



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY

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

ISRAEL Parsha Picture

וְאַחֲרָיִךְ כֵּן קָבַר אֲבֹרָהֶם אֶת
 שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל מְעַרְת שְׂדֵה
 הַמְּכַפְּלָה... הוּא חֲבֵרוֹן...
 וַיָּקָם הַשָּׂדֵה וְהַמְעַרָה אֲשֶׁר
 בּוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזַת קָבַר:









בראשית כג: יט-כ

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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The Obsession with Land

Paul Johnson and the Purchase of the Cave in Chevron



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

I was not born into a religious family but grew up in a warm and traditional South African Jewish home. To the great credit of my dear parents, and through the influence of a young dynamic Rabbi, we began going to *shul* on Shabbat on a regular basis, which sparked the beginning of a spiritual transformation. I was 12 years old when our family odyssey towards more serious Torah observance began.

The Book of Bereishit

A good place to start studying Torah seemed to me to be from the very beginning, so I began with the book of Bereishit. As I began learning about Avraham, I was totally perplexed. The very first time G-d speaks to the very first Jew, He commands him to leave wherever he is and to journey to another land to fulfill his destiny. This baffled me. After all, was this really the most important thing for Avraham to do in order to begin his mission? What about studying Torah, keeping *mitzvot*, committing himself to total obedience to fulfill the will of G-d?

Incredibly, the more I studied the book of Bereishit, the more I realized that this original encounter between G-d and Avraham was not an exception but rather the rule. It seemed as if G-d had some type of obsession, so to speak, with this Land. **It was clear that the new spiritual mission of Avraham and his children was somehow inextricably linked to this tract of land.**

This conclusion is inescapable. As soon as Avraham arrives, G-d promises to give the Land to his children.¹ As he returns from Egypt after the famine, G-d commands him to walk around the Land, look in all directions and promises the whole Land to him and his progeny once again.² G-d makes two

distinct and dramatic covenants with him, promising that his children will return after Exile and that the Land will be an 'Eternal Inheritance' for them.³

G-d forbids Yitzchak from leaving the Land, despite famine, and he spends his entire life there. G-d promises the Land to him and his children.⁴

To escape his brother, Ya'akov has no choice but to leave the Land, but his whole life revolves around it. In his dream on departure, G-d assures him he will return and 20 years later commands him to do so.⁵ Upon his return, Ya'akov is promised the Land for him and his children.⁶ Then after being pushed into Exile once again, to reunite with his son Yosef in Egypt, Ya'akov asks Yosef to swear to bury him in the grave of his forefathers in the Land.⁷

The book of Bereishit ends counterintuitively with Yosef, despite his meteoric success in Egypt, making his family promise to bury him in the Land of his fathers. Remarkably, the last verse of the book conveys his death, embalming and placing him in a coffin. No burial is mentioned. The message is clear — he is waiting, no matter for how long, to return to the Land with the Children of Israel and to be buried there.

The singling out of a person, a family and a people for a unique mission is interlocked at every stage with the singling out of the Land. They are inseparable.

Chevron – The City Which Binds Us to the Land

I also noticed that in the book of Bereishit, one city in the Land — Chevron — stands out more than any other, in three distinct ways. First, it is the site of the first legally purchased part of the Land, the Cave of

Machpelah, which Avraham acquires to bury Sarah. Second, despite our forefathers' many travels and sojournings, Hebron is the main area in the Land where all three of them lived.⁸ And third, it is where all three sets of our forefathers and mothers are buried.⁹

Therefore, Chevron – more than any other place – represents our founding fathers' and mothers' extraordinary connection to the Land.

As I was finishing high school, I made a further amazing discovery. One of the world's leading historians, Paul Johnson, had just published his monumental work, "A History of the Jews," in which he highlighted the very same reflections about the Land in general and Hebron in particular.

In his opening chapter, he emphasized the remarkable centrality of the Land from the dawn of Jewish history: "The election of Abraham and his descendants for a special role in G-d's providence, and the donation of the land, are inseparable in the Biblical presentation of history."¹⁰

Strikingly, Johnson traces the very beginning of Jewish history to Chevron itself:

"The Jews are the most tenacious people in history. Hebron is there to prove it. It lies 20 miles south of Jerusalem, 3,000 feet up in the Judean Hills. There, in the Cave of Machpelah, are the Tombs of the Patriarchs. According to ancient tradition, one sepulcher, itself of great antiquity, contains the mortal remains of Abraham, founder of the Jewish religion and ancestor of the Jewish race. Paired with his tomb is that of his wife Sarah. Within the building are the twin tombs of his son Isaac and his wife Rebecca. Across the inner courtyard is another pair of tombs, of Abraham's grandson Jacob and his wife Leah... This is where the 4,000-year history of the Jews, in so far as it can be anchored in time and place, began."¹¹

He also pointed out what the city teaches about the nature of Jewish spiritual history:

"Hebron is thus an example of Jewish obstinacy over 4,000 years. It also illustrates the curious ambivalence of the Jews towards the possession and occupation of land. No race has maintained over such a long period such an emotional attachment to a particular corner of the earth's surface... Hebron is the site

of their first recorded acquisition of land. Chapter 23 of the Book of Genesis describes how Abraham, after the death of his wife Sarah, decided to purchase the Cave of Machpelah and the lands which surrounded it, as a burying-place for her and ultimately for himself. The passage is among the most important in the entire Bible, embodying one of the most ancient and tenaciously held Jewish traditions, evidently very dear and critical to them. It is perhaps the first passage in the Bible which records an actual event, witnessed and described through a long chain of oral recitation and so preserving authentic details."¹²

Thus the Jewish people's connection to Chevron is a microcosm of our people's unparalleled relationship to the Land.

'The G-d of the Land'

So deeply intertwined is our G-dly mission that the Ramban interprets a verse in this week's Parasha to mean that Hashem is defined as the 'G-d of the Land of Israel.'

The verse states as Avraham makes Eliezer swear to find Yitzchak a wife from his family in Charan: "I want you to swear by the LORD, the G-d of heaven and the G-d of the land, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living" (Bereishit 24:3).

Ramban identifies other verses in Tanach which clearly describe G-d as 'G-d of the Land of Israel' as he terms it.

This clearly does not mean of course that Hashem is not the G-d who created all of heaven and earth. Rather, as the Ramban explains, G-d's spiritual mission for the world is inherently linked to the centrality of a particular people and a particular land.

Indeed, the mainstay of the book of Bereishit is the concurrent singling out of a particular people and a particular Land for a unique spiritual mission and the ineradicable connection between them.

A Hope and a Prayer

Today we are privileged to be participating in and witnessing the miraculous return of our people to our Land. This remarkable reunion is a fulfillment of the promises made to our forebears in the book of Bereishit and is bringing us closer to fulfilling our historic destiny. At the same time, there are anti-Israel forces from without

and within who wish to sever this link, with disastrous consequences. Without integrating the foundational principles of Jewish particularism as a people intertwined with the Land, any attempt to create either a religious or a humanistic Jewish identity betrays the essence of the Jewish mission.¹³

The great religious and universal values of Judaism will always remain inherently connected to the inseparable foundational principles of Jewish peoplehood and nationhood — the Land and people at the heart of Bereishit. It is a privilege to be part of a breathtaking drama unfolding today; a phenomenon unrivaled in all of human history: the remarkable return of a people to its Land as designated by G-d at the very dawn of Creation.

1. Bereishit 12:7.
2. Ibid 13:14-17.
3. The Covenants of the Pieces in Chapter 15 and of Circumcision in Chapter 17.
4. Ibid 26:2-4.
5. Ibid 29:13 and 31:13.
6. Ibid 35:12.
7. Ibid 47:29-31.
8. Avraham settles — יָשָׁב — in Hebron, connoting a permanent settlement as opposed to a previous place where he only pitched his tent (Bereishit 13:18). See Rashi's commentary (21:34), where he quotes Seder Olam regarding Avraham's sojourning in the Land and shows how Hebron is his and Sarah's primary dwelling place. Although Yitzchak spent many years in *Eretz Pelishtim* he also settled in Hebron (35:27). Upon returning to the Land from Lavan's house, Ya'akov moves from place to place eventually settling in Hebron as well (37:14).
9. Bereishit 49:31. Rachel was buried along the way to Efrat, Beit Lechem (35:19).
10. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, published by George Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1987, page 19. It is fascinating that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has mentioned that this work is arguably the most important work of Jewish history and should be in every Jewish home.
11. Ibid, page 3.
12. Ibid, pages 3-4.
13. It is also true that fixation on the people/Land without being tempered with religious, ethical and universalist values does the same and has the potential to create a coarse and destructive brand of nationalism. The Torah ideal, explains Rav Kook (Orot HaTechiya 18), is a blend of religious, universal and nationalist ideals that form a wholesome Jewish identity.

PIRKEI AVOT

How Straight is Beautiful



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רבי אומר, איזוהי דרך? שרה שיבור לו האדם?
כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן האדם... (אבות ב:א)

As we saw last time, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi asks: “What is the straight path that a person should choose?” His answer focuses on one word: “*tiferet*.” *Tiferet* means more than just beauty; it connotes a harmonious balance between differing ideas or components.¹ What different components should comprise the *tiferet* of one’s life path?

Rebbe’s answer delineates two types of *tiferet*: “*loseha*” and “*min ha’adam*.” Let us explore each of these.

Min Ha’Adam

“*Tiferet lo min ha’adam*” means that others perceive our path as beautiful. People naturally see their own path positively;² Others seeing it that way is critical confirmation.

Many *mishnayot* in Avot convey the importance of how others perceive us. The fourth *perek*³ quotes Rabbi Shimon, who rates the “crown” of a “Good Name” as greater than all other crowns (Torah, Malchut, and Kehunah). Rav Chanina Ben Dosa⁴ goes even further by asserting that Hashem is comfortable only with those who other people are comfortable with as well. One who only performs mitzvot *bein Adam l’Makom*, focusing solely upon his relationship with Hashem, is not just insensitive towards other people; he lacks a meaningful relationship with Hashem as well.

Oseha

But this is only Rabbi’s second stated criteria; his first one is: “*tiferet loseha*.” Who is the “*oseha*” that Rabbi is referring to?

