentary on the Pentateuch/Chumash in German, but which I study in a Hebrew translation.

Rav Hirsch is often very creative in his interpretations, sometimes daringly so.

He comments on the phrase "and Avraham came to eulogize and weep." "Came from where?", he asks.

This is a question that many much earlier commentators ask as well, and they generally answer that Avraham had come from Beersheba to Chevron, since, as we read in the final chapter of last week's parsha, he had returned to Beersheba directly from the akedah, from the "binding of Isaac." It was in Beersheba that he learned of Sarah's demise in Chevron, and so he "came" there to bury her.

Rav Hirsch strongly rejects this approach. He insists, as was his wont, that the word *vayavo*/"and he came" often means "he withdrew", or "he secluded himself". Thus, Avraham withdrew from the public that sought to comfort him so that he refused to address an audience. Instead, his "eulogy" was his own inner response to his personal tragedy, and he secluded himself in a place where he could tearfully and emotionally grieve for his life-partner. The "eulogy" was not a performance before an audience. Rather, it was his self-expression of torment. His "tears" were shed in the presence of the One Above alone. Only in his own private space could he "shed tears" and "eulogize" his beloved, and only afterwards could he "go public" and negotiate for a proper burial place for Sarah.

Rav Mecklenburg takes an entirely different approach. He reports that in his experience, the mourner first "sheds tears" and only afterwards presents a "eulogy". First, there is a deeply emotional and wholly personal reaction, tears of pain and heartfelt grief. Then, the mourner composes himself somewhat and formulates a verbal description of the person he lost so that others can know who the deceased was in his or her lifetime.

But Avraham reverses the sequence: first, the relatively calm public assessment of his wife's life of great account, and only then, the bitter tears of personal loss and bereavement. "Why this reversal?", asks the author of HaKsav V'HaKabbalah, the rabbi of the town of Koenigsburg.

His answer is a profoundly religious one. Avraham, he correctly assumes, faithfully believed that “the righteous in their death are greater than in their lifetimes.” (Chulin 7b) His priority was to convey Sarah’s life of piety, compassion, and achievement to a wide audience. That was and remains the purpose of a eulogy in Jewish tradition. It is an assertion of the valuable life that the deceased lived and not primarily an expression of grief.

Only after the eulogy accomplished its mission did Avraham allow himself a tear or two, and perhaps, suggests Rav Mecklenburg, that is why the letter “kaf” in the word “to weep for her”/v’livkosa is reduced in size in the Torah scroll.

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, the Dean of Volozhin, the “mother of all yeshivos”, and author of Haamek Davar, has yet another approach to our concern. He sees the “tears” as the mourner’s expression of his or her own reaction to the loss of a loved one, and the “eulogy” as a kind of biography of the deceased for the benefit of those who did not know much about the person who just died.

Avraham did not “lose” Sarah when she passed away. She left behind a son, a heritage, a model of a way of life. His tears were thus secondary to the educational message that he felt he needed to convey and that he knew that Sarah would have wanted him to continue to propagate.

Sarah, although no longer among the living, is nevertheless a “person in this parsha”. She plays a vital role even after her demise. She is still “present” for Avraham, for his very wide and diverse audience, and for her beloved son Isaac, who attributes the joy he experiences with his new wife to the fact that she reminds him of his mother!

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

A Rare Biblical Hespedit for a Rare Biblical Personality

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

Likutei Divrei Torah

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.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

From Eliezer we learn, God helps those who live their entire life in order to help others. Our sages teach, Gadol Sichatam Shel Avdei Avot Betorotam Shel Banim – the everyday mundane conversation of the servants of the founders of our faith, is of greater relevance to us than the formal instruction that follows.

They are referring to Eliezer, sent by Avraham Avinu to Mesopotamia, to find a wife for Yitzchak. This is featured in the longest chapter of the whole book of Bereishit – Chapter 24. In 67 long verses, we are told about Eliezer's thoughts, his plans for the test at the well side, how he executed it. It's all very expansive.

However, later on in the Torah, when we are given the specific do's and don'ts of Jewish law, then everything is very concise. So what we find here is that from a person who is not a member of our faith, we learn so much about our lives...

Now if, let's say, in a classroom at school, the children will be performing a play about this week's Parasha, and a kid arrives home and he announces to his family – I'm going to be Eliezer! I think that everybody will be really chuffed, because that certainly would be the key role.

Interestingly however, let's have a look at the number of times in which people's names are mentioned in the Parasha. Avraham's name is mentioned on no less than 37 occasions; Yitzchak's – 13; Rivkah – 12, Sarah – 9; Ephron – 9; Bethuel – 4; Lavan – 3; and Eliezer – 0. His name actually doesn't appear. He is the main character but he either referred to as Ha'eved – the servant or Ha'ish – the man. I think that this presents to us a very profound message. We have internalised his values, we have taken on his message, he is there as that role model in that longest chapter but it's not his name that counts, it's what he taught the world that matters.

'Their names might not be in neon lights, but they are our most outstanding characters' In similar fashion, the great heroes and heroines of this world are mainly those men and women who behind the scenes are great family people, who contribute to their community. Their

names might not be in neon lights, but they are our most outstanding characters.

They are the Eliezer's and his name says it all. Eliezer – my God is my help. The almighty certainly helps those, who live an entire life in order to help others.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

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.

Likutei Divrei Torah

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 rebbeztin, 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.

Likutei Divrei Torah

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. *[Excerpted]*

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

The Land: Avraham's Greatest Test

Avraham's hardest test was NOT Akeidat Yitzchak! According to Rabbeinu Yona, the horrific test of sacrificing his son, the Binding of Isaac, was not the most difficult, but rather the acquisition of a burial plot for Sarah.

What could be more difficult than the command to sacrifice his son? Sarah tragically dies, according to our Sages due to the news of the Akeida, which so shocked her that she passed away. Avraham now has to find a place to bury his wife, but he needs land to bury her and he doesn't own any land. This is Avraham Avinu who was promised by Hashem time and time again the land, but he doesn't have anywhere to bury Sarah.

He has to grovel, pay exorbitant prices, and degrade himself to purchase the burial plot. This is the greatness of Avraham. Even though the entire land was promised to Avraham, he practically owned nothing yet, and how much patience and faith he needed in Hashem's divine command that in the end the entire land would belong to him. This was the test.

What a message for us today. Look at the trials and tribulations of the Jewish people. All we have wanted to do since October 7 is defend ourselves against this horrific attack, ensure it doesn't ever happen again, return tens of thousands of our citizens to their homes, and bring back our hostages. Yet, there are those around the world saying that we deserve nothing; if anyone has a claim to this land it is the Jewish people. We must have faith like Avraham Avinu – and if we stick to this path with conviction and patience, everything will pan out as it is supposed to.

**Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam**

Like Rivka by the Well

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

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

Since when is giving water to camels or other animals such a major priority that it becomes the only and final criteria for choosing the future mother of Klal Yisrael?! The whole story and the test that Eliezer set up is crying out for an explanation. The Beis HaLevi opens up the entire story and sheds incredible and sensible light, to the point that after becoming aware of his approach, it's hard to look at this episode any other way.

Eliezer was setting her up. It was almost evening. People are collecting their water to bring home for the rest of the night. There is not much time to operate. He is going to ask a girl who has just finished filling her jug for a drink.

If she refuses, then she lacks empathy. Once she gives him then a dilemma wakes up. What does she do with the rest of the water in the jug after he has drunk from it? The concept of PAGAM predates Louis Pasteur. If she brings that jug home, then she is reckless and irresponsible.

If she just spills it out then she is insulting him directly. She can't just spill out the jug on the ground because that would be wasteful. So, what could she do? She brilliantly announces before that she is ready to give water to all of his ten camels, and make that gigantic effort, so that she could spill the remaining water into the trough and continuously fill up the jug, thereby cleaning it out and fulfilling all her obligations while not offending him even a little. The entire business with the camels was never about the camels. It was all just a major coverup so as to be able to give that stranger a drink of water and simultaneously preserve his honor.

I have a theory that people make their own Shidduch! Somebody impresses someone else and draws some kind of positive attention about themselves, even in unguarded moments and that makes the whole difference.

One of my oldest sons was home briefly from Eretz Yisrael for Pesach. He was heading back. There was a local Torah scholar that had been learning with my son since they met up in high school. I asked this Rebbe to keep his eye open please, for my son. I figured he knows and appreciates him. It didn't take long before

we got a call. He would give a ride once a week to an elderly Rebbetzin that was teaching PreIA in Queens for more than 50 years. He presented the idea of my son and asked if she knew any good girls. She began to fount about her assistant, that there is no one like her. How good can a PreIA assistant be!?

When I called her, she related the following story. She came to Yeshiva one day ready to go to a wedding in Brooklyn that night. She brought along her jewelry case. At the end of the day the jewelry case was nowhere to be found. It contained both expensive jewelry and many sentimental pieces. They checked everywhere but to no avail. Her and her assistant concluded that it must have been swept into the garbage and when they went to check, the Yeshiva garbage had been taken out and taken away by the sanitation department already. She went to the wedding broken-hearted.

Her assistant did not give up. She found out where in Staten Island the garbage from that location is brought. She went there and started rummaging through mountains of garbage bags until she found bags from that Yeshiva. After much digging, she found the jewelry bag and returned it. The Morah told me that she cannot imagine anybody in the universe going to that extent.

Then she told me that this was not the first call she got inquiring about her. I called my son back from Eretz Yisrael and they got married. What an amazing mother she is, caring so much and sparing no effort, like Rivka by the well.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Words – Scarce and Sacred

What is the value of a word? This is a most appropriate question on the first Sabbath after our national elections took place. Elections to the presidency are a wondrous thing to behold and a glory and tribute to a free people. Yet when the elections were done our countrymen across the land heaved a blessed sigh of relief, for many of us believed that the campaigns for the election did not do much to enhance the glory. Many of us suspected that they were largely an exercise in futility. The real issues, such as they were, could have been discussed much more quickly and conclusively. Most of the words that followed were not meant for clarification as much as for tools in the projection of "images." There has been talk recently of the possible devaluation of the dollar. Much more thought should have been given to a more serious danger: the devaluation of the word. I believe the nation could have survived the election of either candidate. But we may properly doubt whether the nation could have survived another month

Likutei Divrei Torah

of the endless, repetitive, meaningless torrents of words without seriously compromising its sanity.

