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Potomac Torah Study Center

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Rosh Hodesh Kislev is Tuesday & Wednesdsay; Kristallnacht memorial is Monday, Nov. 9

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may 5787 bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Congregation Beth Sholom (Potomac, MD)'s Shabbaton for Chayei Sarah welcomes Yeshivat Chovevei Torah for a Shabbos of learning and davening. Featured scholars and speakers include YCT's new President and Rabbi Benjamin Berger; Rabbanit Devorah Zlochower, Senior Scholar & Mashgicha Ruchanit; and Rabbi Ysoscher Katz, Chair of YCT's Talmud Department. Ros Yeshiva Dov Linzer and some YCT Rabbinic students will also participate as special scholars.

Chayei Sarah means the life of Sarah – but the entire parsha takes place after Sarah's death. Hashem's presence is everywhere in the parsha, but God, who interacted actively in Avraham's life, does not participate in this parsha. This week is the 88th anniversary of Kristallnacht, and elections in Israel and the United States have led to significant changes in political lineups in both countries. The next few years promise to bring many challenges for all of us.

Avraham is extremely active after Sarah dies. After sitting shiva, he arises and negotiates with Ephron the Hittite and sons of Chet to purchase the Cave of Machpelah and attached field. Avraham insists on paying full retail price for the property and thereby can purchase the only land in Canaan that anyone will sell to him (a Jew and foreigner). Avraham thus becomes the owner of the burial place of Adam and Chava – and later of Sarah, Avraham, Yitzhak, Rivka, Yaakov, and Leah. This property is in Hebron and the reason why Jews value the city of Hebron so highly.

Avraham next arranges to find a wife for Yitzhak. Because Yitzhak has the status of a korban (sacrifice) after the Akeidah, Hashem has told Avraham that Yitzhak may not marry a Canaanite. Avraham decides to go to his family home in Haran, or Paddan-Aram, to find a wife. Since Avraham is too old to make this journey, he sends his trusted servant Eliezer with specific instructions to find an appropriate wife. When Eliezer arrives in Haran, he goes to the local well and prays to the God of Avraham to send an unmarried woman who will be kind enough to draw water for him to drink. Rivka comes and offers to draw water for him and for his ten camels. Rabbi Mordechai Rhine learns from Rav Shimon Schwab that in Haran, a foreigner was not permitted to take water from the communal well. Since drawing enough water for a man and for ten camels required an enormous amount of water, Eliezer's test (including for the camels) required enormous chesed. When Eliezer learns that Rivka is a member of Avraham's family, he thanks Hashem and realizes that he has found the ideal wife for Yitzhak – a woman from Avraham's family who shares Avraham's devotion to chesed.

The Torah presents Eliezer's original narrative in detail – and then presents Eliezer's detailed presentation to Lavan and Bethuel of what took place when Eliezer met Rivka. Eliezer selectively changes the "facts" to emphasize that Avraham told Eliezer to find a wife from his family (not just his town). Eliezer also realizes that neither Lavan nor Bethuel care for chesed, so he omits the information that the most important criterion for Eliezer was finding a woman who embodied chesed. Eliezer shows evidence of Avraham's enormous wealth – the most important factor for Bethuel and Lavan – and makes it seem as if Hashem selected Rivka to be Yitzhak's wife. Eliezer's selective retelling is well known, and Rabbi Hayyim Angel discusses this material extremely well (below).

Since Monday is the 88th anniversary of Kristallnacht, we should focus on rising anti-Semitism throughout the world. When I grew up in Los Angeles more than 50 years ago, I did not notice any signs of anti-Semitism. Our neighborhoods were always safe, even for children, and I thought nothing of riding my bicycle ten or more miles from my home to downtown Los Angeles or anywhere else. When I was around eleven years old, my father sometimes sent me to take the bus downtown to deliver a diamond ring to a diamond merchant business friend. The increase in crime and danger to anyone who looks Jewish now is amazing and horrible.