Most *meforshim*⁵ understand the word *oseha* as referring to the person himself. In addition to others finding a person’s life beautiful, Rabbi believes that our path in life needs to resonate with our own selves. The way we live needs to be a true expression of our unique character and (thus) destiny.

According to this understanding, Rabbi’s full statement teaches that one’s life needs to be beautiful to both oneself and to others.

Balance – The Middle Path

Many Rishonim⁶ understand Rabbi as addressing an additional issue: the balance between ourselves and others. There is a natural tension between our focus upon our own needs and goals and our caring for and assistance to others. Rabbi’s point is that we need to strike the right balance between these (often) competing values.

The Rambam⁷ gives the example of the need to find the middle ground between being miserly and being irresponsibly altruistic. Though we need to be charitable, we should prioritize taking care of ourselves and our own families. This is what the Rambam calls the “*derech ha’emtzei* (the balanced path)”⁸ where both ideals are appreciated and integrated harmoniously.⁹ This, explains the Rambam and others, is what Rabbi means when he says that the straight path is one that is beautiful both for oneself as well as for others.¹⁰

Osehu

The problem with this interpretation is that the word *oseha* is a strange way to

describe oneself. For this reason, many commentaries¹¹ prefer a different *girsah* (text) of the *mishnah* that reads “*osehu*.”¹² This version emphasizes the importance of one’s path being beautiful in the eyes of “the one who made us” — Hashem.

It is understandable that we would use our Creator’s perspective to validate our life’s path. We ought to aim to achieve the destiny we were created to realize. There is no greater authority on this matter than Hashem — our Creator.

Rabbi Yochanan also used our Creator as his yardstick in his famous words: “*Ashrei mi ... she’amalo baTorah v’oseh nachat ruach l’yotzro*.”¹³ Happy is the one involved in Torah who gives *nachat* to his Creator. If Hashem has *nachat* from us, we know that we are living up to our “factory settings.”

Hashem’s opinion about our lives is particularly relevant to determining the “*derech yesharah*” Rabbi asked about. As Hashem is the model for the very concept of *yashrut*, it makes sense that He would be the one to determine whether we are achieving it.

The Eyes of God and Man

According to this interpretation, Rabbi’s full statement emphasizes the importance of man’s path being beautiful in the eyes of both God and of man.¹⁴ We find this idea in many places in *Tanach*¹⁵ and in the words of *Chazal*.¹⁶ The Gra connects our *mishnah* to the famous *pasuk* (we quote at the end of our bentsching) which encourages man to “find favor and appear wise in the eyes of G-d and man.”¹⁷

Beautiful All Around

If we combine the two versions of the *mishnah*, we derive the importance of

Continued on page 7

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Parashat Chayei Sarah: Sarah's Sacrifice and Legacy



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

Parashat Chayei Sarah focuses on two detailed narratives – Avraham's purchase of a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and his mission – via his servant Eliezer – to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. The former is Avraham's initiative to secure the promise of Land (*Brit bein HaBetarim*), stated five times,¹ and the latter is Avraham's response to the promise of children (*Brit Mila*), also assured to Avraham five times.² Avraham does not wait for G-d to fulfill these promises but realizes G-d is waiting for him to facilitate their fulfillment.

But why wait for Sarah's death and not purchase land or search for a wife for Yitzchak earlier?

The Torah teaches us – “And the life of Sarah was 100 and 20 and seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.”³ Avraham was not waiting for the death of Sarah. He was inspired by Sarah's life of active commitment to the aforementioned promises to continue her legacy.

At the climax/transition in the narratives of Avraham *Avinu*,⁴ the Torah tells us a story of Sarah *Imeinu* (Bereishit 16). This is the story that will determine who will be the “Mother” of the promised nation. Sarah has followed Avram from Ur Kasdim to Canaan, accompanying him as they both sacrificed their pasts for Divine promise.⁵ But 10 years have passed, a covenant of Land has been forged and promises of a child have yet to be fulfilled. Sarah does not wait around, passively

anticipating their fulfillment. She is determined to play a role in the actualization of *Hashem's* word. So she forfeits her entire future and potential status of national matriarch, and gives her maidservant Hagar as a full-fledged wife to Avram to beget the long-awaited promised progeny.⁶ She struggles with this change in status as Hagar conceives and belittles her, and stands by as Avraham names his first-born child “Yishmael” – for G-d had heard the oppressive cries of Hagar.

Immediately after this story, the Torah tells us of the *Brit Mila*, a covenant forged with Avraham and his descendants through the sign of circumcision. And Sarah is to be the mother of Yitzchak through whom the covenant will continue! Sarah's willingness to sacrifice her future status to actively catalyze the fulfillment of *Hashem's* promises, of Land and descendants, merits her to become *Am Yisrael's* first Matriarch.

The Netziv⁷ explains that although Avraham received direct messages of prophecies from *Hashem* commanding him to leave his father's home, and later to sacrifice his future hopes through the binding of Yitzchak, Sarah surmounts similar challenges through *ruach haKodesh* – Divine inspiration and pure faith in the ways of *Hashem*.⁸ She willingly undergoes her own “sacrifice” of a child before Avraham is told by *Hashem* to do so. This is Sarah *Imeinu's* legacy.

Upon her death, Avraham is inspired and determined to perpetuate Sarah's life and

legacy. Without any prophetic commands, he struggles with focused willpower to catalyze the fulfillment of *Hashem's* promises to secure Land and children for the future. Sarah understood that Divine promise is not a statement that G-d will act, but “an invitation from G-d to Avraham and his children that they should act,”⁹ with commitment and willingness to sacrifice, and G-d will help them. Sarah understood the challenge of fulfilling *Hashem's* covenant. She acted with faith, not passivity, overcoming overwhelming personal obstacles to secure the future of *Hashem's* nation. She inspired Avraham to get up and do the same. May her legacy provide us, her children, with the strength to persevere and act to secure the future of our Land and nation!

1. Bereishit 12:7, 13:14-17, 15:7, 15:18-21, 17:7-8.
2. Bereishit 12:2, 13:16, 15:5, 17:4-5, 22:17.
3. Bereishit 23:1.
4. Literally in the middle of the narratives, as highlighted through chiasmus in the Avraham stories.
5. See Radak 11:29-31.
6. See Ramban 16:2
7. Netziv, HaEmek Davar, 23:1.
8. Bereishit Rabbah 41 – “Avraham left (Ur Kasdim) in promise, I (Sarah) left in faith.”
9. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Land and Children,” Covenant and Conversation (Genesis), p. 126.

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: I am only able to daven Shacharit after I bring my kids to school, which means I am home for a while until I actually daven. What am I allowed/not allowed to do during that period?

Answer: There are a few categories of actions that are permitted before tefillah:

1. Tzarchei Shamayim – The Gemara in Megilah (23a) states that one is slow to come to shul on Yom Tov. Rashi explains based on Masechet Sofrim (18:4) that people come later because they are busy preparing the yuntif meal. This teaches us that tzarechei shamayim (actions done for the sake of G-d) are allowed to be done before tefillah. This ruling applies to all other tzarchei shamayim (MB 89:36, 250:1, Aruch Hashulchan). Based on this, we can permit gymnastics or running in the morning before tefillah (Rav Elyashiv, see Rav Sheinberg who also permits but writes it is better to do after tefillah if possible.)
2. Tefillah Preparations – Actions which can be viewed as preparatory to tefillah are permitted, such as showering (Igrot Moshe, others) and shaving (Rav Elyashiv, others). It seems that one can even shine his shoes, as this also improves one's appearance before tefillah.
3. Insignificant Acts – Actions such as a brief read over the newspaper, taking out the trash, and turning on a washing machine (and even putting in the laundry if there is not great effort needed) are permitted before tefillah (quoted in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach).

In a situation where there is a need to do melacha, there is room to be lenient after saying Brachot. (Rema in Siman 89 brings this opinion and says “it is good to be machmir.”)

Question: I saw that some Rabbanim wrote that it is mutar/mitzvah/chovah to vote in the elections, even before davening shacharit. This year the polls opened at 7 AM. How can it be that one can vote before davening?

Answer: If possible, one should vote after davening. If there is a concern that a person will not be able to after davening, then he may vote before because it is like a mitzvah and it is for the sake of the public and one's personal sake. Nevertheless, a person should first say brachot like the Rema writes in Siman 89 (even though we are generally machmir and do not permit melacha after brachot).

Question: I only manage to make it to minyan at around 8 AM after getting my kids to school. Is it better to daven at 8 with a minyan or to daven at neitz by myself? Is it better to choose one option and stick to it or switch off?

Answer: It is preferable to daven with a minyan. In certain circumstances there is room to allow for tefillot vatikin b'yichidut. While there is a machloket regarding what is better, this is what I feel is right for our generation

Question: I baked dairy blintzes in a meat oven which has not been used for two months. What is the ruling of the blintzes and the oven?

Answer: The blintzes are kosher. The oven should be kashered by turning it on its highest heat for an hour.

Question: In what case can a person do melacha after the time posted on the boards for candle lighting?

Answer: A person is allowed to do melacha around 15 minutes after the time that appears for candle lighting (and 35 minutes after in Jerusalem). This way one is not close to desecrating Shabbat and he has time for Tosefet Shabbat. Nevertheless, it is proper for one to accept Shabbat at the earlier point.

Question: Can a married woman staying at her parents house light candles where her mother lights or does she need to light elsewhere? If they are sleeping in one house and eating somewhere else, where should they light?

Answer: An Ashkenazi woman can light with her mother. Sephardic women should either light elsewhere or not light.

If they are sleeping where they are eating, they should light where they are eating.

If they are sleeping elsewhere – better to light where you are sleeping.

● Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

תקציר פרשת חיי שרה

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



הכנענית. אברהם מגיע אל הארץ כדי להוציא את הכנענים מתוכה ולרשת את הארץ במקומם, כחלק ממאבק תרבותי-רוחני.