What then is the Jewish attitude to words? First let us understand that Israel's greatness can benefit the world only through words. We have never been a numerous people. We have never, except in the most restricted sense, been militarily significant. We have usually been diplomatically weak. Therefore, our message to the world has been transmitted only through the power of the word. Ever since our father Isaac said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau" (Genesis 27:22), our tradition has maintained that "Yaakov kofo bafeh" – that the strength and the might of Israel lies in its mouth, in its words. The message of Torah is referred to as "the words of the covenant" (Exodus 34:28). What the Western world calls the Ten Commandments our tradition refers to as "aseret hadibrot" – the "ten words." And when Jews speak of a spiritual gem, they say in Hebrew, a "devar Torah," "a word of Torah," or, in Yiddish, "a gut vort" – "a good word." The word is the medium of spiritual enlightenment, the medium for Israel's message.

But words, in our conception, have an even more universal function. Words are the mortar that binds man with his fellow-men. Without the extensive use of words, human beings would never group themselves in a society. Without words there can be no communication, no study or schools, no society or social life, no civilization or business or commerce. Neither can there be any family life. When husband and wife are "not on speaking terms," that is a real danger sign for domestic health.

Onkelos, the great Aramaic translator of the Bible, had that in mind when he offered an unusual translation of a familiar verse. When the Bible relates that God breathed the breath of life into Adam, it says, "Vayehi ha'adam lenefesh haya," which we usually translate as, "And the man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). Onkelos, however, translates it, "And it (the breath of God) became in man a speaking spirit." The living soul of man is his speaking spirit. The uniqueness of man, his intellect, would be muted and silent were it not for his ability to use words and thus articulate his rational ideas and the feelings of his heart. A word has a life and biography and character and soul of its own. And the word can give life to or take life from the human being. A word can restore and a word can kill. One word can give a man the reputation for wisdom, one word can mark him in the eyes of his peers as a fool. The speaking spirit has a profound effect upon the living soul.

Because of this, Judaism regards words as more than mere verbal units, as more than just another form of communication. In Judaism words are – or should be – holy! When the Torah commands a man that he not break his word, it says, “Lo ya’hel devaro” (Numbers 30:3). Our rabbis noted (Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 2:1) that ya’hel is an unusual word and so they explained it as “Lo ya’aseh devarav ħullin” – he shall not profane his word, not desecrate it. Only that which is holy can be made unholy. Only that which is sacred can be desecrated. Man’s words therefore must be holy.

If our word is to be holy, we must keep it, honor it, and revere it. Indeed, the sanctity of a man’s word is a measure of the confidence he deserves, whether in business or within the family. If he keeps his word holy, people will confide in him and trust him. If he desecrates his word, if he makes it ħullin, then he does not deserve the confidence of his wife, his partners, and his fellow-men. Many, many years after Ĥazal, Oliver Wendell Holmes was to put it this way: “Life and language are alike sacred...homicide and verbicide are alike forbidden.”

It follows therefrom that we must be careful and discriminating, not casual, in whatever we say. When the Israelites conquered the pagan Midianites and destroyed them, the Torah bade the Israelites not to use the Midianites’ vessels until they had been purified and cleansed, so that even the atmosphere or memory of paganism and idolatry would be banished from Israel’s midst. The Torah puts it this way: “Kol davar – any vessel – that is normally used over an open flame must be purified by passing it through fire” (Numbers 31:23). Our rabbis of the Talmud (Shabbat 58b) asked this interesting question: What of a metal megaphone, an instrument devised for magnifying the voice? Can that contract impurities, and if so how can it be purified? Yes, answer our rabbis, it can become impure, and must also be purified by passing through fire. They played cleverly on the phrase “kol davar.” Not only, they said, “kol davar,” but “kol dibbur” – not only every “object,” but every “word” must be passed through fire. Therefore, a megaphone, used to magnify words, is included in the laws of the impurities of Midianite vessels.

Our rabbis meant, I believe, to refer more than just to a megaphone. They meant “kol dibbur” – every word spoken by human lips must be passed through the fire of the soul before it is spoken to the world at large. Every word must be passed through the flame of integrity, of sincerity, of consideration for others, and for the effect that the word may have on them. A word untethered in the furnace of integrity and wisdom is like a table unplanned and

unfiled: its splinters and rough edges can injure far more than the table can serve. A word not passed through the fire of consciousness is the master and not the servant of him who speaks it.

Furthermore, we must be not only discriminating in our words, but sparse as well. Our words must be few and scarce. In all of Judaism, the principle of kedusha is protected from the danger of over-familiarity. When man has too much free access to an object or a place, he gradually loses his respect and awe for it. That is why the Torah reader uses a silver pointer. It is not used for decorative purposes. It is employed because of the halakha that “Sacred texts make the hands impure” (Yadayim 3:2) – that we are forbidden to touch the inner part of the Torah scroll. The reason for this is a profound insight of the Torah into human nature: if we are permitted to touch it freely and often, we will lose our reverence for it. The less we are permitted to contact it, the greater our respect for it. Similarly, the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem was preserved in its sanctity by our tradition when it forbade any man other than the high priest to enter its sacred precincts; and even he might not do so except for one time during the year – on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

And so it is with words. The more we use them, the less they mean. When our rabbis investigated the first portion of Genesis, they discovered that the world was created by God “with ten ‘words’” (Avot 5:1). Only ten words to create an entire universe! And yet our rabbis were not satisfied. And so they asked, “Could not the world have been created with only one word?” Why waste nine precious words? Indeed, for with regard to words, quantity is in inverse relationship to quality. If there are so many words that you cannot count them, then no individual word counts for very much.

In our sidra we read, “And Abraham came to mourn for Sara and livkota, to weep for her (Genesis 23:2). If you read the portion carefully, you will notice something strange about the word livkota. The letter kaf is smaller than normal. It is a kaf ketana, a miniature kaf. Why is that?

The commentator known as the Ba’al haTurim explains that Abraham did not weep or speak too much. Of course Abraham said something. There had to be some weeping and mourning and eulogizing. He had to give some articulate expression to the grief that welled up in his breast. For a man who cannot speak out his grief is like a man who cannot sweat – the poison remains within. It can be psychologically dangerous not to mourn. But it must not be overdone. Abraham realized that too many words are an escape from the

Likutei Divrei Torah

confrontation with reality. He realized that by using too many words he would dissipate the real feelings he contained within himself. He wanted something to remain, something deliciously private, painfully mysterious, some residue of memory and love and affection for his beloved Sara that he did not want to share with the rest of the world. And so the kaf ketana – indicating that he knew how to limit the outpouring of his words.

Oh how we moderns need this lesson of making our words sacred by making them scarce! How we need that lesson of the kaf ketana. How we must learn to pass our words through the flame of wisdom. Modern life seems centered so much about words. We are dominated by a communications industry. We veer constantly between meetings and discussions, symposia and forums, lectures and sermons, public relations and propaganda. We are hounded continually by radio and television, telephone and telegraph. We are the “talkiest” civilization in all of history. How desperately we need that kaf ketana!

It’s about time that all of us, and especially Jewish agencies, learned that we ought not to be dominated by the public relations machines. It’s about time that we learned to respect the kaf ketana. Moses himself was a stammerer and a stutterer, and so he spoke few words – but whatever he did speak was engraved in letters of fire upon the consciousness of the people. David told us, “Commune with your hearts upon your beds and be silent” (Psalms 4:5). Shammai reminded us, “Speak little, but do much” (Avot 1:15). Other rabbis told us that “The way to wisdom is through silence” (Avot 1:17). The Besht, the great Ba’al Shem Tov, meant the same thing in a comment upon God’s command to Noah, “You shall make a light for the ark.” The Besht pointed out that the Hebrew word for ark – teiva – means not only “ark” but also “word.” Make each word brilliant, alive, shining, sparkling, and illuminating. Use it to enlighten, not to confuse. All of these individuals knew the secret of Abraham, that of the kaf ketana.

Words are important and powerful; therefore they are sacred. Because they are sacred, they must be issued with great, extreme caution. They must be tempered in the fire of one’s character. And because they are holy and purified in fire, they must be few, choice, and scarce. When we will have learned this, we will have learned a great deal indeed. So that ultimately, we will be able to say to God, with David (Psalms 65:2), “Almighty God, our very silence is praise unto You.”

1. November 12, 1960

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Thoughts on the Parasha with Rav Moshe Taragin
Chayei Sara | **Ger VeToshav: Unfinished Belonging**
Rav Moshe Taragin

Bereishit is more than a record of the past. The lives of our ancestors set patterns that continue to shape Jewish history. Their experiences became models that repeat across generations. This concept — *ma'aseh avot siman la-banim* — teaches that the stories of our founders are not only moral lessons but blueprints for our national journey.

One such historical blueprint unfolds as Avraham arrives in Chevron seeking a burial site for Sara. He introduces himself with a striking phrase: "*Ger vetoshav anokhi imakhem*" — a stranger and a resident among you. He had lived for many years in the Land of Israel, often near Chevron — yet he still calls himself a stranger. In part, he remains an outsider, having never purchased land and relying on the goodwill of others who hosted him. In part, this phrase reflects his humility. Despite his reputation and growing influence, Avraham assumes no privilege. He signals that he will negotiate in good faith and offer full payment for the field.

Patience as an Act of Faith

However, Avraham's use of the word *ger* carries deeper historical meaning. When Hashem forged His covenant with Avraham, He foretold that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land and ultimately enslaved in Egypt. That prophecy of estrangement begins even as Avraham lives in the Land of Israel. Though promised the land by divine decree, he finds himself a guest within it — living among others who still hold rightful claim. Even when finally given the chance to acquire property, it is limited to a small burial plot — obtained only after long, painful negotiations.

This moment tests Avraham's *emuna*: promised the land by Hashem, he now confronts the reality that others still hold rightful claim to it. Avraham does not force his claim or demand immediate ownership. He respects the current residents and accepts the slow pace of divine promises. His faith is deep enough to remain calm when the fulfillment of *nevu'a* seems delayed. He trusts that the land will one day belong to his descendants and that Hashem's word will unfold in its proper time.