This past week both Israel and the United States had elections. My focus is on the United States. Mamdani's election as mayor of New York was enough of a shock. Now we have an Arab Senator in Michigan who openly praises Hamas and Arab enemies of Jews and will not admit in public that Hamas murdered Jews. The Democrat Socialists openly call for cutting ties with Israel, and it is becoming difficult for any candidate to win a nomination in the Democratic party without joining or catering to this political force. Only a few years ago, I suspect that no one would have expected a return of Kristallnacht. However, violence against Jews is increasingly apparent in many countries and even in some parts of our country,

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, wrote only eleven years ago about the influence of chesed from a Jewish woman in Washington, DC influenced an eleven-year-old black boy who later became a law professor at Yale. The chesed of this woman is what Avraham and Rivka looked for – the types of influences that Hashem envisioned in restarting the world after the flood. God wanted a nation of people who would influence the evil people to reform and work toward Hashem's values. Unfortunately, I see a sharp increase in evil, especially in recent years. May those who work for chesed become more successful in influencing the violent and evil members of society to reform, and may a better trend come speedily while I am still around to see signs of progress.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations. 2026 has been an especially difficult year for AlephBeta.org, so please consider donating now.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Haftarat Parshat Chayei Sarah: Lessons from Three Biblical Marriages

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone 5787 (2026)

Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, known as the Ralbag, teaches in his commentary on Bereshiet that the stories of our forefathers are there to teach us how to live. From both the virtues and the failings of the biblical personalities, we learn how to conduct ourselves, especially in our closest relationships. This week, the parsha and the haftarah invite us to consider three marriages, each offering a different perspective on what makes a relationship thrive, endure, or falter. The question is just as urgent in our own homes as it was in the tents and palaces of Tanakh.

It is no coincidence that so many of the laws governing marriage are derived from Avraham's efforts to secure a proper burial place for Sarah. The care that Avraham shows his beloved wife, both during her lifetime and after her death, illustrates how love and commitment can be expressed through concrete actions. That care runs through their whole life together.

Even his request that Sarah present herself as his sister on their journey to Egypt was interpreted by biblical scholar Ephraim A. Speiser as a strategy for protecting her, as he explains in his well-known article "The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives."

The haftarah offers a very different picture, taking us inside the palace of David, where his relationship with Bat Sheva began, as is well known, in sin and tragedy.

As the haftarah opens, their bond is challenged by the arrival of a young woman, Avishag the Shunamite, brought to attend the ailing king. Meanwhile, outside the palace and unknown to David, a violent rivalry for the throne is unfolding among David's sons and would-be heirs, threatening to tear the royal family apart. Bat Sheva's response is to conspire with Natan the prophet to stage an audience with the king that will secure the throne for her son Shlomo. Shlomo's claim is rightful, but the distance between David and Bat Sheva requires some manipulation and concealment.

Yet even Parshat Chayei Sarah, while it seems to celebrate the model marriage of Avraham and Sarah, also holds a cautionary tale about the next generation. Avraham's servant chooses Rivka as a wife for Yitzchak without the groom having any part in the decision. The first time Rivka sees Yitzchak, she covers herself with a veil, and that veil can be seen as a symbol of the communication barriers that will come to characterize their relationship. While there is love between them, **the Torah records only one conversation between Yitzchak and Rivka.** It comes at the end of Parshat Toldot, when Rivka is trying to save one of their sons, Yaakov, from the murderous anger of the other, Esav. Even then she does not speak openly. She offers Yitzchak a pretext and hides the real reason that Yaakov must leave. One can only imagine what their shared home might have been had it been built on ongoing and forthright communication. [emphasis added]

In this light, David and Bat Sheva fall somewhere in the middle. Their relationship is far from simple, and the haftarah does not hide its flaws. Yet David's final words to Bat Sheva mark an important moment of honest communication and commitment: *"'As the LORD lives,'* he said*, 'who has rescued me from every danger, what I swore to you by the LORD, God of Israel – that Shlomo your son will rule after me, and that he will sit on my throne in my place – I shall fulfill this very day'"* (I Kings 1:29–30). After all the intrigue and silence, the king speaks to his wife directly, binds himself by oath, and keeps his word. His promise does not erase the troubled backdrop to their relationship, but it underscores the importance of honoring one's promises, especially when the future of the family is at stake.