אם כן, הישיבה בארץ וההתרחקות מן הכנענים אינם שני ערכים שעלולים להתנגש זה בזה, אלא הם שני צדדים של אותה מטבע. ההתרחקות מן הכנענים ויצירת תרבות שונה מתרבותם הפגומה (דווקא בתחום הנישואין) היא המאפשרת את ירושת הארץ. לכן, אברהם משיב את עבדו שבמהלך חיפוש זיווג של יצחק יקפיד לשמור על שני הערכים החשובים הללו, והוא בטוח שה' יהיה בעזרו, ויסייע לו למצוא את האישה הראויה שתסכים לבא לארץ כנען לשם נישואין עם יצחק, ובכך להמשיך את בית אברהם ואת דרכו.

אברהם עושה את כל מה שהוא יכול למען קיום הייעוד שניתן לו, ויחד עם זאת בטוח שה' ימלא את הבטחתו ויסייע לו בקיום הייעוד הזה.

והערך השני הוא הישיבה בארץ כנען, ארץ ה' שהובטחה לאברהם.

ההכונה של אברהם שלא להתחתן עם בנות כנען אלא עם צאצאי משפחת אברהם מחרן, שהם צאצאי שם, קשורה למהותם של שני ענפי האנושות הללו, כפי שהיא באה לידי ביטוי בסיפור השכרות של נח (ט', כ-ז). מעשיו של חם אבי כנען העידו על אופיו השלילי, הפגום בתחום המיני, והביאו עליו קללה. לעומת זאת, מעשיו של שם העידו על אופיו החיובי, המוכן לקרבת ה', והביאו עליו ברכה. אברהם מבהיר שהכרחי למצוא אישה ראויה, המתאימה לרוח בית אברהם, ותסייע ליצחק להקים בית שימשיך את דרך ה'.

יחד עם זאת, אברהם מבהיר שאסור לוותר על הישיבה בארץ לצורך הנישואין עם אישה ראויה. ירושת הארץ היא חלק חשוב מאותו מהלך של ביור דרך ה' בעולם. בתחילה, כנען התישב בארץ זו. והנה, דווקא הארץ שבה יושבים בני כנען, המושחתים והמקוללים, היא הארץ שאברהם מגיע אליה בעקבות צו ה', והיא הארץ הנבחרת על ידי ה' להתחיל בה את הקריאה בשם ה'. אברהם מבין שהוא הגיע לארץ לא כדי להתערב בכנענים ולהיות אחד מהם, אלא להפך – כדי להוות אלטרנטיבה לתרבות

פרשת חיי שרה מתארת את שלושת מעשיו האחרונים של אברהם, המאפיינים את דרכו בחייו: רכישת מערת המכפלה – מימוש הבטחת הארץ; מציאת זיווג ראוי ליצחק – מימוש הבטחת הזרע; סילוק בני הפלגשים – מימוש הבטחה שיצחק הוא הירש הממשיך את אברהם.

אברהם, כדרכו, מתייחס להבטחות ה' כיעוד שעליו לפעול למען הגשמתו, ולא כהבטחה האמורה להגיע אליו "בחינם" מאת ה'.

נרחיב את העיון לגבי מציאת זיווגו של יצחק.

אברהם שולח את אליעזר, עבדו, לחפש אישה הראויה ליצחק. הוא משיב אותו בשתי שבועות: האחת – שלא יקח לו אשה מבנות הכנעני אלא מחרן, ממשפחת המוצא של אברהם; השניה – שלא יוציא את יצחק לחרן לשם כך. שני התנאים שאברהם מציב מקשים על התהליך ומצמצמים את אפשרויות הבחירה, אך הם מגדירים את הערכים החשובים לאברהם, שעליהם אי אפשר להתפשר:

הערך האחד הוא המשכיות זרע אברהם בצורה הראויה להמשיך את דרכו, דרך ה'.

Continued from page 4

three different perceptions: how G-d perceives us, how society perceives us and how we perceive ourselves. The straight path is one viewed by all three as beautiful and harmonious.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis.

1. See Olat Re'iyah 33.
2. See the commentary of the Rosh and Sefer Mishlei 12:15 and 21:2.
3. Mesechet Avot 4:13: "Kol she'ruach ha'briyot nochah heimenu, ruach HaMakom nochah heimenu."
4. Mesechet Avot 3:10.
5. Rambam and others.

6. Rambam in both Mishneh Torah Hilchot De'ot 1 and Shemonah Perakim 4. See also Rabbeinu Bachya, Meiri, and Bartenura.
7. Ibid., see Halacha 4.
8. Often mistranslated as the middle path.
9. The Rambam integrates this with the "derech Hashem" Hashem mentioned that Avraham would teach to his children.
10. The Machzor Vitri connects this to the previous *mishnah's* (1:18) theme of the importance on the one hand of *emet* and *mishpat*, and *shalom* on the other — both must coexist together.
11. See the commentaries of the Meiri and Rabbeinu Yonah, and *Tosafot* to Masechet Nedarim 22b.
12. The Rashbatz brings this in his *peirush Magen Avot* in the name of Ritz Ge'ut, one of the earlier Spanish Rishonim. Others bring this based on Sefer Iyov 4:17 and Tehillim

- 149:2, which describe Hashem as the one who made us.
13. Masechet Berachot 17a.
14. The Tashbetz explains that the *girsah* was corrupted — the *vav* of "osehu" was mistakenly inserted into the second phrase of the *mishnah*. If we put the *vav* back into "osehu," the *mishnah* isn't saying you need both of these; it is saying that anyone who is *tiferet* in the eyes of *osehu* will automatically be *tiferet* in the eyes of all people. Living up to G-d's standards yields other people appreciating the way we're living.
15. Bamidbar 32:22. See Masechet Pesachim 13a and Masechet Yoma 38a.
16. The Sifrei explains that the two phrases of *tov* and *yashar* refer to how G-d and man see us, respectively. See also Bereishit Rabbah on 6:9.
17. Mishlei 3:4.

Three Contemporary Lessons from Chayei Sarah



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

Chayei Sarah is actually not about Sarah, but about Rivka. The message is clear: there is no “Chayei Sarah” without the continuity, without the “Chayei Rivka.” Avraham and Sarah will be a passing episode if there is no one to continue what they began.

Here are three special lessons from our first *Abba* and *Ima* that we can continue to apply today:

Facing Up to Assimilation

This may not be politically correct, but this is how the story of the post-Avraham and Sarah generation begins. First and foremost, Avraham demands that his children do not marry the children of another people. He is establishing something new here, and despite his desire for friendship and cooperation with the peoples of the region, there are red lines, and this is what he says to Eliezer when he sends him on his mission to find a wife for Yitzchak:

“And I will make you swear by the L-rd, the G-d of heaven and the G-d of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Yitzchak.’ And the servant said to him, ‘What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came?’ Avraham answered him, “On no account must you take my son back there! The L-rd, the G-d of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, ‘I will assign this land to your offspring’—He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there. And if the woman does not

consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there.”

On this point, there are no compromises. And nothing has changed since Avraham’s times. If anything, the situation is much worse. In my opinion, we are dealing too much with other issues and neglecting this issue, which should be *the* issue on the Jewish people’s agenda. In the United States, the sad reality for some time has been more than 60% intermarriage. We have seen this up close, and it is our responsibility to continue Avraham Avinu’s sacred mission.

Preserving Our Culture

Avraham and Sarah are establishing a new culture in the world: “Then the servant took 10 of his master’s camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor.”

Rashi tells us that “his master’s camels” were distinguished from other camels by being muzzled so they should not graze in other peoples’ fields.

This detail is mentioned again when the servant arrives at Rivka’s house: “So the man entered the house, and the camels were ungirded [he removed their muzzles - Rashi]. The camels were given straw and feed, and water was brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men with him.”

You may remember we have already encountered this very detail in *Parashat Lech Lecha*, when Avraham enters the stage of history. It is one of the first things we hear about him. Lot’s shepherds were wicked and grazed their animals in other fields, and because of this, Abram’s

shepherds rebuked them for this act of robbery (Rashi).

Lot chose to go to Sodom, and Avraham parted from him to build a society with a different culture. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe writes: This is Avraham Avinu’s innovation. Truth is not some abstract ideal, in thought only. Truth is expressed in the smallest deeds of man. Avraham Avinu renewed leadership in the world, how camels should walk, and when anyone saw a camel with his mouth muzzled, they said: This camel belongs to Avraham Avinu.

When building a Jewish home, these are its foundations. Put a muzzle over the mouth of your camel. And in today’s terms, that can refer to one’s car, one’s home, one’s cell phone. We have been building an alternative culture here for 4,000 years.

This is why it is clear to Eliezer that the first test of any intended bride for Yitzchak - who will continue the culture of Avraham and Sarah - is a test of kindness. This is the only way she will fit into this special family: “Let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your jar that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Yitzchak. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.”

Today too, young men and women look for many character traits in their prospective dates. Eliezer reminds us the first attribute we should be looking for in a descendant of Avraham and Sarah – *chesed*. Generosity. Thinking of others. Good *midot*.

Connecting Heaven and Earth

None of this works without *emunah* and *tefillah*. Eliezer, Avraham’s servant, sets out

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For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
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“**A**nd the life of Sarah was a hundred years and twenty years and seven years, the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron in the land of Canaan and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her” (Bereishit 23:1-2).

In the opening section of this week’s Parsha, Avraham purchases Ma’arat HaMachpela in Chevron as a burial place for Sarah. Over the course of 17 verses (Bereishit 23:3-20) the negotiations and details of the sale are described, with Avraham eventually paying 400 silver shekels to Ephron for his field and cave. The Torah could have easily and briefly informed us in a single verse that Avraham bought Ma’arat HaMachpela. Why do we need to be told who he bought it from, how he found him, the full details of the negotiations and how much he paid?

My late sister, Liora Graham z”l, taught me a Midrash which connects Avraham’s

purchase of Chevron to two other Biblical purchases:

“Rav Yudan bar Simon said, ‘This is one of three places about which the nations of the world cannot taunt Israel, saying, ‘They are stolen in your hands’, and these are them: The Cave of Machpela and the Beit Hamikdash and the burial place of Yoseph” (Bereishit Rabba 79:7).