He also understood his mission: to model moral conduct in a land bereft of it. He had witnessed societies that degraded women and watched as Sedom, steeped in corruption, was destroyed. Surrounded by moral decay, Avraham

sought to model compassion and kindness. He welcomed guests, rescued his nephew, refused spoils of war, and preferred peace treaties to coercion. To act unjustly would betray his moral mission. Confident in divine prophecy and committed to moral integrity, he does not seize the land but acquires it honorably, paying full price.

The Long View

Avraham's struggle — to wait faithfully for divine promises while acting morally in a corrupt world — echoes in our generation. We too see our return to this land as rooted in a divine promise and as part of a redemptive process foretold to our ancestors.

I was recently interviewed by a journalist from the United States who asked why some people react so strongly against Messianists. "Isn't messianism," he wondered, "synonymous with aggression toward others who live in the land?"

I explained quietly that it is precisely my messianic belief — my confidence in the fulfillment of Hashem's promise — that allows me to respect the rights of others who also live here. Because I am certain that history's end is guided by Hashem, I can afford to take the long view. I labor to settle our homeland, yet I do so with the quiet confidence that its destiny is already written. That certainty enables me to act with patience and restraint. The term messianic should not carry a pejorative tone; it reflects faith in ancient prophecies and trust in their unfolding within history.

Sadly, many of our neighbors refuse to live peacefully alongside us, making it harder to safeguard the rights of those who do seek coexistence. Our first responsibility is to protect our people. Yet conceptually, there is no contradiction between messianic belief and respect for the rights of others. Like Avraham, we are striving to become *toshavim* and to settle the land promised to us. Yet for now, we remain in an intermediate *ger*-like state — blessed with sovereignty but not yet complete settlement.

Avraham's story becomes our own. We walk in his shadow — longing for completion, yet living with faith and restraint amid what remains unfinished.

Strangers

The tension Avraham lived — between promise and incompleteness — shapes Jewish life, both in Israel and throughout the Diaspora. The Rov, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, saw this same duality — the longing to be *toshavim* while remaining *gerim* — as the essence of Jewish identity in exile. We yearn to contribute to the societies around us and to be accepted as full citizens. Still, we remain distinct — guarding the inner core of our identity even as we engage with the world. *Ger ve-toshav* thus describes not only our unfinished settlement in the Land of Israel but also the enduring tension of Jewish life in foreign lands.

No matter how deeply we integrate or how loyal we are to our host countries, history reminds us — often painfully — that we are still seen as different. Shattered Illusions

History has often reminded us of this truth in harsh ways. We once believed we had become *toshavim*, only to discover how fragile that acceptance could be. The first example was in medieval Spain. Jews had lived there for nearly seven centuries, deeply woven into Spanish culture and instrumental in its ascent as a global power. Yet a wave of violence in the late 14th century shattered that fragile acceptance and was followed, a century later, by expulsion. Centuries of belonging vanished in an instant, reminding us that we were always just *gerim* in the land of Spain.

Four and a half centuries later, we were reminded once again of our *ger* status. For nearly two hundred years, Jews had helped build modern Europe — advancing science, culture, and liberty. Yet Hitler revived Europe's oldest hatreds and turned them into a movement of annihilation. After generations of striving to become full *toshavim*, European Jews were cruelly shown that in the eyes of their hosts, they were still *gerim*.

A Fragile Haven

Today, American Jewry may be confronting its own *ger ve-toshav* moment. Over the last century and a half, Jews in the United States have lived with a freedom and opportunity unmatched in our history.

New York City in particular has long been intertwined with the Jewish experience in America. It is home to the largest Jewish population outside

Israel, and the city itself has been profoundly shaped by Jewish life, culture, and values.

The election of a New York City mayor who expresses hostility toward Israel is a troubling development, reflecting a possible shift in America's political climate. No one can know where this will lead. Despite our deep longing for every Jew to return to Israel, we never wish hardship upon our brothers and sisters as a means of prompting aliya. We hope that Jewish life in America remains stable and secure, so that Jews may choose to come home out of faith and love, not fear or compulsion.

This latest election marks a *ger ve-toshav* moment for American Jewry — a stark and sobering reminder that even in the safest of lands, we remain *gerim*.

History's lessons return, reminding us that the tension between *ger* and *toshav* still defines our story. Until our people are gathered and the land is restored, we remain wanderers yearning for wholeness.

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** ryfrand@torah.org ravfrand@torah.org

date: Nov 12, 2025, 11:53 PM

Parshas Chayei Sarah

Efron Loses A Vov From His Name

These *divrei Torah* were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion:

#1356 – The Kallah Whose Bridal Veil Was So Thick The Witnesses Couldn't See Who She Was. Good Shabbos

Parshas Chayei Sarah begins with the selling of a burial plot to Avraham Avinu. Avraham goes to the Bnei Cheis and wants to buy what is today known as the Ma'aras Hamachpeila. The owner of this property was Efron the Chiti. Efron initially claimed that he was willing to give the field to Avraham for free. Avraham said that he wants to pay for it. Efron responded, "What is the matter of a four hundred silver-shekel field between you and me?" This was apparently a very high price for the field that he initially offered to give to Avraham for free. The narration ends by stating that Avraham paid the price mentioned by Efron – four hundred silver shekels, with the type of coins that were readily exchanged (*over la'socher*).

If we carefully look at this *pasuk* (where Efron suddenly raises the price of the plot of land from zero to four hundred silver shekels), we notice that the word Efron is first spelled "*malei*" (full – including the letter *vov*). Then when we look at the words "Avraham paid to Efron," the name Efron is spelled "*chaser*" (lacking – without the *vov*). Sometimes the Torah does spell the same word with a *vov* and also without a *vov*. However, it is exceedingly rare for the Torah to use two different spellings of the same word in one *pasuk*!

The *Medrash Rabbah* comments on this anomaly and references a *pasuk* in *Mishlei*: "One overeager for wealth has an evil eye; he does not know what may befall him." (*Mishlei* 28:22). The *Medrash* calls Efron a man who became all excited by the possibility of making a ton of money, however, he failed to realize that this windfall would cause something to be deducted from him (i.e., the extra *vov* in his name).

Now it is quite likely that Efron does not care how his name is spelled in the Torah. Obviously, this is not supposed to be a lesson for Efron, but rather for us. So, what is the lesson? The Alter from Kelm once said a *schmooze*, which he preceded by relating an incident that actually occurred. (It is alleged that the incident happened with Rav Yonoson Eibshitz, although there is some controversy about whether it happened to him or to another famous personage.)

The incident involved a debate that took place between the "wise men of the world" and this famous Jewish personage. The wise men were of the opinion that with enough training, an animal could be trained to be just like a human being and could change its entire nature. The Rabbi denied the claim, insisting that an animal remains an animal, and no matter how intelligent the animal is, a dog remains a dog and a horse remains a horse.

The wise men of the world took a cat and trained it to walk on its hind legs and carry a tray with its paws. Ultimately, they trained the cat to become a proficient waiter. They arranged a large banquet in which the cat would

perform like a waiter and serve all the guests. The Rabbi was invited to the banquet to defend his position that an animal's nature cannot be changed. He took his snuff container with him, as he typically did. While he wasn't looking, a little mouse jumped into his snuff container.

They were at this banquet. The cat was doing its thing – carrying a little tray of wine and serving the people. The wise men said to the Rabbi, "Nu! You see!" The Rabbi pondered how to respond and while doing so, he took out his snuff container to smell a whiff of the aroma. Suddenly, the mouse jumped out and started running around. As soon as the cat saw the mouse running, the cat did what cats do. The cat dropped the tray and ran after the mouse to catch it. The Rabbi told the wise men, "My point has been proven." How did the Alter from Kelm apply this story? He said as follows: Efron can dress up as the nicest and most respectable fellow in the world. He can talk the talk of generosity and magnanimity. "For sure, I will give you this land for free." However, this is all an act. That was not the real Efron. Efron was characterized – as are many people – by the attribute mentioned in the previously cited *pasuk* in *Mishlei*: "*nivhal la'hon*" (overeager for wealth). When he realized that he could make money, the act ended and the true Efron came out. The true Efron was a person who lusted money. That is why the same *pasuk* also contains the "full Efron" (with the *vov*), the civilized and generous person, to emphasize that he is not the real Efron. Ironically, Efron is not the only character in this week's parsha who we see was afflicted by lust for money. There is another such fellow in this parsha who suffered from the same disease.

There is an old debate of "nurture versus nature." What dominates the development of a human personality, the way the person was raised or the way the person was born? However, sometimes we see that it is neither nurture nor nature. Parshas Chayei Sarah contains siblings – a brother and a sister – who are diametrically different in their personalities. Lavan Ha'arami wants to wipe out Klal Yisrael. His sister is our Matriarch, Rivka. How do we define the difference between these two siblings, who are polar opposites of one another?

The central point of Lavan's nature was also about this lust for money. When Eliezer first came, Lavan ran towards him. Rashi explains why he was running: "When he saw the ten loaded camels that Eliezer brought, he assumed this fellow must be rich!" Later on, when Yaakov came, Lavan also ran out to him. He figured, if even the slave from this household was so rich, how much wealthier must be the offspring! Rashi explains that Lavan hugged Yaakov, because when he didn't see any jewelry on his person, he thought it might be hidden in his chest or even his mouth! In short, when Lavan sensed wealth, that became his entire interest and focus. That is why he eventually cheated Yaakov Avinu left and right for all the years of Yaakov's servitude to him.

The Ari z"l writes that Lavan has three *gilgulim* (soul transmigrations) in this world, alluded to by the three letters of his name (Lamed Beis Nun). The three *gilgulim* were Lavan, Bilaam, and Naval Hakarmeli. Bilaam had this exact same lust for money. When Balak wanted to hire him, his response was "If Balak gives me his full warehouse of silver and gold..." (*Bamidbar* 22:18). The third iteration of Lavan was the infamous Naval Hakarmeli, about whom the Tanach comments "Naval was his name and naval (despicable) was he." (*Shmuel I* 25:25) He too, as described there, was extremely tight with his money. The common denominator that runs through Lavan, through Bilaam, and through Naval was this lust for money, with which so many people are afflicted.

Lavan was a taker. Rivka was the polar opposite. Rivka was a giver. Even though a case could be made that she shouldn't have given water to Eliezer (and his camels), she does so graciously. Eliezer was standing by the well. He could have easily taken a drink for himself. It was *chutzpah* on his part to ask for this young girl to draw the water for him. But that was Rivka.