Avraham and Sarah, the first of these three couples, offer a model of partnership and devoted care. The second couple, David and Bat Sheva, navigate a relationship shaped by a flawed past and political intrigue, yet ultimately, their communication finds honest words and commitment. The third couple, Yitzchak and Rivka, share a bond marked by love and family loyalty, but also by silence and concealed intentions. They live out their marriage with a veil between them, a barrier whose consequences reverberate through the next generation.

These are not just portraits from the distant past. They are possibilities that every home holds. **A marriage can become a partnership of mutual care, or a relationship that survives its crises through honest words – or a life lived side by**

side behind a veil. The difference often lies less in grand gestures than in the daily choice to make time, to speak and to listen. [emphasis added]

As we enter the winter months and settle back into our regular routines, may we always make time for our families and for the relationships that sustain us. May our homes be built, like the tent of Avraham and Sarah, on care and partnership, and may we have the wisdom, like David at the end of his days, to recognize that strong relationships require more than love: they need honest communication, care, and a mutual commitment to shared values that hold our families together.

Shabbat Shalom.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone.

https://ots.org.il/rabbi-brander-haftarat-chayei-sarah/?pfstyle=wp

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Remembering Kristallnacht

From *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* *

[Ed. note: An attempt to burn down the Young Israel shul of West Hempstead, NY last week reminds us that the spirit of Kristallnacht still encourages our enemies to attack us and destroy our property. One of my closest friends will be a featured speaker Sunday, November 8, as the shul continues to cope with the impact of violence against our people. In this spirit, ***Chamber Music Experience,*** *a nonprofit dedicated to bringing the joys of chamber music to youth and remembering Jewish composers killed by the Nazis, is offering a free concert featuring the music of Dick Kattenburg, an outstanding young composer from Amsterdam, murdered at Auschwitz when he was only 24 years old. Hopefully many of you in the New York area will attend the program at Young Israel on Sunday and the memorial concert Sunday, November 15, at 2 p.m., at the Hewlett-Woodmere Public Library. Concert performers include Juilliard faculty. More information at cmexperience.org.]*

The unprecedented pogrom of November 9-10, 1938 in Germany has passed into history as Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass). Violent attacks on Jews and Judaism throughout the Reich and in the recently annexed Sudetenland began on November 8 and continued until November 11 in Hannover and the free city of Danzig, which had not then been incorporated into the Reich. There followed associated operations: arrests, detention in concentration camps, and a wave of so-called Aryanization orders, which completely eliminated Jews from German economic life.

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

Jews Leaving Germany

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

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

The illusion that the legal repression enacted in the civil service law of April 1, 1933, which excluded non-Aryans from public service, would be temporary was laid to rest in September 1935 by the Nuremberg Laws — the Reich Citizenship

Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor. The Reich Citizenship Law heralded the political compartmentalization of Jewish and Aryan Germans.

Desecrated Synagogues, Looted Shops, Mass Arrests

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Parshat Chayei Sarah: From a Burial Site to a Nation Rooted in Kindness

By Rachel Eilon Kochva * (November 17, 2024)

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

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

Following her death, Avraham seeks to purchase a burial site, and the Torah meticulously describes his negotiations with the sons of Chet and Efron. Intriguingly, the passage opens with the word vayakom —”and he arose”*: “And Avraham arose*

from before his deceased." The shift from the previous verse, where Avraham mourns and weeps, to the practicalities of acquiring Me'arat HaMachpelah, marks a sudden and jarring transition. How long did Avraham remain in his mourning? (After the year we've collectively experienced [5784], we all know that mourning can be a profoundly long, drawn-out process.) In his search for a place to bury Sarah, Avraham arises — implying he had previously been in a low place, sitting in despair, overcome by grief and inaction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our bond with the Land of Israel cannot remain confined to the mere ownership of burial plots. It is meant to foster a vibrant, living nation committed to kindness, justice, and righteousness. My heartfelt prayer and hope, inspired by the spirit

of our wondrous people, is that we may indeed become such a nation — building a society in our sacred land that stands as an exemplar of righteousness and justice.

Amen, may it be so.