Chevron (in Yehuda), Shechem (in Shomron) and Har HaBayit (in East Jerusalem) are among the most disputed territories in the world today. According to the Midrash, the purchases of Ma’arat HaMachpela, Har HaBayit (Divrei HaYamim I 21:25) and Kever Yoseph (Bereishit 33:9) are fully documented in the Torah so that nobody should ever claim that they do not rightfully belong to us.

Whilst these words of the Midrash can provide us with encouragement today, they should not lead to arrogance or complacency. The Midrash HaGadol teaches a different lesson from Avraham’s purchase of Ma’arat HaMachpela:

“Come and see the humility of Avraham Avinu, for The Holy One Blessed Be He promised him to give him and his descendants the Land forever and now he could only find a burial place for a (high) price, but he did not question the attributes of The Holy One Blessed Be He and he did not challenge. Furthermore, he only spoke to the inhabitants of the Land with humility” (Midrash HaGadol, Bereishit 23:4).

Although Hashem promised Avraham that the Land will always belong to us, he paid Ephron the full price for the field and cave and dealt with humility and decency towards the inhabitants of the Land.

Let nobody ever claim that we do not rightfully own Ma’arat HaMachpela, Har HaBayit or Kever Yoseph. Indeed, the entire Land was promised to us by Hashem. At the same time, we cannot assume automatic control of the Land. We must approach the Land with confidence, but also with pragmatism and humility.

Shabbat Shalom!

Continued from previous page

and knows what he must do first: “And he said, ‘O L-rd, G-d of my master Avraham, grant me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with my master Avraham: Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your pitcher that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’— let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Yitzchak. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.’ He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rivka, who was born to Betuel, the son of Milcah the wife of Avraham’s

brother Nachor, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder.”

Rabbi Shabtai Sabato writes that Rivka left her house even before Eliezer began to pray! Even before he arranged his prayer, reality was moving in the way he wanted, so to speak.

Eliezer is not the only one to pray in this episode of course. Yitzchak, the *chatan*, also prayed. When Eliezer and Rivka and the whole caravan arrive, Yitzchak has just established *tefillat Mincha* and Rivka is impressed as she sees a person praying for the first time.

For sure we should be acting in a practical way, but let us pray to G-d before every step we take.

In Conclusion

We have discussed three elements that appear in Chayei Sarah – vehement opposition to assimilation and souls being detached from the Jewish people, a culture counterintuitive to the accepted world culture, a world rooted in self-sacrifice, *chesed* and generosity, and of course prayer, constantly linking our actions to G-d. May we continue in this path and, as her sons and daughters, be a worthy continuation of Chayei Sarah.

A Call from the Future



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l

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 G-d 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 G-d still insisted they would have a child.

Eventually it came. There was rejoicing. Sarah said: “G-d has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” (Gen. 21:6) Then came the terrifying moment when G-d said to Abraham: “Take your son, your only one, the one you love... and offer him as a sacrifice.” (Gen. 21:6) 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 G-d had asked of him. Yet he could hardly say that G-d’s promises had been fulfilled. Seven times he had been promised the land of Canaan, yet when



Abraham did not wait for G-d to act. He understood one of the profoundest truths of Judaism: that G-d is waiting for us to act.

Sarah died he owned not one square inch of it, not even a place in which to bury his wife. G-d 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 G-d to act. He understood one of the profoundest truths of Judaism: *that G-d 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 G-d. 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



First build the future. Only then can you mourn the past.

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 G-d. 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. G-d forbid that we experience any of this, but if we do, this is how to survive.

G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d 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.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- How can building the future help with your grief over a past event?
- Can you think of examples of Jews who have followed Avraham's lead, and built for the future despite the trauma of the past?
- What do you see as your own *tafkid*? What is G-d calling on you from the future to do?

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).

The First Jewish Burial



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

After Sarah's passing, Avraham Avinu purchased *Ma'arat HaMachpelah* as her burial plot. The Jew lives differently, dies differently, and is even buried differently.

The Torah formulates the *mitzvah* to bury the dead in the context of the verse that refers to a person executed by *beit din*:

כי קבור תקברנו ביום ההוא כי קללת אלקים תלוי – “You shall surely bury him on that day, for a hanging person is a curse of G-d” (Devarim 21:23).

Rashi explains that a hanging body constitutes “a degradation of the King, for man is made in the likeness of His image, and Yisrael are His children.” Rashi’s interpretation alludes to an important point. The verse does not mean that since all humans, including non-Jews, are created *בצלם אלקים* (in the image of G-d), it would be considered a “curse of G-d” to leave the body uninterred, for the obligation to bury the dead is limited to Jewish bodies. Rather, the verse refers to the more enhanced level of “the image of G-d” possessed only by Jews, referred to as *בנים למקום* – “sons of the Omnipresent” (Avot 3:14).

Since the verse could have been read to include even non-Jewish bodies in the burial obligation, as they too were created in the Divine image, what was the basis of Chazal’s differentiation between Jewish and non-Jewish bodies in regard to burial?

Perhaps the explanation is based on the distinction between religious articles that are *תשמישי קדושה* (accessories to sacred items) and those that are *תשמישי מצוה* (objects used for the performance



The Jew lives differently, dies differently, and is even buried differently.

of a *mitzvah*) (Megillah 26b). Objects in the former category, such as Torah mantles and *tefillin* bags, must be buried when they become unfit for use since their *kedushah* (holiness) remains intact. In contrast, objects in the latter category, such as a *lulav*, *shofar*, or *tzitzit*, may be discarded when they become unusable, since the object’s *kedushah* no longer exists.

The *Nefesh HaChayim* explains that the criterion to determine which category a religious article belongs to is whether it contains or services written words of Torah.

This is because the root source of all *kedushah* is G-d Himself, and the words of Torah are considered to be a description of His Divine Essence. This is why a Sefer Torah has more *kedushah* than *tefillin*, and *tefillin* has more than a *mezuzah*; the object with a greater amount of written Torah has a greater degree of *kedushah*. Even within the category of *tefillin*, the *shel rosh* (of the head) has more *kedushah* than the *shel yad* (of the arm), as it contains the additional letter *ו* on the outside of its *bayit* (box). The Rambam writes that the *Aseret HaDibrot* (Ten Commandments) engraved on the original *luchot* (tablets) were the very same as those written in every Sefer Torah, implying that the “Author’s

Copy” of the original *luchot* themselves, although priceless, would not have any more *kedushah* than any Torah scroll in our shuls today. On the contrary, a Sefer Torah would have more *kedushah* than the *luchot* because of the greater amount of words of Torah it contains!

The same analysis applies to the physical body as well. In the case of non-Jews, whose bodies enable them to perform the seven Noachide *mitzvot*, the physical body falls into the category of *תשמישי מצוה*. Although fully deserving of respect while still able to perform the *mitzvot*, these objects lose their *kedushah* when they become unfit for use, that is, upon death.

In contrast, the body of the Jew, infused with words of Torah learning, falls into the category of *תשמישי קדושה*. These objects, even when they become unusable, never lose their *kedushah* status and require *genizah* in the form of proper burial.

Even the body of a non-observant Jew, through which Torah learning never flowed during his lifetime, was still exposed to words of Torah. The Gemara indicates that an angel teaches the entire Torah to every Jewish fetus. Although the newborn child does not consciously remember the Torah studied in utero, that study still makes a subconscious impression, and this is what endows every Jewish soul with the status of *גופיה קדושה* (the sacred item itself) and every Jewish body with the status of *תשמישי קדושה*.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.

The Ways of the Satan



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

Having concluded last week's parsha with the climax of Akeidat Yitzchak, we begin this week with the death of Sarah Immeinu. Rashi famously points out the juxtaposition between these two episodes by explaining that Sarah's death was a result of her being informed about Akeidat Yitzchak. The shock of being told that her son was going to be sacrificed was ultimately the cause of her passing away.

We would have expected Rashi to point out this juxtaposition immediately when the Torah informs us of Sarah's passing. Interestingly, Rashi waits to comment on this until the phrase **וַיָּבֵא אַבְרָהָם לְסֹפֵד לְשָׂרָה וְלִבְכָתָהּ** – “And Avraham came to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her.” Why specifically at this point does Rashi choose to make note of the juxtaposition? Furthermore, Rashi's commentary deals solely with pshat, the simple understanding of the words the Torah uses. How is the chronology of the events in the Torah the simple understanding of Avraham mourning and crying over his late wife?

There is another striking question on this verse. The letter **ב** in the word **וְלִבְכָתָהּ** – “And to bewail her” is written smaller than the other letters. The Baal HaTurim explains that this is to teach us that Avraham only cried a little bit over the passing of Sarah. He adds that the reason



Sarah had indeed lived a long and productive life. Nevertheless, does that really warrant the Torah telling us that Avraham only cried a little bit?

for this was **כִּי זְקֵנָה הִי** – because she was old. Sarah had indeed lived a long and productive life. Nevertheless, does that really warrant the Torah telling us that Avraham only cried a little bit?

The Nesivos Shalom provides a beautiful insight to answer all of our questions. Every night at Maariv we ask Hashem for the following, **וְהִסֵּר שָׂטָן מִלְּפָנֵינוּ וּמֵאַחֲרֵינוּ** – “Remove the Satan from before us and from behind us.” There are two methods that the Yetzer Hara uses to try to cause man to stumble. There is the Yetzer Hara that is before us, that attempts to stop man from performing a Mitzvah. When Avraham Avinu was heading towards the Akeida, the Satan put up different kinds of roadblocks in order to stop him from reaching his destination. There is another Yetzer Hara that is behind us, that attempts to make a person regret the Mitzvah they have just performed or to at least view the Mitzvah as less significant or less important than it

really is. The Nesivos Shalom explains that when Avraham Avinu left the Akeida, it was already time for Sarah to pass away. The Yetzer Hara used the news of Akeidat Yitzchak as the cause of her death in an attempt to make Avraham feel regret towards following Hashem's commandment of nearly sacrificing his son.