This was a tale of two siblings: One was the ultimate taker and one was the ultimate giver. Lavan's *neshama* ends up as Bilaam and then Naval Hakarmeli. Rivka becomes Rivka Imeinu.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Edited 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

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Parshas Chayei Sarah
Rav Pam on Chumash
Priorities in Shidduchim

[The most popular and widely anticipated of Rav Pam's many shiurim was his annual Parashas Chayei Sarah shmues. He would offer his profound and yet highly practical insights into the topic of shidduchim, marriage and shalom bayis. The following is based on various points of his shmuesen from 1982-1989.]

The major topic of this parashah is the lengthy description of the shidduch between Yitzchak and Rivkah. In the spirit of the famous rule of Maaseh Avos Siman Li'Banim it is important to carefully analyze this chapter and glean the practical lessons the Torah conveys on how to accomplish life's most important task.

The very first step in shidduchim is tefillah — heartfelt prayer. This is clearly illustrated in Avraham's instructions to Eliezer, when he appealed to "HASHEM, God of Heaven, Who took me from the house of my father and from the land of my birth," to bless Eliezer's mission with success by "sending His angel before you" (24:7).

Eliezer, too, began his mission with tefillah, saying, "HASHEM, God of my master Avraham, may You arrange it for me this day that You do kindness with my master, Avraham" (24:12). Thus, we see that one must devote great effort to tefillah and daven to Hashem, the Mezavag Zivugim, to send one's true helpmate.

In the search for a shidduch the first factor to consider is: What am I looking for in a wife? Avraham knew exactly what he required in a shidduch for Yitzchak. He sought a girl who was outstanding in the character trait of chesed — which Avraham himself exemplified.

She would help Yitzchak perpetuate Avraham's lifework of spreading the midah of loving-kindness and thereby bringing people to belief in a Creator.

Avraham was a famous personality as well as a very rich man. He could have sought a girl who had great wealth or yichus, but these matters meant nothing to him. His only priorities were midos tovos and ahavas chesed.

We can learn from Avraham that when a person knows what he is looking for, the search for a shidduch is much easier. Once Eliezer realized that Rivkah had the qualifications Avraham required, he quickly concluded the match. Why? What was the rush for Yitzchak to marry the first girl? Why didn't Eliezer "shop around" to see if he could find "something better"? The answer is that Eliezer knew what Avraham wanted, and if, through Hashem's kindness, he found the shidduch quickly, there was no purpose in searching for "something better." Someone who "shops around" for a shidduch, with an attitude of "Let's see what's available," usually doesn't know what he is looking for. Often there is no end to the "shopping." All that happens is that months and years pass without his finding a shidduch. He is always hesitant to come to a decision because he may find "something better."

Rav Pam would often quote his mother, Rebbetzin Rochel Leah Pam A"H who would say that one reason a chassan and kallah fast on their wedding day is to atone for the unnecessary pain and embarrassment they caused by rejecting other boys and girls due to their unrealistic expectations.

The prerequisite for finding one's shidduch is that one must know clearly what his purpose and goals in life are. If these are clear to him, then he knows what to look for in a wife. A wife is an Ezer Kinegdo, a helpmate. How can someone look for a helpmate if he doesn't know what he needs help with? This lack of focus causes many problems. It accounts for the many dates necessary before a bachur reaches a decision. It accounts for long six to eight-hour dates which are unnecessary and improper. Many parents

complain about the impropriety of a bachur bringing a girl home from a date well past midnight. This is very far from the Darchei Hatzinuis guidelines of modesty. Furthermore, the girl's parents often wait up for her to return and then review the date with her. The girl herself will need time to unwind from the lengthy outing. How will she be able to function at her job the next day after a nearly sleepless night? The Gemara (Taanis 24a) says, "As long as a kallah's eyes are beautiful, the rest of her body need not be checked." Kli Yakar (Bereishis 24:14) questions the validity of this generalization; there are many young women with beautiful eyes who have flaws elsewhere. He explains that Chazal are not referring to physical features, but to an Ayin Tov, a "good eye" with which she looks at others. If she always sees the inherent goodness of others, seeking out their positive attributes rather than harping on their faults, this shows that she possesses beautiful midos. This is a clear, indisputable sign that she has the Kedushas Hanefesh to be a true eishes Chayil who will become an Atarah Li'Baila, a crown to her husband. There are some people who have difficulty finding a shidduch because their priorities are well off the mark. They search for a match that will be "the talk of the town" and earn them the respect and envy of their friends, causing them to place great importance on famous lineage or great wealth. Others seek beauty that will impress others. Such behavior is akin to Achashveirosh's conduct; he desired to show off to the people and officials her beauty (Esther 1:11).

Another common misconception is that one should seek a girl who is extremely intelligent so that her husband can discuss lofty philosophical Torah concepts with her. This is a gross error. A bachur looking for this should go to the beis midrash and search for a chavrusa.

While the highest priority in a shidduch is the girl herself, the characters of the prospective match's family cannot be overlooked. At times it is the parents who can cause a breach in the couple's shalom bayis. Therefore it is important to ascertain what kind of people the girl's parents are. Sometimes the in-laws are kapdanim (contentious) who must always have things their way. This can certainly present difficulties to the couple. In-laws who are flexible, easy going, understanding, and desirous of making others comfortable will certainly be an asset to the couple.

In the search for a shidduch for Yitzchak, Eliezer was not concerned about Rivkah's family. He had ironclad instructions from Avraham forbidding him to return my son to there (24:6). Thus he did not have to fear the influence of Lavan on Rivkah after her marriage. In our times, when the world is so "small" — travel and communications are cheaper and easier than ever before — a bachur must take the girl's family into consideration when contemplating a shidduch. As noted above, the effects of in-laws on a marriage can be very great — for good or bad.

Rema (in his glosses to Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 240:25) rules that a son is not obligated to break off the shidduch if his father disapproves of his choice of a wife. Yet as a practical matter, he should try his utmost to choose a wife of whom his parents will approve. It is a very good sign when everyone is happy with a shidduch.

It is important to remember that after the chasunah, the courtship must continue. The husband must treat his wife with the utmost courtesy and respect. The most common cause for the breakdown of shalom bayis is a lack of proper speech. Words can work wonders . . . and words can work horrors. During the dating process, both sides invest great care and forethought into what they say and how they say it. After the date, they review in their minds the conversations that took place and make a careful analysis: "What did she mean when she said that?" or "What did he have in mind with that remark?" One realizes that a poor impression made by a wrong word or inference might negatively affect the outcome of the shidduch. Yet, unfortunately, often this Zehiras Hadibur (care in speech) does not continue after the wedding. Speaking without thinking causes great breaches in shalom bayis.

In every marriage there are times of disagreement, but a wise spouse will avoid the temptation to get in the last word or emerge victorious from the argument. One will simply cause an escalation of the argument by responding to every comment or criticism.

The Chofetz Chaim (Hilchos Lashon Hara 8:10) writes, “Many people err in this matter; they tell their wives about everything that happened to them in their interaction with others at work or in the beis midrash. Aside from the sin of lashon hara, this will eventually lead to machlokes, because the wife will defend her husband and react in kind, and encourage him to defend himself from those bothering him. Additionally, when she sees how her husband is treated with disrespect, she too will lose her inherent esteem for him.”

Thus, while open communication between husband and wife is crucial to a successful marriage, this does not justify the violation of many serious Torah commandments. By studying the laws of lashon hara, one will know what is and what is not permitted to be shared with one’s spouse.

At times, a wife loses respect for her husband when she sees that he takes lightly his obligations to learn Torah or daven with a minyan. R’ Baruch Epstein (author of Torah Temimah and the nephew of R’ Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, the Netziv) writes in Mekor Baruch that his uncle was once approached by a fabulously wealthy man who complained that, despite being respected and feared by his employees and business associates, his wife treated him with contempt. The Netziv asked about his daily schedule, and the man admitted that due to his many business concerns he rarely had time to study Torah.

The Netziv understood that although the man was powerful in the business sector and considered master in many circles, his wife looked down at him because she perceived him as a slave to his own ambitions and desire for still more money. The Netziv advised the man to set aside time for Torah study, assuring him that it would have a beneficial effect on his marriage — and so it was. Once his wife perceived that he had a purpose in life other than amassing money, her respect for him returned and their shalom bayis improved.

Shalom bayis requires lifelong effort. This is clearly illustrated by the Torah’s description of Sarah’s reaction to the news that she would have a son: And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have withered will I again have delicate skin? And my husband is old!” (Bereishis 18:12). Hashem told Avraham that she had laughed with incredulity that at her advanced age she would bear a child. Rashi says that in order to preserve harmony between Avraham and Sarah, Hashem changed the uncomplimentary reference from Avraham (my husband is old) to Sarah (I am old).

Could it be that Avraham, the epitome of chesed, would take offense at Sarah’s remark that he was old? He would be the first to agree that at age 99 he was not a young man; would her remark truly be upsetting to him? The answer must be that anything which could cause even a slight breach in shalom bayis must be avoided at all costs.

The third berachah of the Sheva Berachos mentions that the purpose of marriage is to be a Binyan Adei Ad, a building for eternity. How can marriage be for eternity if man’s life span on earth is so short? The explanation may be that a couple’s shidduch affects all future generations to come. Building a bayis ne’eman b’Yisrael is the very purpose of marriage. It will lead to the greatest blessing in life, which is to produce righteous children who will themselves perpetuate the eternity of Klal Yisrael. Thus, in choosing a mate for life, one must consider the everlasting nature of marriage. With fervent prayer, a person will be zocheh to find his true zivug with whom he will build his own bayis ne’eman b’Yisrael. ---

from: Yeshiva Torah Vodaath <ryg@torahvodaath.org> date: Nov 11, 2025, 5:38 PM subject: Rav Pam's Famous Parshas Chayei Sarah Shiurim We are pleased to present you with Rav Pam's famous shiurim on Parshas Chayei Sara relating to Shidduchim [in Yiddish]. Click here --

<https://tinyurl.com/Rav-Pam-Chayei-Sarah-Audio> --- for the link to several shiurim on Parshas Chayei Sara. We thank R' Shmuel Glassman who compiled the shiurim into an mp3 format for easier accessibility. May we all be zoche to yeshuos in shidduchim and hatzlacha with all! Rabbi Yitzchok Gottdiener Executive Director ryg@torahvodaath.org 718-941-8000x210 --

YUTORAH IN PRINT • Chayei Sarah 5786

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid, with AI assistance, from a YUTorah shiur presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on November 13, 2014)

In this week’s Parshah, in the process of purchasing Ma’aras Hamachpeila, Avraham tells Ephron, Nasati kesef ha-sadeh kach mi-meni. And he used the word kicha in reference to kesef, and the Gemara at the beginning of Kidushin learns from here that isha nikneis be-shlosha drachim—be- kesef, shtar, u-via. When a chosson gives a kallah a ring of certain monetary value, that’s a valid kiddushin. How do we learn that? One pasuk says, Ki yikach ish isha, and another says, Nasati kesef ha-sadeh, kach mimeni. And, therefore, we see that kicha is done with kesef. But on a simple pshat level, this connection seems very strange. Does this mean a groom buys his wife with money, like any other commodity?