Aware of this, Avraham knew that if he cried too much over the death of his wife, it would have appeared that he regretted his actions and wished the whole episode of Akeidat Yitzchak never occurred. **כִּי זְקֵנָה הִי** – “Because she was old”, doesn't mean that she was physically old but rather that her time in this world had come to an end. The reason Avraham cried only a little was to make it clear that regardless of whether Akeidat Yitzchak took place or not, Sarah would have passed away anyway and he by no means regretted following Hashem's instructions thoroughly. It now makes perfect sense why Rashi waited until Avraham's tears to note the juxtaposition. Rashi is pointing out exactly the same message and is also directing us towards the pshat of the verse. Avraham's minimal tears were a defence against the Yetzer Hara that works from behind us, willing us to regret our good deeds.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

One's Real Age



Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef zt"l
Former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel

In *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, it says וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְּיָמָיו "Avraham was now old, advanced in years." What does this double language mean? Why does the Torah write both "old" and "advanced in years"?

A Rabbi once visited a town he had never been to before. The locals gave their honored guest a tour, taking him to see the *shul*, the school, the *mikveh* and even the kosher supermarket. And then they took him to the cemetery.

The Rabbi was shocked to see that all the *matzeivot*, gravestones, testified to children who had died young: Reuven, 12 years old. Shimon, 11 years old. Levi, 15 years old, and so on.

"Was there a plague here?" he asked. "A pogrom? Why did everybody here die so young?"

"No Rabbi," the Mayor explained. "In this town, everybody keeps track of all the time they spend each day learning Torah and doing *mitzvot*. At the end of the day, we each count up those hours and write them down on a little pad. At the end of the week, we each tally up our total hours for the week, say 7-10 hours. At the end of the month, we do another tally - this could be 20 or 30 hours. And at the end of the year, we do the math. Same when anyone dies. We add up the total amount of time they spent learning Torah and doing *mitzvot*. For this person, it was 10 years, for that person 12. The ages on the *matzeivot* are their Torah ages, not their biological ones."

A sobering message.

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְּיָמָיו means not only was Avraham old in years, but he filled all of his days with Torah and *mitzvot*. Not just

one hour or two, but from dawn to dusk - *hachnasat orchim*, spreading G-d's Name to the world, teaching people all about monotheism.

Avraham Avinu knew his purpose in life and devoted every waking moment to fulfilling it. He spent every day learning Torah and doing *mitzvot*, balancing *mitzvot* between man and G-d with *mitzvot* between man and man. He understood the value of time and defining one's priorities in life.

The father of our nation set a high standard for us to emulate.

(Excerpted from one of Rav Ovadia's weekly parasha shiurim.)

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was the Rishon LeTzion, the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, from 1973 to 1983, and author of the authoritative halachic work, *Yalkut Yosef*.

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All Equally Great Days



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

On the first pasuk of the parasha, Rashi tells us that the last phrase of the verse “*shene chaye sara*” is to underscore that “*kulan shavin l'tova*” – all of her years were equally great. In the sefer *L'hitaneg*, Rav Yitzhak Zilber is quoted as asking a simple question. How can we refer to all of the days of Sarah's life as being equally great? She was childless until the age of 90. She was taken captive by Pharaoh and Avimelech. There seemed to have been better days and more challenging days. Why refer to her whole life as being “equally great”?

To answer this question, he cites the following story. There were two chefs who previously served as cooks in the Russian army. Upon moving to Israel, they secured work as chefs in the Mir Yeshiva. One of the chefs would constantly complain of

how difficult his job was and how little he was being compensated. The other chef would respond to his colleague's complaints by stating how grateful he was that he is able to prepare food for students studying Torah in Israel rather than for the Russian army. He would do so for free if he was not in need of a livelihood to support his family. Both chefs performed the same tasks on a daily basis, yet one was bitter while the other felt fortunate.

Sarah had the attitude of the latter chef. No matter what difficulties she experienced, on a daily basis she expressed gratitude for all that transpired. Her hashkafa or outlook was positive.

We all have difficulties and face challenges. Yet, we should emulate Sarah Imenu and be able to have a positive outlook. To appreciate the good that we have

and focus on the positive rather than the difficulties. We can perform a simple act like shopping for shabbat or driving our children to school. It can be considered an onerous activity, or we can view it as a step towards fulfilling our oneg shabbat and facilitating our children's chinuch.

While preparing for the chagim, people may highlight the hardship of cooking and cleaning, rather than the anticipation of spending quality time with the family and partaking in inspirational davening and shiurim. This is a nuance that our children detect and it can have an everlasting negative impact on them. We should act as Sarah and the second cook – viewing the cup as always being half full. Infusing positive energy into our lives to turn all our days into equally great days!



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Chayei Sarah: Strive for Greatness



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

In this week's *parsha*, *Chayei Sarah*, the Torah tells us of Sarah *Imeinu's* passing at the age of one hundred and twenty seven years old. Following her death, Avraham *Avinu* negotiates the purchase price of the *Me'aras Ha'Machpela*, buys the cave and buries his beloved wife: וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם אֶת-שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ, אֶל-מְעָרַת שָׂדֵה הַמְּכַפְלָה עַל-פְּנֵי מְמָרָא—הוּא חֶבְרוֹן: בְּאֶרֶץ, כְּנָעַן and after that, Avraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre, which is Chevron, in the land (of Canaan) (Bereishis 23:19).

The *parsha* begins by telling us:

וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה, מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעָה שָׁנִים שָׁנֶי, חַיֵּי שָׂרָה

and the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; these were the years of Sarah's life (23:1).

Rashi famously comments:

ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים. לכה נכתב שנה בכל כלל וכלל, לומר לה שכל אחד נדרש לעצמו, בת ק' כבת כ' לחטא, מה בת כ' לא חטאה, שהרי אינה בת ענשיו, אף בת ק' בלא חטא, ובת כ' כבת ז' ליפי -

The word 'shana' (years) is written at each category (after the hundreds, tens and ones) to teach you that each one is expounded on its own. When she was one hundred years old, she was like twenty years old with respect to sin; just as one who is twenty years old is considered sin-free, so too when Sarah was one hundred she was without sin. And when she was twenty years old, she was like seven years old with regard to beauty.

Furthermore, Rashi comments: *The years of Sarah's life: They were all equal for goodness.*

Our first foremother, Sarah, was a *tzadikes* who was sin free when she died, as beautiful in her old age as in her youth, and who recognized that all the years of her life - even the difficult *nisyonos* she

and her husband, Avraham, faced - were equal for goodness. She truly lived up to her *tafkid* of becoming the *Eim b'Yisrael*, the first mother of Israel who birthed our nation.

There is a well-known Medrash that teaches:

R' Akiva was sitting and lecturing and his students were falling asleep. He sought to wake them up, so he said: What did Esther see that she ruled over 127 provinces? He answered his own question and said: Let Esther, the daughter of Sarah, who lived for 127 years, come and rule over 127 provinces! (Medrash Bereishis Rabbah 58:3)

This is a seemingly very strange Medrash. How can we understand that the great R' Akiva's students were falling asleep in his shiur? How would his connection between Esther *Ha'Malka* and Sarah *Imeinu* wake them up? And what lesson does this Medrash teach us?

R' Ari Wasserman quotes R' Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* and writes "(In his *Michtav M'Eliyahu*) R' Dessler explains that there are two ways of rousing oneself to higher levels of serving Hashem. One can either contemplate his lowliness, or aspire to greatness by aiming high.

"Rabbi Akiva chose the latter path; (he strove and aspired to reach greatness by always seeking to attain higher levels in his *avodas Hashem*). Well versed in the most esoteric aspects of the Torah, R' Akiva was surely speaking about very lofty things that day in the *beis medrash*.

"That's why his listeners were falling asleep: they thought that they could never possibly attain such heights. (They were focusing on their lowliness, instead of focusing on their boundless potential and ability to reach ever-higher heights.) Therefore, says R' Dessler, R' Akiva sought

to 'wake them up' to the fact that, precisely by 'thinking big,' they could indeed become great.

"Just look at Queen Esther! he was telling them. She achieved greatness by contemplating the life of Sarah *Imeinu* and asking herself (to paraphrase another Medrash), *מתי יגיעו מעשי למעשה אבתי* - when will my deeds reach those of my ancestors?

"... This was precisely Rabbi Akiva's message to her students: If you really want to reach higher heights in serving Hashem, you can find inspiration everywhere, even - and especially - in that which currently lies beyond you.

"R' Dessler's understanding of this fascinating medrash teaches us the importance of striving to improve. We should never be content with the status quo. Only by constantly working on ourselves (to reach greater heights) can we, too, (grow to) serve Hashem with clarity and completeness" (Welcome to Our Table 2, p.45-46).

Only when we look at those who are greater than us, and we recognize our own boundless potential to reach higher heights, will we be able to grow in our *avodas Hashem*. We may never become a Sarah *Imeinu*, an Esther *Ha'Malka*, or a Rabbi Akiva, but we can certainly all become greater than we are today, if we only believe in ourselves and our ability to grow.

It happened one time that a *talmid* of the great R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel *zt'l* (1943-2011, Rosh Yeshiva Yeshivas Mir Yerushalayim) visited his home on a Friday afternoon and saw him sitting with two young men wearing jeans and t-shirts, with *Chumashim* open in front of them. When they left, the *talmid* asked the Rosh Yeshiva, incredulously, "Was the Rosh

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Hashem Elokei HaShamayim



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag
Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

In *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, Avraham sends his servant to his 'home-town' of Charan in search of a wife for his son Yitzchak. To guarantee that Eliezer will faithfully fulfill that mission, Avraham makes his servant take an oath in the Name of: "Hashem, the G-d of the Heavens, and the G-d of the Earth."

However, two verses later, when Avraham must allay Eliezer's fear that the wife he finds may prefer to stay in Charan, he promises his servant that: "Hashem, the G-d of the Heavens, who had taken him [Avraham] from his homeland..." will send an 'angel' to assist him.

The classical commentators are troubled by two problems. First of all, Avraham's description of G-d as "Hashem, the G-d of the Heavens and the G-d of the Earth" seems to imply 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 G-d of 'heaven and earth'"?

Secondly, why does Avraham 'shorten' his second description of G-d to simply "the G-d of the Heavens," without mentioning 'the earth' at all?

Heavens 'and' Earth

Radak offers a philosophical explanation, claiming that Avraham is worried that his servant – even though he believes in 'the G-d of the heavens' – may not believe G-d'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 G-d overseeing what happens in



Avraham is worried that his servant – even though he believes in 'the G-d of the heavens' – may not believe G-d's Providence extends over mundane matters 'down on earth' as well.

the Heavens, but He also oversees what happens on earth. However, when Avraham later explains to Eliezer how G-d had earlier spoken to him, it is sufficient for Avraham to mention only 'the G-d of the Heavens.'

Seforno explains that Avraham must impress upon his servant the severity of this oath. To assure his servant will keep it, he reminds him that G-d 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. By this statement, Avraham warns his servant that should he break this oath, he could expect not only punishment in this world but also in the world to come!

Ibn Ezra relates to the fact that 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.'

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 down here on earth, Ramban understands *aretz* as referring to the Land of Israel. Therefore, because his servant is now leaving *Eretz Yisrael*, Avraham adds specifically the phrase *Elokei haAretz* to the standard phrase of *Elokei haShamayim*.

One might also suggest that by using these two phrases to describe G-d, Avraham may be alluding to the opening line of *Sefer Bereishit*, and hence to a thematic connection between the purpose of Creation and G-d's involvement in the process of *Am Yisrael* becoming a Nation to serve Him.

Elokei HaShamayim

Rashi differentiates between Man's perception of G-d before Avraham was chosen and Man's perception of G-d now. Back when G-d first commanded Avraham to leave his homeland, no one on earth had yet recognized G-d. Hence His Kingdom was only in Heaven, as reflected in 24:7. But now, when Avraham sends Eliezer on his mission (see 24:3), he had already begun to proclaim G-d's Name to the public, hence *Hashem* can now be referred to as both *Elokei haShamayim* and *Elokei haAretz*.

Just as our forefathers referred to G-d in different ways based on the context of their relationship with Him, we also refer to G-d in many different ways in the 19 blessings of the daily *Amidah* – reflecting His various attributes in our relationship with Him. Next time you *daven*, take note!

Heavenly Matches



Rabbi Eli Mansour

Edmond J Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

Parashat Hayeh-Sara tells the story of Eliezer, Abraham Abinu's trusted servant whom Abraham sent to find a wife for Yishak. Abraham made Eliezer take an oath that he would not bring for Yishak a woman from the local population, and would instead find a wife from Abraham's homeland. In imposing this oath upon Eliezer, Abraham said, "I will make you swear by Hashem, G-d of the heavens and G-d of the earth" (24:3).

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (Spain, 1089-1167) explains why Abraham emphasized in this context that Hashem is "G-d of the heavens and G-d of the earth." He writes: "Because [the designation] of the daughter of so-and-so for so-and-so on earth is from the heavens." The matches that are made here on earth are decided up in the heavens, and so as Abraham sends his servant to find a spouse for his son, Yishak, he speaks of Hashem as "G-d of the heavens and G-d of the earth," emphasizing that the matches on earth originate in the heavens. Ibn Ezra concludes, "Ve'hu Sod" - "This is a secret," indicating that this interpretation touches upon profound Kabbalistic teaching.



The "Zivug Sheni" – the reuniting of the two souls in this world through marriage, is not predetermined and needs to be earned.

Later commentators uncovered for us the deep concepts underlying Ibn Ezra's remark. The Gemara teaches that even before a fetus is formed, a heavenly voice declares whom that person will marry. However, the Gemara adds, this refers only to "Zivug Rishon" - "the first marriage." When it comes to "Zivug Sheni" - a person's second marriage, this is not predetermined, and who a person marries the second time depends on his or her deeds. On the surface, the Gemara here speaks of people who marry more than once, due to the death of their spouse or divorce. The Kabbalists, however, explain this Gemara differently. They explain that a husband and wife's souls were created together, bound into a single entity. Just as the Sages teach that Adam and Hava were created as a single body, and were

then separated, similarly, a husband and wife's souls began as a single soul in the heavens. They were then separated and sent down to the earth as two different beings, and so when a man and woman marry, their souls reunite and again become bound into the single soul that they had initially comprised. The Gemara thus teaches that the "Zivug Rishon" - the initial bond between a husband and wife, which existed in the heavens before they were born, is predetermined by G-d, and has nothing to do with their actions and their merits. But the "Zivug Sheni" - the reuniting of the two souls in this world through marriage, is not predetermined and needs to be earned. Indeed, as we know, in order to find a spouse, one must develop his character, be responsible and prepare himself to build a close relationship and care for a family. The original bond between the two souls happens without effort, but the "Zivug Sheni" here on earth requires a great deal of hard work.

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Yeshiva learning Chumash with Rashi with them?" "Yes," the Rosh Yeshiva replied. "But why?" asked the *talmid* (as a learning *seder* in Chumash with Rashi was well below the Rosh Yeshiva's exalted

level of learning!) "Because they asked," the Rosh Yeshiva replied (Rav Nosson Tzvi, Artscroll, p.280-281).

We can all reach higher heights, if we but arouse our own selves, by remembering that the path to greatness lies in thinking big, and striving to attain that which is just beyond reach.



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It's not Me!



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

When Avraham wants to find a wife for his son Yitzchak, he sends his servant Eliezer to accomplish this great task (Bereishis 24:3): “I will cause you to swear in the name of Hashem, the G-d of heaven and earth that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of Kna’an among whom I dwell.” Why was Avraham so insistent that Yitzchak marry a woman from Charan, Avraham’s hometown, but not from Kna’an. Considering that they are all idol worshipers, what is the great difference between the women in these two places?

The Ran offers an amazing principle to help us understand Avraham’s insistence that the mother of the Jewish nation be from Charan rather than Kna’an. He explains that תכונות רעות, bad character traits, like cruelty and nastiness, are passed on from generation to generation. A nation with a bad character can change its nature, but only with great effort. דעות רעות, false ideologies, however, are not passed down from generation to generation. The environment can have a significant influence on ideology, but each person must make his own decisions and think through various issues for himself. דעות רעות, false ideologies are, relative to character traits, a matter of בחירה, individual free choice.

Based on this principle, the Ran explains that Avraham knew that in finding a wife for Yitzchak he was building the Jewish nation. He therefore wanted to ensure that Yitzchak’s wife came from a nation, even if it was a nation of idol worshipers, which had good מדות, good character traits. The people in Kna’an were not only ideologically bad. They were also cruel and nasty people. The citizens of Charan, however, where Avraham grew up, were

at least kind hearted. They had good character traits. Avraham, and later Yitzchak, were therefore very careful that their children marry women who, even if they came from idolatrous backgrounds, had a לב טוב, a good heart, so that the Jewish nation would be built on a foundation of good character traits, which are passed on throughout the generations.

Why was it so important that Yitzchak marry a woman with a לב טוב, a good heart? The Mishna in Avos (2:13) says the following: “[Rav Yochanan ben Zakai] said to [his students]: ‘Go and see which is the best path to which a person should cling.’ Rabi Eliezer says, ‘a good eye.’ Rabi Yehoshua says, ‘a good friend.’ Rabi Yossi says, ‘a good neighbor.’ Rabi Shimon says, ‘one who sees the future.’ Rabi Elazar [ben Aroch] says, ‘a good heart.’ He said to them, ‘To me, the words of Rabi Elazar ben Aroch are more correct than your words, because your words are included in his.’”

According to Rav Yochanan ben Zakai, the most important good mida is a לב טוב, a good heart, because it is the root and source for all of the other good character traits. תכונות טובות. This trait of having a לב טוב was therefore the trait Avraham sought for Yitzchak’s future wife.

But what is the source of a לב טוב, how does one acquire a good heart? According to the Ramchal, the Ramak, the Chovos Halevavos, and other seforim, the source of a good heart is the trait of ענוה, humility. When one is humble, and nullifies his “I,” his אנוכי, his ego, he can look out for others and their needs. If a person has humility, he sees beyond his אמותו, his own person space and focuses on others and things greater than himself. This is the root of the לב טוב, the good heart.

Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa explains Yaakov’s statement (Bereishis 28:16) “indeed Hashem is in this place and I did not know it” in the following way: “Hashem is within me, but I did not know it because the “אנוכי,” my ego caused me not to know it.” A person who is arrogant, who has an exaggerated sense of self cannot see G-d in his life. As the Gemara in Sota 5a says, “Hashem says, with regard to every arrogant person, ‘Both he and I cannot live together in the same world.’”

Avraham, in contrast, had no sense of ego. He said (Bereishis 18:27) “אנוכי עפר ורֶגֶם,” my sense of ego, my אנוכי is nothing but dust and ashes. He knew that humility is the foundation of a לב טוב, a good heart. That is why he sought out a wife for Yitzchak with a kind-hearted nature. Eliezer also internalized this message. When he came to Lavan and Besuel, he said (Bereishis 24:24) “I am the servant of Avraham.” In other words, Eliezer was saying: “Before we begin, let me tell you the perspective from which this marriage is going to begin. I am not coming here for myself. My ‘I’ is merely a servant of Avraham, who himself is ‘עפר ורֶגֶם,’ dust and ashes.

The Chasam Sofer asks why Avraham makes it a point to say that Yitzchak may not marry a woman from the Kna’anim, the Canaanites, “among whom I dwell.” Didn’t Eliezer already know that he and Avraham both lived in Kna’an and therefore that they live among the Kna’anim? According to what we have said, and the way the Drashos Haran explains Avraham’s intent, we can understand that Avraham was actually explaining to Eliezer why he was insistent that Yitzchak not marry a woman from Kna’an. He was explaining that the problem with Kna’an is that אנוכי, egotism, a sense of “I,” dwells

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The First 12-Step Program in History And Why It Didn't Work



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

It would not be a bad idea for contemporary descendants of Ishmael – and for all of us – to reflect on the individual names of Ishmael's 12 sons, who all became princes and fathers of Ishmaelite nations.

"These are the names of Ishmael's sons in order of their birth," records the Torah in Chayei Sarah, and it goes on to list them in three groups and in three separate verses. The Torah then relates where they lived in the Middle East. It concludes its account – and the entire portion – by stating these ambiguous words: "They fell in the presence of all their brethren."