The meforshim note that this pasuk is about more than just your typical purchase. Why did Avraham pay for Ma’aras Hamachpeila? He didn’t have to. Ephron said you can have it for free, and Bnei Cheis agreed. He insisted on buying it because he wanted Ma’aras Hamachpeila to be a place where the Jews would have a permanent connection to our eternal yerusha in Eretz Yisrael. And he knew that if you receive something for free, it’s not as meaningful. Your connection to something you don’t invest in is weak. You create a strong connection that lasts forever when you pay or sacrifice for something. That’s why ha-isha nikneis be- kesef—a wife is acquired with money. Otherwise, why wouldn’t a chosson marry his kallah for free just because they love each other? This halachah teaches that a chosson must start his marriage by investing. He must offer something. Just like Avraham’s purchase of Ma’aras Hamachpeila, the payment reminds us what makes this relationship meaningful and valuable. In marriage, to make it special, one must sacrifice and give. Additionally, Rav Hirsch points out that Avraham wasn’t just buying a future achuzah of Am Yisrael. There was also another aspect. He was buying a proper place to bury Sarah. And he showed his matrimonial dedication by burying her in one of the most special, holiest places on earth. As the medrash says, Ma’aras Hamachpeila was a makom kevuras Adam and Chava, and it had other unique aspects—such as being the portal to Gan Eiden. He didn’t compromise for second best. Avraham’s dedication to Sarah was not diminished in the slightest, even after she assed away. And maybe that’s the lesson of ki yikach ish isha. Avraham was committed to making any sacrifice to honor Sarah properly—even a costly one. And perhaps that’s also why the chosson grants the kallah something of value to begin their marriage. Kesef kiddushin demonstrates the husband’s commitment to respecting his wife by properly providing all her needs. He must be a giver and not just a taker. And that’s why Avraham said to Ephron, Nasati kesef ha-sadeh kach mimeni.

The Brisker Rav, at the back of Chiddushei Ha- Griz al ha-Rambam, discusses the conceptual nature of kiddushei kesef — kesef shel hana’ah. In a typical kinyan kesef, when buying a field, it’s enough to simply give money. However, when it comes to kidushei isha, that’s insufficient. It must be kesef shel hana’ah. In addition to the formal monetary transfer, the chosson must give his kalah hana’ah. The chosson must provide something to improve his kalah’s life. He must supply her needs— something that’ll benefit her. And ultimately, that’s the best way to start a marriage. It’s not like a typical monetary transaction That’s why the husband initiates his marriage by referencing Nasati kesef ha-sadeh kach mimeni. Avraham took the money out of his pocket, and he did everything necessary to respect Sarah and her needs— even after she was in the Olam ha-Emes. There was no quid pro quo, and he wasn’t getting anything from her in exchange. He just wanted to take care of Sarah in the best possible way. And therefore, we start off our marriage on the right foot by emulating Avraham Avinu.

from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>

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Chayei Sarah: **Is it Acceptable to Test Your Dates?**

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

he test that Eliezer devised to discover a proper match for Isaac must be considered one of the most successful creative strategies of all history (Gen.ch. 24). Charged by the first founding father of the Jewish people, Abraham, with finding a match for the second, Yitzchak, Eliezer prays to God for a “chesed” that his mission will be successful based on the following plan: Having travelled to the area of Abraham’s family, he will wait by the wells that provide water to the locals; when the women come out to draw water, he will approach one and ask to be given water; one who not only provides water for him, but also offers to give water to his camels, will show herself to be the appropriate match. Apparently granted the Divine assistance he requested, Eliezer’s plan introduces him to Rebecca, an exquisitely qualified candidate who becomes one of the matriarchs of the Jewish people and thus a key builder of the moral and spiritual foundation of the Chosen People.

So, does this mean that Eliezer has found a successful model for the generations? Should contemporary Jews put their dates through tests to see if they are the match they are looking for?

There is a literature regarding the overall question of putting people through tests in other contexts. For example, the issue of testing employees was taken up by R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg in his *Responsa Seridei Eish* (I, OC, 57:2). He considered the question of an employer who wanted to ascertain whether or not his worker was honest, and therefore left a large sum of money in his presence, and waited to see if he would steal it. Rabbi Weinberg cited in this regard a Talmudic passage (Bava Metzia 75b) that seems to explicitly forbid such a tactic, due to the biblical injunction of “do not place this stumbling block in front of the blind”, or *lifnei iver*, which the Rabbis explain has a spiritual dimension that prohibits enabling or causing others to regress. More specifically, the Talmud applies this to one who would lend money without witnesses, because, as Rashi explains, the borrower will immediately realize that he can later deny having taken the loan and keep the money. Apparently, even the enabling of the plotting of the theft, regardless of whether or not it actually takes place, constitutes a violation of this prohibition.

However, one complicating source is another Talmudic passage (Kiddushin 32a), which also discusses the *lifnei iver* injunction. In this one, testing is the context. Rav Huna wanted to confirm that his son was properly respectful. To find out, he tore up silk in front of him to gauge his reaction. The Talmud poses the question: what if indeed he had responded disrespectfully? Wouldn't that have placed Rav Huna in violation of *lifnei iver*? We are then told that he had preemptively waived his honor in this case, and thus removed the possibility of a transgression on the part of either of them. The *Tosafot*, however, are unsatisfied with this answer. Wouldn't it be bad enough that the son would think that he was doing something wrong, which, the Rabbis teach, also stains the soul? They suggest in response that the son must have been informed in advance that the father had waived his honor. If so, one wonders just how effective an experiment this could have been (see *Resp. Chatam Sofer*, YD, 229).

Notably, the *Ritva* asks the same question and answers differently. He suggests that the *lifnei iver* concern here is minor compared to the benefits, which would have been to identify weaknesses in the son's development and thereby correct them. R. Shmuel Vosner (*Resp. Shevet HaLevi*, II,101:5) found this approach unsatisfactory, as even if one were to minimize the *lifnei iver* factor, the concern at hand is the violation of parental respect, which is being transgressed in spirit, even if it had been technically accounted for. However, there is another issue at stake besides violating the prohibition of disrespecting one's parents. As the passage explicitly mentions, there was the possibility that the son would become enraged. Losing one's temper is quite possibly considered its own prohibition, and is compared to idolatry (see *Hil. Deot* 2:3). At a minimum, it is a character flaw. Are we to assume that the *lifnei Iver* prohibition does not cover shortcomings of character?

The *Chida* (*Birkei Yosef* YD 240:13) poses this question and offers that perhaps Rav Huna was was confident that his son would not get angry enough to reach a level deserving of such condemnation.

The *lifnei iver* question is particularly relevant given that many authorities felt that there is a prohibition connected with character deficiencies. Indeed, Maimonides rules that one is obligated to repent for such shortcomings. As such, it must be considered whether *lifnei iver* applies to character violations as well.

In this vein, R. Yitzchak Zilberstein (*Chashukei Chemed to Kiddushin*) considers the question of a business owner who wishes to see if applicants for a position will treat customers with patience. To accomplish this, he set up a test. He invited twenty applicants to come for an interview but intentionally kept them waiting for about two hours. During that time, he planted a confederate who was capable of acting like a “*nudnik*” with the express goal of annoying them, while the boss himself observed through a hidden camera to see how each would react.

As a result of this ordeal, most of the applicants indeed lost their composure, with one exception. That worthy individual was granted the job on the spot. All the other applicants reacted angrily, asserting that he had arrived last. At that point, the boss emerged and explained that while they thought the interview had not yet begun, it had been taking place all along. The main qualification for the job was patience, and they had all exposed themselves as unworthy. Was it permissible for him to provoke anger in all of these applicants in order to test their qualifications?

The *Resp. Torah L'Shemah* (#370) discusses the general question of whether somebody who causes another to get angry is in violation of *lifnei iver*, and adduces a proof from Rav Huna that it is not. Notably, the questioner seems to be discussing asking about something less than this - one who is not intentionally angering the other, but pursuing other purposes with his behavior; he remarks that a prohibition here would make normal daily interaction impossible. It would seem that intentional provocation would be in a different category.

Rabbi Eliezer Papo, author of the *Pela Yoetz*, asserts in a few places in his writings (*Orot Eilim*, *Eiruv* 18b, *Ya'aloze Chasidim* 15) that there is a prohibition of *lifnei iver* regarding character traits, while Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, who was famous for founding the Mussar movement that focused on character development, is quoted by R. Chaim Kanievsky as saying that the prohibition does not apply to character traits (*Derekh Tzlechah*, page 369). That may seem surprising coming from one who directed so much attention in this area. One suggestion is that the character traits are already present in the individual, and all the other person can do is provoke a manifestation of what is there, not cause them to exist. However, this is difficult to say, particularly regarding anger, as the Talmud does convey condemnation specifically of expressions of rage.

Beyond the technicalities, there is the simple golden rule. It is a fair assumption that no one would appreciate being put in a position where their worst attributes are being provoked to emerge.

However, perhaps it should be maintained that Eliezer's actions were in a different category and could indeed be a model for contemporary daters. The above discussions involved trying to test for negative qualities and behaviors. In that context, fears of *lifnei iver*, entrapment, and unfair treatment of others are present. Eliezer, by contrast, was looking for unusual positive behavior. Those who did not pass the test were none the wiser and suffered no embarrassment or negative consequences. Can it be said, then, that Eliezer's plan was impeccable and to be recommended without hesitation?