What is this episode telling us? Though the Bible records many genealogical and historical facts, it is fundamentally not a book of history or genealogy, but as its very name "Torah" indicates, it is a book of instruction, a blueprint for human life.

But what is the relevance of the 12 ancient names of Ishmael's children? And why did Ishmael give his sons these particular names?

The writings of Jewish mysticism explain that these names represent Ishmael's 12-step program toward living a healthy and well-balanced life. His guide to good living covers the three primary components of life: health, relationships and work.

A. Health

The first group of Ishmael's sons, comprised of four names, represents his four-step guide toward good health.

1. Nebayoth

Nebayoth in Hebrew means hollowness. This indicates the need to maintain a body that is hollow and clean from trash and substances detrimental to the human organism. The body is not a garbage can. The body must remain "hollow," free and light, translucent and filled with alacrity and energy.

2. Kedar

The meaning of the Hebrew word Kedar is warmth or heat. This represents the need to exercise regularly, maintaining a warm body temperature and good blood circulation.

3. Adbiel

The meaning of this name is "do not overeat." Even if you are eating nutritious foods, you should consume only the amounts that are needed for your health.

4. Mibsam

The Hebrew translation of Mibsam is spice. In addition to good eating habits and regular exercising, one should add some "spice" and "seasoning" to his or her bodily life, enriching its existence and giving it pizzazz. This is achieved through fine living – eating first rate foods, drinking fine drinks, absorbing the sights and fresh air of nature, enjoying fragrant scents, etc.

B. Relationships

The next group of Ishmael's children, comprised of three sons, represents Ishmael's three-step guide towards effective relationships, both in the home and in the workplace.

5. Mishma

Mishmah means to listen, to pay heed. You must cultivate the skill to truly listen to another human being.

6. Dumah

Dumah means silence. The second step toward creating a good relationship consists of the ability to remain silent. You must not always feel that you need to respond to your wife's criticism, or don't always have to give an answer to a question asked. Remain silent. You won't perish if you don't shoot a response out of your hip; your silence may even grant you unexpected insight. Successful people do a lot more listening than talking.

7. Massa

Massa, which literally means "a burden," symbolizes the third step which is effective in developing balanced and long-term relationships, namely, patience and tolerance, the ability to tolerate and contain the burdens of another human being, though they may be flawed and imperfect.

C. Once our bodies and our relationships are in order, we may approach the final group of Ishmael's five sons, conveying his five-step program toward work and productivity. In this case, the five names need to be read and understood in a single sequence.

Chadad in Aramaic means newness. Tema indicates wonder. Yetur is a straight line. Nafish means serenity, finally, Kedmah means first and ahead.

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Chayei Sarah: Holy Shlepping



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

The holy Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld, zt'l, was one of the great tzadikim of Yerushalayim in the early part of the Twentieth Century. Rav Zonnenfeld's daughter, Reb-betzin Rochel Breindel Friedman, shared the following memory of her great father: Once when she was a young girl, her father was particularly late in returning from the Beis Medrash. Concerned about his whereabouts, Rochel Breindel's mother sent her to go and see if anything was wrong. On the way, she found her father filling up pails of water for two little children. "Tatty, what's going on? Are you the new *vasertreiger*, the new water-schlepper in town?"

"My dear," he replied, "as I was coming home I saw these two children standing dangerously close to the edge of the well trying to draw water; I admonished them to move away, that it was unsafe, and 'Let the waterboy bring it to your house!' The older of the children replied that they couldn't afford to have water delivered. I asked where their parents were. Their mother recently gave birth and their father is sick in bed with a fever and unable to leave the house. I've been drawing pails for them to bring home to fill the water tank...."

"But *Tatteh*, you're wearing a *kaftan* and are the Rav of the neighborhood, what will people say?" She asked her father. "It's not *kavodik*, it is below your dignity."

"What will *people* say? What would the *Ribbono Shel Olam* say if I didn't help these children? Could I go home and calmly eat my breakfast while these poor young children are endangering their lives in order to bring water for their incapacitated parents?"

Rav Zonnenfeld straightened up and looked his daughter lovingly in the eye.

"Please remember, my child, there is nothing more *mechubad*, nothing more honorable, than helping other Yidden."

■ ■ ■

Our sedra recounts Eliezer's mission to Aram Naharayim to find a wife suitable for Yitzchak Avinu. Eliezer davens that Hashem will perform a *chesed* for his master Avraham, namely a clear indicator that he has found the right match: a young woman among the maidens at the city's well, a central meeting spot, who would be forthcoming and gracious in offering water for him and his camels. Before even finishing his *tefillah*, Eliezer spots Rivka:

...And behold, Rivka came out... and her pitcher was on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and she filled her pitcher and ascended.

The servant ran toward her and said, "Please, let me sip a little water from your pitcher."

"Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her pitcher upon her hand and let him drink. (24:15-18)

Rashi explains why Eliezer was excited and ran toward Rivka: Seeing that the water rose up from within the spring to greet her, he understood that she was a *tzadekes*, a righteous woman who merited a miraculous event. Witnessing this, Eliezer sensed it might be the answer to his prayer, and this was confirmed as Rivka generously offered him a drink and to fetch more water for his camels and entourage. This time however, there was something different as Rivka approached the spring:

...And she ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. (24:20)

Unlike the first time Rivka approached the wellspring and the water rose up to greet her, this time there was no supernatural event. In fact, she had to expend considerable effort, lowering the jug, filling it and then lifting the heavy vessel onto her shoulder.

The Kedushas Levi, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy'a, shares an important insight, suggesting why this is so:

When Eliezer saw Rivka for the first time, she was simply getting herself a drink to quench her thirst. In order to honor the needs of the *tzadekes*, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* performed a miracle, and the water rose to greet her. The world is in service of the righteous.... However in her second trip to the spring, when Rivka's intention was to serve Eliezer, to draw water not for her own needs, but for him and the camels, no miracle was forthcoming and the water did not rise to greet her.

For what is most essential in a mitzvah — and in performing an act of *chesed* in particular — is the hard work, investment and effort we expend. There are no shortcuts in giving to others, because a shortcut might diminish the reward, as expressed in the piyut *Yigdal*, recited in our daily prayers: "Hashem repays the righteous **for his actions**, and punishes the wicked in proportion to their wickedness."

While we are held accountable for the wrongdoings that we commit *k'rishaso*, "according to their negativity", the acts of *chesed* and goodness that we have done are rewarded *k'mifalo*, "according to our action". And the reward for this is generous, as it takes into account all of our intention, investment and effort.

■ ■ ■

"Yitzchak went out to converse with G-d in the field at dusk, and

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Sleepy Sermon

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

Once, when Rabbi Akiva was teaching his students, they appeared to be lethargic, almost dozing. Rabbi Akiva aroused his students by referring to *Parshat Chayei Sarah*, which begins by relating that Sarah lived “100 years and 20 years and 7 years.” He then said that Queen Esther merited ruling over 127 lands of the Persian Empire because of her ancestress Sarah. Aside from the bloodline, what other connection can we establish that would explain why Esther merited such greatness?

First, we must understand that these students were not ordinary students prone to boredom. Among them were the great Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda – giants whose work enabled Judaism to continue after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, says Rabbi Druck in *Dorash Mordechai*. However, that was exactly the point. Rabbi Akiva lived during a period of destruction and devastation for the Jewish people. There was work to do.

Both Sarah and Esther were founders of a new nation, Sarah at the point of our inception, and Esther at our rebirth from imminent annihilation. Despite these challenges and responsibilities, each maintained their *temimut*, their wholeness and purity, at every stage of their lives.

Rabbi Menachem Zion Sacks, a Holocaust survivor, adds another dimension to our discussion by citing a complementary source from Shir Hashirim Rabbah. Here too, a great Rabbi’s students needed to be roused from their lethargy.

Rabbi Yehuda told his students that in Egypt, one woman gave birth to 600,000 children at once. Who was this woman? Yocheved, who gave birth to Moshe Rabbeinu. Because of his role in saving the



While Avraham was out in the public domain, G-d’s spirit could not rest upon him, but Sarah, alone in her tent, found many opportunities to interact with G-d’s presence on a deeper level.

Jewish nation, Moshe is equivalent to the 600,000 people who left Egypt under his leadership.

Both Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yehuda were dealing with the sense of despondency and hopelessness of their generation after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. By citing these models – Sarah, Moshe and Esther, they were trying to inspire hope in their disciples and rally them to rebuild, to fire up their brothers and bring the assimilated Jews back to Torah. That was their mission, and that is what they accomplished, as did our great post-Holocaust Rabbis of the previous generation.

Rashi says the Torah adds “these were the years of Sarah” to tell us that all her years were equally good. Why were they all equal and good? Rabbi Sacks explains that in spite of her very difficult challenges, (even being imprisoned in a foreign king’s palace), Sarah never lost hope to do good. Similarly, Esther also went through challenges and trials, even being in a foreign king’s palace (albeit as queen), but she always remained as steadfast in her faith as she had been as a ward in Mordechai’s home. Rabbi Akiva could easily have given up, but by citing the examples of Esther and Sarah, he bolstered his own faith and spurred his disciples to action.

While Queen Esther ruled over 127 lands, Rabbi Alpert maintains that the connection between Esther and Sarah is stronger than external sovereignty, for Sarah, as her name suggests, also ruled. (שרה means a female officer or minister.) Both maintained mastery over themselves and over their faith, in whatever circumstances they found themselves. They always believed they were where G-d wanted them to be at the moment and that G-d was with them. In fact, the Netziv writes that although G-d may have spoken to Sarah only once whereas He spoke to Avraham many times, more of the Divine Spirit rested upon Sarah than upon Avraham. While Avraham was out in the public domain, G-d’s spirit could not rest upon him, but Sarah, alone in her tent, found many opportunities to interact with G-d’s presence on a deeper level.

The righteous ones are *temimim*, whole, complete, with integrity to their entire being. G-d knows this integrity as it is intertwined with time. Time is itself a product of G-d’s creation, and just as each of us is recreated each day, so is time. Therefore, each moment is unique and must be used appropriately. Each moment needs to be integrated into one’s life toward fulfilling one’s spiritual potential. Otherwise, one is killing time rather than letting it live on to eternity. Both Sarah and Queen Esther used their time fully, whether “creating souls” in Charan or maintaining Jewish identity during a time when G-d hid His face from us.

This was Rabbi Akiva’s message to his disciples. Just as Sarah Imeinu affected so many lives in her generation, so can you affect lives in this generation. Wake up from your lethargic despondency and make your time count.

Who is This Man?



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

How do we know it is him? How do we know it is her? We probably will not know. When Rivka saw Yitzchak, she asked, “Who is this man?” And she used the word “man” because she was talking about marriage. But Eliezer wisely answered her, “He is my lord,” to say, “I know him as a lord, I cannot know what he will be like as a man by a woman’s side.”

This week I spoke in New York to 6,000 people who had gathered to hear about the bone marrow registry of “Ezer Mizion” The timing for Parashat Chayei Sarah was wonderful. You can meet them anywhere in New York: Jewish single men and women, talented, beautiful and so smart, who hang out in the “right” places and even organize activities on campus to meet one or the other. As one student told me, “Yemima, give me any problem in computer science and I will be able to solve it. With this problem, being single, there’s not even the end of a way to solve it.” Right, I told her. Even Avraham, our father who discovered G-d in the world, had to plead with Eliezer, “And please do kindness.” And that is precisely the cure



The really great lesson in a relationship is that a person who gives a part of himself actually cures the worst disease in the world: loneliness.

for loneliness. Chesed. Donating bone marrow to cancer patients, I told them, is a compensation for everything:

One can come with infinite good will to donate, but there must be a “match,” a maximum match. The first bone marrow donation in history was when part of the first man’s body was taken to create a woman, so that the very first “help from Zion” (Ezer Mizion) was the “fitting counterpart for him” (Ezer Kenegdo)... “Finally, this one!” He was thrilled to have the perfect match, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” The really great lesson in a relationship is that a person who gives a part of himself actually cures the worst disease

in the world: loneliness. He himself is no longer in the “evil” of “being alone”.

This discovery is sensational. Chesed heals loneliness.

Rivka is so called because she was “reikah” – empty, or, in modern Hebrew: single. There is no suitable match for her in Haran, and she makes perhaps the greatest human discovery: when her vessels are empty, when she is lonely, she will fill the vessels of others. Thus she will not meet her husband, but she will meet the one who will draw him to her, like the rope that pulls the bucket from the well: “And an eternal love I have loved you, therefore I have I drawn you with kindness.”

We all need kindness, we all need love. We will never know in advance if what we have contributed will exactly fit and heal another’s body, but the kindness we do until the man comes, until the woman comes, will heal us. We will never be alone in the world again.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
balashon.com

In Parashat Chaye Sarah, we find many “directions” of blessing.

We see G-d blessing a human (Avraham):

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וְהָאֵלֹהִים בֵּרַךְ אֶת־אֲבְרָהָם בְּכָל־
“Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.” (Bereshit 24:1)

There is a human (Avraham’s servant) blessing G-d:

וְאֶקֶד וְאֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהּ וְאֲבָרַךְ אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבְרָהָם
אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת לְקַחַת אֶת־בֵּית־אֲדֹנָי לְבָנוֹ:
“Then I bowed low in homage to the LORD and blessed the LORD, the G-d of my master Abraham, who led me on the right way to get the daughter of my master’s brother for his son.” (Bereshit 24:48)

And humans blessing each other (Rivka’s family blessing her):

וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ אַחֲתֹנִי אֵת הַיְי לְאַלְפֵי
רִבְקָה וַיִּירֶשׁ זֶרְעָךָ אֶת שַׁעַר שַׁנְאָיו:
“And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, ‘O sister! May you grow into thousands of myriads; may your offspring seize the gates of their foes.’” (Bereshit 24:60)

The blessings from G-d to man, or man to man, are generally understood as bestowing something on the recipient. However, this perception is problematic when applied to blessings from man to G-d. How can a mere mortal grant anything to the Omnipotent Creator?

Some, therefore, imply that these two types of blessings are fully distinct. When it comes to blessing G-d, we are thanking or praising Him. And when G-d is described as בָּרוּךְ (as in Bereshit 24:27), some commentators explain that this means that He is the source of blessing, not passively blessed.

However, there are those who assert that there is no dichotomy in the meanings of בָּרַךְ. This approach began in the mystical tradition, but continued with modern rabbis as well. For example, this is Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch’s explanation:

“The understanding of this term [בָּרוּךְ] has been confused because people have objected to taking this word ‘to bless,’ referring from man to G-d, in the same

meaning as it has when used from G-d to man. It has been taken to be adjectival, like גִּרְחוּם חַנוּן... But that does not get us much further, we are constantly called upon לְבָרַךְ G-d ... If man is active in blessing G-d, then G-d must be blessed in a passive sense, He must be receiving blessing from man, one cannot get away from it. And why should one have to try and get away from it? ... The whole Torah teaches us nothing else other than how we can בָּרַךְ G-d and that we are to do so. Taking it to mean to praise or thank G-d, loses the true conception of blessing G-d. Those praises become בְּרוּכָה when they effect their real work on ourselves; if they direct our minds into the right channels, lift our hearts, and so further the work that G-d expects us to accomplish on ourselves.”¹ Certainly from our parasha we can see that these blessings flow in every direction.

1. Commentary on Bereshit 9:17

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

Find three words that have initials spelling the name of עשו in reverse order.

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

And the field of Efron became (23:17) (lit: rose up).
The Baal HaTurim explains that the Torah hints to the episode in which Esav rose up to protest the burial of Yaakov in the Cave of Machpela.

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within the people of Kna'an. That is why they lack kindness, and why a woman from such a place is unfit to become the mother of the future Jewish nation.

As the pasuk in Devarim 5:5 says, “אָנְכִי, עֹמֵד בֵּין ה' וּבֵינֵיכֶם,” the אנכי, the ego is the main impediment that stands between a Jew and Hashem. Only a nation who nullifies its sense of אנכיות, its sense “I,”

is fit to receive the first of the Ten Commandments which begins “אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ,” “I am the L-rd your G-d.”

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This is Ishmael's five-step program towards work and achievement:

8. Chadad

First, you must be driven to embark on a new and novel path, the road less traveled. You must overcome the fear of failure and be ready to take risks and break new ground. Fear not to be original and creative.

9. Tema

Yet every creator and entrepreneur will encounter resistance. People around you will shrug their shoulders in wonder and astonishment (Tema), criticizing you for an unrealistic fantasy, for youthful arrogance, for immature stupidity. They will predict your failure. What do you do?

10. Yetur

At this point, you need to make sure that your plan is well organized and structured, as perfect as a straight line.

11. Nafish

You also need to withdraw, relax and rethink your plans and goals from a serene and tranquil state of mind. Don't allow an inspiring but fleeing mood to define your long-term goals; make sure you have serenely internalized your mission statement.

12. Kedmah

But if and when you conclude that this is the right path, you need to jump into the project headfirst and not allow the many obstacles along the way to hinder the execution of your dreams. “Move on!” – be first and ahead of the game, because of you procrastinate at this point, someone else will beat you to it.

When we reflect on these 12 steps, we notice that one crucial element – perhaps the most important element – is missing from Ishmael's impressive list. This is the component of meaning.

Human life needs meaning. When we are devoid of inner purpose, it is extremely difficult to maintain these 12-steps which require discipline and focus. At

some point, you ask yourself, what is the purpose of it all? This question cannot be answered by getting a personal trainer, learning about effective relationships and working your way up in the company.

Thus, the Torah concludes its account of these 12 sons by stating, “They fell in the presence of their brethren.” Even a balanced life of health, relationships and work that is devoid of inner meaning, might ultimately fail, because it lacks the oxygen of depth that keeps the person inspired and motivated to live well, and to ensure that the steps are channeled for the right purposes, not for futile or detrimental objectives.

Ishmael's twelve-steps capture an important but superficial layer of existence. It does not address our sense that there is something at the core of nature that transcends it. For this, we have the names of another twelve tribes, the twelve sons of Jacob, whose names represent the blueprint for living not only a fine and balanced life but also living with the Divine, with the mysterious core of reality.

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he raised his eyes and saw, behold, camels were arriving...” (24:63)

The Torah's choice of language, that Yitzchak lifted up his eyes and saw גמלים, “camels”, is puzzling. One would expect more of an ‘uplifting vision’, for instance, seeing his wife-to-be, Rivka Imeinu! Rebbe Meir of Premishlan, zy’a, explains:

Yitzchak did see Rivkah, and then “lifted his eyes”, looking into the future. He was ‘uplifted’ when he foresaw that their descendents would have the trait embodied by his bride — they would be גומלים, “givers”, actively generous and kind.

May we, the physical and spiritual descendents of our great-grandmother Rivka,

continue her precious legacy. And may we merit to ‘uplift’ our great-grandfather Yitzchak by taking up the great honor of ‘shlepping water’ for one another.



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Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach
Kingsway Jewish Center
Lincoln Square Synagogue
Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park

North Shore Hebrew Academy
Young Israel of Merrick
NYC Department of Correction
OU-JLIC at Binghamton University
OU-JLIC at Cornell University
Queens Jewish Center
Stars of Israel Academy
The Riverdale Minyan
Vaad of Chevra Kadisha
West Side institutional Synagogue
Yeshiva University High School for Girls
Young Israel of Hillcrest
Young Israel of Jamaica Estates
Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst
Young Israel of New Rochelle
Young Israel of North Woodmere
Young Israel of Oceanside
Young Israel of Scarsdale

OHIO

Beachwood Kehilla
Congregation Sha'arei Torah
Congregation Torat Emet
Green Road Synagogue
Fuchs Mizrachi School
Heights Jewish Center

PENNSYLVANIA

Shaare Torah Congregation

SOUTH CAROLINA

Brith Sholom Beth Israel
Congregation Dor Tikvah

TENNESSEE

Baron Hirsch Congregation

TEXAS

Mayerland Minyan Synagogue
Robert M. Beren Academy
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

VIRGINIA

Keneseth Beth Israel

WASHINGTON

Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath
Northwest Yeshiva High School
Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation

VENEZUELA

CARACAS

Ashkenazi Kehilla
Mizrachi Venezuela



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