Not necessarily. It may come as a surprise to learn that the Rabbis seem to maintain a somewhat critical attitude towards Eliezer's methods, as expressed in at least two Talmudic statements. (It should be noted, however, that some statements in rabbinic literature are more positively inclined toward Eliezer's plan; see, for example, *Kallah Rabati*, end of ch. 3). In one (*Ta'anit* 4a; see also *Bereishit Rabbah* 60:3), Eliezer is described as one who asked “improperly” (*bikesh she-lo ke-hogen*), and was nonetheless answered “properly”.

More striking is a second passage (*Chullin* 95b) which appears to allege a halakhic violation. In discussing the prohibition of *neichush* (Lev. 19:26.), which might loosely be translated as superstitious behavior, the Talmud

asserts, in the name of Rav, the following standard: “Any ‘nachash’ that is not as Eliezer the servant of Avraham ... is not nachash”. In other words, it seems that Eliezer’s behavior serves as the baseline to determine when one is in violation of this Biblical prohibition.

This assertion is shocking. The nature of the objection to superstition is that it is irrational, and involves living one’s life based on meaningless signs. No one would maintain that one cannot make decisions based on rational, relevant factors; that is the essence of intelligent living. In the case of Eliezer, he was seeking, most appropriately, a paragon of kindness, of chesed. Accordingly, he devised a rational test to identify one who would act in a manner displaying chesed. How could that plan be considered in any way connected to the transgression of neichush?

This issue underlies a primary debate. Maimonides (Hilkhot Avodat Kohavim 11:4.), in delineating the prohibition, gives several examples of proscribed practice, and closes with the words, “...like Eliezer the servant of Avraham – and so too all things like this are prohibited...”. The Ra’avad takes sharp issue with this formulation, maintaining that Eliezer’s behavior was permissible, that questioning it is unthinkable, and that Maimonides was confused by the Talmud’s choice of language.

Indeed, other authorities maintain that Eliezer was innocent of any sin in this case. Rather, these views, represented by the Ran, assert that the Talmud invokes Eliezer not to allege any impropriety, but to focus on one isolated detail: Eliezer’s absolute commitment to his test. Indeed, Eliezer’s test was a rational one, not at all subject to the prohibition. However, if one is utilizing an irrational indicator, he would violate neichush if he relied on this sign with a commitment equal to that of Eliezer to his permissible test.

Thus, it emerges from the Talmud that in order to violate neichush, two conditions must be present: a) the basis for the decision must be irrational, and not actually relevant to the issues involved; b) the decision must be made as a result of complete commitment to the irrational sign, and not be the result of a combination of factors. Apparently, according to the second view in the, the relevance of Eliezer is only to condition (b); as his condition was rational, it is instructive only in its level of commitment. It remains somewhat startling then, that Eliezer, acting rationally and innocently, should be held up as a negative role model.

While this second view exonerates Eliezer of any guilt, perhaps it might nonetheless be suggested that the tinge of disapproval exhibited by the Rabbis is rooted in this very approach.

True, it was rational and appropriate for Eliezer to devise a test to ascertain if Rebecca was a person of chesed. Where the test merited criticism, however, was in its absolute quality – the assumption that if Rebecca passed, she was a person of chesed, and if she didn’t, she wasn’t (it should be noted that not all commentaries agree with the underlying assumptions here of the facts of the narrative). In other words, the test assumed a perfect correlation between an attribute and an action. While clearly a relationship between the two must exist, it is not the case that an action always accurately displays the attribute from which it is assumed to emanate. The observer might misjudge the source of a discrete action or inaction; or it may simply not be representative, colored by some other factor of which the observer is unaware. A kind person may not help out a person in need because of preoccupation or justifiable distraction; while an unkind person may help because of an ulterior, selfish motive.

The automatic linking of attribute and action is the source of much of human conflict: “if he was a really nice guy, he would do what I need”; “if she really loved me, she wouldn’t do such and such”. All too often, the interpretation is artificial or incomplete, and the other party forms a completely inaccurate impression. This is related to what is now identified by psychologists as the “fundamental attribution error”, a reference to the human tendency to see the actions of others as wholly representative of their character, while the one evaluating readily minimizes such interpretations when applied to his own actions. If he fails to do the “kind” thing, he is unkind; if I fail to do that same thing, I am generally kind but at the moment attending to other priorities.

It might be suggested that this tendency is one reason for the prohibition of lashon hara, which forbids the relating of derogatory information, even when it is true. Unfortunately, human nature is such that it is very difficult not to form a character judgment after hearing of an incident that, while factually true, may be isolated or otherwise unrepresentative. As such, we are required to refrain from relating such facts, as their technical accuracy do not prevent the violation of “do not bear [or transmit] a false report (Ex 23:2; see Pesachim 118a).”

It seems, then, that the tests we devise, even if they do not trigger negative qualities, may still be misleading in very harmful ways that are all too easy to miss.

The question then becomes, if Eliezer indeed acted improperly in his request, why was he so gloriously successful? Why did God reward an unseemly request with a perfect response?

Perhaps this was one instance where the test specifically asked for an absolute correlation, for a quality that expressed itself constantly, without exception. As Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Abraham’s Journey pp. 195-196): “What key virtue did the members of this household possess that made them fit for and worthy of joining the covenant? The answer is hesed, kindness expressed through hakhnasat orechim, hospitality...hakhnasat orechim may have its source in one of two human qualities: either genuine kindness or civility and courtesy. A polite person quite often conveys the impression of being charitable and good, but inwardly he is completely indifferent and detached. The act of the polite person is related to an etiquette, the act of the kind person to an ethic.

“The criterion that enables us to distinguish between politeness and kindness is quite obvious. The element of perseverance and patience is to be found in the kind person but not in the merely polite person. The kind person has unlimited patience. The needy may call on a kind person for help over a long period of time, for years and years. The appeal will always be heard and acted upon. The polite person’s patience is limited. If repeatedly approached, he will stop extending help. Any illogical plea for help, any exaggeration or crossing the borderline of decency, will be harshly rejected and condemned if the helper is merely acting in accordance with etiquette. But in the case of kindness, there is no limit to the benefactor’s perseverance and tolerance. He helps even people who are vulgar and coarse. He takes abuse. Nothing can alienate him from the person in need.

“Eliezer wanted to find out what motivated Rebecca’s actions. Was it spiritual nobility and kindness, or good manners and civility? He asked her to do things that were outrageous. He said, “Let me sip a little water from your pitcher”. (Gen. 24:17), as opposed to asking her to hand him the pitcher. In other words, he told her that he would do nothing; she was to draw water from the well and pour it into his mouth. Isn’t this distasteful and tasteless? Had she just been polite, she would have splashed the water in his face. Why did he ask a young girl to water the camels, something women did not do in antiquity? Couldn’t one of his servants have taken the pitcher down to the well, brought up the water, and taken care of the animals?

“The answer is that Eliezer was testing her patience. She passed the test with flying colors. She did not feel hurt; she was not repulsed by the newcomer’s primitive bluntness and lack of good manners. She practiced hospitality even though the traveler was coarse and rude. The quality of erekh appayim prevailed, and Rebecca became the mother of the nation.”

Rav Soloveitchik’s comments appear to be stating that the test was not just for chesed in any basic sense, but specifically in an absolute sense; that only one who would express kindness without exception and in all circumstances would qualify. As such, it is understandable that actions could, in this unusual case, be equated absolutely with attributes; the unique demand of the situation called for it. Further, it seems that the very nature of Rebecca’s chesed was itself one of transcending the “action-based judgment” toward others.

Without a doubt, Rebecca’s behavior is extraordinary, and can hardly represent the expectation placed upon the average person. Nonetheless, perhaps there is a valuable lesson to be learned from this episode for all human relationships, marriage and otherwise. This lesson is the benefit of

living life by a double standard: when evaluating others' actions, one should recognize the frequent lack of correlation between these actions and their actual attributes; understand that they can be kind people even if not always displaying the actions we would identify with kindness. When one is considering one's own actions, however, one should act with the opposite mentality, recognizing that one's own positive attributes are often only perceived by others through the actions that usually display them; accordingly, one would try to manifest his quality of *chesed* (for example) as unilaterally and absolutely as possible. In other words, harmony is best served by attitudes that are the reverse of the more instinctive "fundamental attribution error".

Indeed, this approach, this "double standard", is far from instinctive. To separate the behavior that we see from the sweeping evaluations that we are inclined to make is profoundly challenging. Likewise, to strive to avoid relying on exceptions in our own actions – to express positive traits as consistently as possible, regardless of the circumstances – requires a discipline and a commitment evocative of our foremother Rebecca.

Nonetheless, it is a test worth taking on.

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From: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>

Date: Thu, Nov 13, 2025 at 3:45 PM

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, Chayei 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 Sarai." [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 did not 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.”

[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: (אברהם: 'צ', (יצחק: 'כ'), and (יעקב: 'ע'), alluding to the Hebrew terms: "בוקר" (morning), "צהריים" (afternoon), and "ערב" (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 Behaaloscha 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.

from: Michal Horowitz <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>

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Chayei Sarah 5786: From Servant to Man Parshas Chayei Sarah begins with the death of Sarah at one hundred and twenty-seven years old, and ends with the death of Avraham, at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years old. Both are buried in the Me'aras Ha'Machpela, which Avraham purchased from Efron - after Sarah's death - for four hundred silver shekels.

In the middle of these end-of-life events, we learn that the cycle of life continues - with the marriage of Yitzchak and Rivka.

Upon Sarah's death, Avraham realized that the time had come to find the second eim b'Yisrael - matriarch - who would wed Yitzchak and take up the role of Sarah. Through this union, Avraham knew that the seeds of Am Yisrael, which he planted, would sprout and grow.

Given that Avraham was "old and advanced in days" (Bereishis 24:1), he ordered his servant - who remains unnamed throughout the shidduch narrative - to search for a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham commanded his servant, זקן ביתו המשל בקל אֶשְׂרָלוֹ, "the elder of his house, who ruled over all that was his" (24:2), to put his hand on Avraham's thigh and take an oath that he would travel back to Avraham's land and birthplace, and from there he would find a wife for Yitzchak. Under no circumstances - Avraham ordered his servant - should a woman from the daughters of Canaan be taken as a wife for Yitzchak (v.3), and under no circumstances should Yitzchak be taken back to Avraham's ancestral homelands (v.5-6). Avraham is certain that Hashem will guide his servant's path and the match-made-in-Heaven will be quickly found (v.7).

While the Torah text does not name the servant, Chazal identify him as Eliezer (see, for example, Rashi to 24:39). In this role as the shaliach (messenger) of Avraham, Eliezer is focused on carrying out his master's wishes, as his own desires are suppressed.

It is interesting to note that throughout the long and detailed shidduch narrative, the servant is first referred to as an 'eved' (servant), and then he is called an 'ish' (man).

In the last pasuk before he interacts with, and speaks to, Rivka, he is called an eved: וַיֵּרָץ הַעֶבֶד לְקִרְאָתָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּמְיָאִי גָא מִעֵימָם מִכָּדָר - and the servant ran to greet her, and he said, please let me sip a little water from your pitcher (v.17).

And in the first pasuk after he speaks with her: וְהָאִישׁ מִשְׁתַּאֲשֵׁה לָהּ מִחֲרִישׁ לִנְעוּת - And the man was astonished at her, standing silent, to know whether Hashem had made his way successful or not (v.21).

When he realizes she is the one, וַיִּקְדֵּהָ אִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לָהּ - And the man bowed his head, and prostrated himself before Hashem (v.26).

And a few pasukim later, when he goes back to her home to meet her family, the pasuk tells us: וְלִרְבֵּקָה אָח וּשְׁמוֹ לָבָן וַיֵּרָץ לָבָן אֶל־הָאִישׁ הַהוּא וַיִּצְדָּק אֵלָיו - and Rivka had a brother, and his name was Lavan, and Lavan ran outside to the man at the spring (v.29) (as well as v.30, 32).

Before he meets Rivka he is the eved, after he meets her, he is an ish. Why the sudden change in the title?

Let us note that when Rivka meets the servant at the well, and he is waiting to determine if she is the ba'alas chessed who will marry Yitzchak, the pasuk says: וְהָאִשָּׁה שָׁתָה אֹדֶיךָ וְהַמָּטָר וַתִּרְדֵּף פָּנָה עָלָיו וַתִּשְׁקָהוּ - And she said: Drink my master, and she hurried and she lowered her pitcher upon her hand and she gave him to drink (v.18).

Rav Yaakov Bender, shlita, Rosh HaYeshiva Yeshiva Darchei Torah, offers an exceptionally beautiful and powerful answer to explain the switch from eved to ish, in the name of Rabbi Shimon Dachs, one of the Darchei principals.

"In the middle of traveling, the servant encountered Rivkah, paragon of chessed. She spoke to him using a new term: adoni. And she said, 'Drink, my master.' She referred to him as a master, and at that moment, something shifted. He saw himself as such, and the difference is noted in the next pesukim, the eved having become an ish. Because of one word from Rivkah. Along with the chessed and generosity she showed, we also see the... power of a mother. [It] is not just to be able to see good when others can't, but to find the way to articulate and express it... One word, one phrase, can make all the difference" (Rav Bender on Chumash 2, p.51-53).

Rav Bender tells over the following illustrative story: Rav Moshe Shapira zt'l, along with a talmid, was once seated in the back of a taxi. The talmid was arguing with Rav Moshe in Yiddish about a certain topic in Gemara. Suddenly, Rav Moshe Shapira stopped the conversation. He leaned forward and scanned the name of the driver, which appeared on the ID tag.

"Shalom, Arik," he said. He explained to the driver that they were having a conversation about the mitzvah of building a succah and that in deference to Arik, they would now continue speaking in Hebrew. "Our friend Arik will listen and partake," Rav Moshe Shapira then declared, and he and his talmid continued their conversation.

Notes Rav Bender: Did the driver appreciate the fine points of the Gemara? Perhaps not. But he undoubtedly did appreciate being shown respect, and being part of the conversation (ibid.).

Each and every word we utter to others is so powerful, even one word can change the reality for another - and for our own selves.

The Chafetz Chaim writes, in the introduction to Kuntres Chovas Ha'shemira: "klal ha'davarim, b'diburav shel adam, yachol li'vr'oah olamos, u'le'hachrivan - the summation of the matter is: with words one can create worlds, and with words, one can destroy worlds."

Let us strive to be cognizant, b'ezras Hashem, of all that we say, so with our words, we can truly build people, and build worlds.

ברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום,

Michal _____

from: Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>

Rabbi Kaganoff's Sunday night shiur

date: Nov 10, 2025, 4:52 AM

Some Halachos about Performing a Proper Hespel

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Someone told me that sometimes one obeys the request of a person not to be eulogized and sometimes one may ignore it. How can this be?

Question #2: Is it true that one may not schedule a hesped within thirty days of a Yom Tov?

Our Parsha

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

The Mitzvah

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

What is a proper hesped?

“It is a great mitzvah to eulogize the deceased appropriately. The mitzvah is to raise one's voice, saying about him things that break the heart, in order to increase crying and to commemorate his praise. However, it is prohibited to exaggerate his praise excessively. One mentions his good qualities and adds a little... If the person had no positive qualities, say nothing about him (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 444:1).” The eulogy should be appropriate to the purpose and extent of the tragedy. For example, one should eulogize more intensely for someone who died young than for an older person, and more for someone who left no surviving descendants than for someone who had children (Meiri, Moed Katan 27b). In summation, we see that the purpose of a hesped is to cause people to cry over the loss of a Jew who observed mitzvos properly.

Exaggerate a little

The hesped should be appropriate to the deceased; one may exaggerate very slightly (Rosh, Moed Katan 3:63). You might ask, how can any exaggerating be permitted? Isn't the smallest exaggeration an untruth? What difference is there between a small lie and a big one? (See Taz, Yoreh Deah 344:1) The answer is that there is usually a bit more to praise about the person than we necessarily know, so that, on the contrary, adding a bit makes the tribute closer to the truth (based on Taz, Yoreh Deah 344:1).

Ignoring a Request

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

The answer, as explained by the Noda BeYehudah's disciple, is that for a gadol hador to be buried without proper eulogy is not simply a lack of the deceased's honor, which he has a right to forgo, but also a disgrace to the Torah. Even though a talmid chacham may (in general) forgo the honor due him as a Torah scholar (talmid chacham shemachal al kevodo, kevodo machul [Kiddushin 32b]), this applies only to forgoing honor. He cannot allow himself to be disgraced, since this disgraces not only him but also the Torah itself (Shu"t Teshuvah Mei'Ahavah, Volume I #174; see also Pischei Teshuvah 444:1). We now understand why there are times when one obeys the request of a person to omit his hesped, and times when one may ignore it. Usually, we obey his/her request because of the general principle *retzono shel adam zehu kevodo*, the fulfillment of someone's desire is his honor. However, if a gadol hador requests omission of eulogies, and major authorities consider this a breach of respect for the Torah itself; they may overrule the gadol's request out of *kavod* for the Torah. (Of course, this

implies that the departed gadol felt that the absence of hesped would not be a disgrace to the Torah, and that his halachic opinion is being overruled.)

At this point, we can address the second question raised above: Is it true that one may not schedule a hesped within thirty days of a Yom Tov?

Hesped before Yom Tov

The Mishnah (Moed Katan 8a) forbids scheduling a hesped within thirty days before Yom Tov, which the Rosh explains means for someone who died more than thirty days before Yom Tov (Rosh ad loc. and Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 447:1). What is wrong with scheduling this hesped, particularly since performing a proper hesped is such a big mitzvah? The Gemara cites two approaches to explain this ruling, both explaining that some form of Yom Tov desecration may result from such a eulogy. Rav (according to our version of the text) explained the reason with an anecdote: “A man once saved money in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *aliyah la'regel*, traveling to the Beis HaMikdash for Yom Tov. A professional eulogizer then showed up at the man's door and convinced his wife that her recently departed relative deserved another eulogy. She took the money her husband had saved for *aliyah la'regel* and gave them to the eulogizer. (This indicates that ambulance chasing is a time-hallowed profession.) At that time, Chazal decreed that one should not make a post-funeral hesped during the thirty day period before Yom Tov.”

The Gemara then quotes Shemuel, who cited a different reason for the ban: Usually, thirty days after someone's death, he or she is sufficiently forgotten for people to not discuss the death during Yom Tov, which would diminish the festival joy. However, performing a eulogy during these thirty days refreshes people's memories, and as a result, they discuss the passing during Yom Tov and disturb the Yom Tov joy (Moed Katan 8b). The Gemara notes that there is a practical difference between the two approaches. According to the first approach, our concern only applies if someone hires a professional speaker and there is no stricture against conducting voluntary eulogies. However, according to Shemuel, one may not conduct even an unpaid eulogy since this may revive the loss for the close family and result in a desecration of Yom Tov.

Contemporary Problem or Not?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

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subject: Potomac Torah Study Center Devrei Torah for Shabbat Chayei Sarah 5786

We were very excited this week to receive an email from cousins that their oldest grandson, who is studying for Semikah at Yeshiva University, has just become engaged. Hannah and I are thrilled to be joining the family for the wedding soon in Lakewood. Our cousins, who divide their time between Los Angeles and Israel, are children of Holocaust survivors. My grandparents sponsored my cousin's family to immigrate and move to Los Angeles in the early 1950s, when my cousin and her three sisters were very young. I remember my parents taking us to meet my cousin, (who was a young girl at the time), her next younger sister, and their twin baby daughters (the latter two in a crib) – when I was probably around eight years old. These cousins have always been special to us. We shared numerous simchas growing up, attended their children's simchas (all their weddings), and normally stay with them for Shabbat when we travel to Los Angeles. Our cousins are a natural topic for this parsha. Last week was the anniversary of Kristallnacht, the beginning of the worst horrors of the Holocaust. Our cousins, with their large frum family and so far two Orthodox rabbis, are the best part of our revenge for Hitler. We Jews remember the horrors of the Nazis, encourage large families, study our holy texts, and encourage our children to make aliyah. Chayei Sarah is part of the story of Avraham Avinu (whose name I carry) and his efforts to purchase property in Israel (Canaan) and to establish a legacy for our people. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander explores the diverse legacies of Moshe, David, and Avraham. Moshe spent much of his adult life communicating with God, teaching His mitzvot to the people, judging issues that arose, and initiating an oral tradition to clarify issues that are not obvious in the written Torah. To be available to Hashem at any time of day or night, Moshe lived apart from his wife and children. After the Exodus, the Torah does not mention Moshe's children. His burial location is hidden, and no Jew attempts to visit and pay respects to Moshe. Rabbi Brander considers King David's relationship with his children to be passive. Others in David's environment must tell him when one of his sons is attempting to take over from their father's royal duties.

In contrast with Moshe and David, Avraham devotes considerable time and attention to his sons. Yitzhak learns enough from his father to repeat many of Avraham's experiences and approaches, including not telling foreign

rulers that he is married and redigging and giving up again some of the wells that his father had originally dug. Avraham directs his servant Eliezer how to find a wife for Yitzhak, and Yitzhak sends Yaakov to his same cousins in Haran to search for a wife. Even this Shabbat, nearly 3700 years later, many Jews spend Shabbat Chayei Sarah in Hebron, at the tombs of Avraham and Sarah, because of the close connection we Jews feel to their kever.

Rabbi Haim Ovadia explores Avraham's brilliant negotiation with the Hittites for a burial spot, a Kever Akhuzah (a permanent holding in the land).

Since the people of Canaan would not sell any land to a foreigner, Avraham could only purchase a permanent holding of land by shaming Ephron ben Zohar into selling a corner of his property for an extremely high price. The purchase of this first permanent holding is so important to the Jewish legacy in Israel that all the details are in the Torah.

Our connection to fellow Jews continues after thousands of years. Rabbi Mordechai Rhine writes beautifully to Avraham and Sarah, whom he feels are his parents, even after nearly 3700 years. We see this long connection of fellow Jews as our relatives in other contexts. This Shabbat marks seven years since a murderous anti-Semite broke into the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh and killed eleven congregants during morning services. In the past week, the Goldin family and Israel could finally remember and bury the remains of Lt. Hadar Goldin, whom Hamas murderers dragged into Gaza eleven years ago. Hamas finally returned his body, because IDF discovered the location and were a few feet away from reaching and returning his remains to Israel. IDF kept working to discover and recover Lt. Goldin's bones. Jews in Pittsburgh have kept alive the memories of the eleven members of the Tree of Life Congregation. These efforts demonstrate that we Jews continue to build and reinforce a legacy of B'Nai Yisrael, whom we consider all to be part of our family.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, reminds us of the immensely difficult task that Holocaust survivors had to rebuild a life after their horrific experiences. (Our hostages from Gaza and their families face a similar task.) Jews who survived the Nazi horrors frequently would not speak of their experiences for decades – some never would address the topic. I cannot imagine how I would have had the strength to get up in the morning and create a new life if I had been in either situation. Hashem promises that we shall endure, but with our enemies at our gates. I count my blessings that my grandparents made their way to America, that my parents were the first generation born in this country, and that my sisters and I could live in a free and protected period. Those who came before us, and those living now during a time of wicked anti-Semitism, have much more difficult tasks. I wish them koach – and may those of the current generation understand that they must be careful lest history repeat for them and their children.

We should always cherish those who make us aware of our legacy. I wrote the following words three years ago, and I cannot improve on them: A Rebbe is like a father, and my Rebbe/father figure for decades was Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, who earned my weekly dedication of these Devrei Torah to his memory – many times over during our friendship. He was my mentor for nearly fifty years. Rabbi Cahan and his beloved wife Elizabeth taught Hannah and me to find deeper appreciation for the many levels of insights in the Torah. Shabbas and Yom Tov with the Cahans was always special, something that we have tried to pass on to our children. Avraham and Sarah built a legacy that has lasted for more than 3500 years. Dedicated Jews like the Cahans renew and reinforce the Jewish legacy each generation – and that is why we Jews have survived so long and shall always be around, always fulfilling Hashem's promise to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov. May our children and grandchildren always appreciate this lesson.

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.

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Nov 13, 2025, 9:27 PM

subject: **Tidbits** • Chayei Sarah 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZT"L

Parashas Chayei Sarah • November 15th • 24 Cheshvan 5786

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Kislev. Rosh Chodesh is next Friday, November 21st. The molad is THURSDAY afternoon at 1:38 PM and 9 chalakim. As of Shacharis this past Tuesday, November 11th, Shemoneh Esrei has been recited ninety times with the inclusion of Mashiv HaRuach U'Morid HaGesheim. Therefore, after this point, one who is unsure if he added Mashiv HaRuach can halachically be presumed to have said it correctly, and need not repeat Shemoneh Esrei (this is applicable for Nusach Ashkenaz; Nusach Sefard mispallelim [who say Morid Hatal in the summer months] never need to correct). Note: One who served as a shaliach tzibbur during this period may count his chazaras hashatz towards his count of ninety. af Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Zevachim 62 • Yerushalmi: Yoma 23 • Mishnah Yomis: Chulin 8:1-2 • Oraysa (coming week): Chagigah 23b-25b • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 17:8-18:2 Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish them a good Shabbos.

Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Kislev is this Shabbos Parashas Chayei Sarah.

Rosh Chodesh Kislev is next Friday, November 21st. CHAYEI SARAH:

Sarah passes away • Avraham acquires the Me'aras Hamachpeilah from Efron and buries Sarah there • Avraham sends Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak • Eliezer prays to find a girl who excels in kindness • Rivka, daughter of Besuel, offers Eliezer and his camels water to drink • Eliezer gives her gifts of jewelry • Rivka's brother Lavan sees the gifts and invites Eliezer to stay with them • Eliezer relates the day's events to Rivka's family and proposes her marriage to Yitzchak • Lavan attempts to delay the marriage, but Rivka chooses to leave immediately • The blessings of Sarah's tent return upon Rivka's arrival • Avraham marries Keturah and bears six sons; they are sent away with gifts • Avraham passes away at the age of 175; Yitzchak and Yishmael bury him in the Me'aras Hamachpeilah • Yishmael's 12 children • Yishmael dies at the age of 137 Haftarah: By carefully selecting an appropriate soulmate for his son Yitzchak, Avraham Avinu sought to ensure the continuity of Klal Yisrael as well as its growth, both in numbers and in nobility. David Hamelech (Melachim Alef 1:1-31) sought continuity of his kingdom and the Jewish nation as well by designating his son Shlomo Hamelech as heir to the throne.

ואשאל אתה ואמר בת מי את ותאמר בת בתואל בן נחור אשר ילדה לו מלכה ואשם הנזם על אפה והצמידים על ידיה

"And I asked her who's daughter she was...and I placed the nose ring on her nose..." (Berieishis 24:47) In recounting his encounter with Rivka, Eliezer tells her family that he first conversed with her and afterward gave her the jewelry. However, according to the preceding account in the Torah he gave her the jewelry, even before conversing with her. Rashi explains that he did so out of concern that they would take issue with the fact that he gave the jewelry without knowing her identity. One may question that Besuel had already stated that "mei'Hashem yatza hadavar" - this was brought forth by Hashem, and the hashgacha was obvious to all. If so, why would this minor inconsistency in Eliezer's approach derail the shidduch? Furthermore, Chazal say that with the help of divine intervention, Besuel was poisoned in order that he would not stop the shidduch. But did he not already agree that this match was heavenly ordained? Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock zt"l explains that negiyos (personal biases) and ulterior motives negatively affect other nations to a higher degree. Even though through logic they can see the truth, when it comes to taking action, these subconscious feelings take hold of their decisions and direction. Although it was obvious to all parties that this shidduch was destined to be, Eliezer's minor inconsistency may have caused them to move away from pursuing this marriage.

Parshas Chayei Sarah: The Slave's Mission

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE RESULT OF THE AKEDAH: YITZHAK BECOMES A LIVING OLAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT HAYYEI SARA:

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

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

THINK ABOUT IT:

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

PARASHAT HAYYEI SARA:

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

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

BURYING THE BODY:

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

BERESHIT 23:2-20 --

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Avraham LISTENED to Efron, and Avraham weighed for Efron the money he had spoken of IN THE HEARING of the children of Het -- four hundred shekels of silver, acceptable to a merchant. The field of Efron, which was in Mahpela, before Mamre -- the field, and the cave in it, and all the trees of the field, in all its perimeter around -- arose to Avraham as a purchase, in sight of the children of Het, with all the people in the gate of the city. After this, Avraham buried Sara, his wife, in the cave of the field of Mahpela, before Mamre, which is Hebron, in the Land of Canaan. The field and the cave in it arose to Avraham as a holding of a grave ['ahuzat kever'], 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 kever"; he is not interested in a space in one of the Hittite gravesites.

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

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

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

WHY BOTHER?

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

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

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

CLOSING THE DEAL:

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

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

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

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

Let us now take the evidence and put it together:

- * We know that Avraham wants an "ahuzat kaver," a permanent burial ground, not just a space in someone else's burial ground.
- * We know that he wants to pay for it and will not accept it as a gift.
- * We know he views the Bnei Het as the "am ha-aretz," "the people of the land," from whom he wants land.
- * We know that the Torah stresses that this event takes place publicly and is witnessed by everyone present.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AVRAHAM FINALLY "LISTENS":

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

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

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

BERESHIT 35:27 --

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

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

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

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

BERESHIT 25:8-10 --

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

Shabbat Shalom

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

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

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

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

WHY TERACH?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

destiny.

shabbat shalom
menachem

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

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

Earth (see 24:1-4).

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

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

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

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

HEAVENS 'and' EARTH

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

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

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

A. RADAK - 'Helping his servant understand'

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

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

B. SFORNO - 'Scare tactics'

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

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

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

D. RAMBAN - "Eretz Yisrael"

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

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

ELOKEI HA-SHAMAYIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHIUR #2 - AVRAHAM AVINU & 'REAL' ESTATE

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

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

TWO PERCEPTIONS

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

1) Bnei Chet's perception:

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

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

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

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

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

2) Avraham Avinu's perception:

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

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

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FOR FURTHER IYUN:

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

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SHIUR #3 "ZERA VA-ARETZ"

- A PROMISE, COVENANT, AND OATH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE OATH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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