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https://ots.org.il/rachel-eilon-kochva-chayei-sarah/

Parshas Chayei Sarah: The Dignity of the Stranger

by Rabbi Label Lam (5767)

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

Rivka may not have known but she was trying out for the position of Matriarch of the Jewish People. What was her test and how did she display her worthiness? Well the story line tells us of her extraordinary display of kindliness to even to the 10 camels of Eliezer the servant of Avraham. So she gets the job of Mother of a Nation because of her extra sensitivity and concern for animals? Realizing, of course, she did demonstrate, thereby, the abundance of her native kindliness, there is still room to wonder aloud whether or not it was her concern for animals that tipped the scale in her favor or something else!?

Why does the Torah tell us that Rivka *"emptied her jug into the trough"* before running to fetch more water for the camels? Of all the matters in the universe why is it that this detail is included? Why did she first announce her intention to feed the animals before spilling the water into the trough and getting into high gear? What does this add? What do we learn about her unique qualifications for the task to which she is about to be appointed?

The story is told about Rabbi Akiva Eiger ztl. that a guest at his table had clumsily toppled a glass of red wine on the pristine white Shabbos table cloth. The Rabbi reacted immediately and almost instinctively. He jarred the table in such a way that his glass of wine spilled as well. What a ploy and play of unrehearsed sensitivity he displayed in that one move and all just to protect the other fellow's feelings of embarrassment.

In a similar way **Rivka preserved the inherent honor of the man Eliezer**. He had requested a drink. She could have poured into another vessel or into his mouth but rather she gave him to drink from the jug directly in the most dignified fashion. After this stranger drinks from her jug a new dilemma is born. Can she deliver home a partially filled jug or one out of which a stranger has just partaken? If you owned a grocery store and a customer, for whatever reason took a swig from a gallon container of milk, and returned it to the shelf, what would you, the proprietor do? 1) Would you reseal and resell it at a slight discount? 2) Would you spill it out! 3) Would you give to the cat?

Rivka was alert to a number of matters. 1) Spilling the water out is wasteful. 2) Spilling it in front of him is insulting. 3) The pain of thirst of the animals is also a pressing obligation waiting to be fulfilled by someone.

Therefore Rivka cleverly announced her intentions first before emptying the jug into the water trough to spare him even a moment of personal discomfort. Only then did she launch into her heroic activity to care for his ten camels, fueling them like ten Mack Trucks and all by hand. The whole giant effort may have included a desire to be economical as well as to quench some creaturely thirsts but it may have been mostly motivated by a desire to maintain to **the dignity of the stranger.**

[boldface added]

Good Shabbos

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5767-chayeisarah/

Chayei Sarah: Speaking Is Believing

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2016, 2019

After the climactic event of the akeida, the Torah turns its attention to more quotidian matters: the death and burial of Sarah and the finding of a wife for Yitzchak. In this shift, a number of the major characters move off the scene. Not only Sarah and Avraham, but God as well. In our parasha, God is neither seen nor heard; God is only spoken about.

This shift in God's role is intimately connected to the passing of the baton from Avraham to Yitzchak. Avraham is a visionary, a charismatic leader to whom God has directly spoken. People are drawn to his passion and his person, feeling that they can connect to God just by being in proximity of Avraham. But not everyone can be nor should be an Avraham. For the vision to live on and continue to the next generation, what is needed is a successor who can sustain the vision without the immediacy of God's presence. One must move from charisma to forms and rituals that can communicate and embody the faith. If this can be achieved then the belief can survive and be passed forward.

Avraham heard God's voice throughout his life; but after the akeida, it is seeing that takes central stage: *"And Avraham called the name of that place, God Sees, as it is said to this day, on the mount God will be seen"* (Breishit 22:14). In future generations, the Torah is telling us, God may not always be heard, but if we try hard enough, then "even to this day" God can be seen.

The theme of seeing God and seeing as God goes back to the story of creation. God sees that the world is good. Adam and Eve fail to see as God would; they see the tree as "good for eating," and not as forbidden and off-limits. The later generations continue to see the world through their lens of self-interest, seeing, coveting and taking whatever they want. As a result, God sees that the world that was good has become bad, and it must be destroyed so it can start over.

The message is clear – God sees what is good, and we must learn to see the world through God's eyes. Avraham is chosen and given this task. He is told not to go to the land of Canaan, but to go to the land which God will show him; he must learn to see the place that God has chosen. Avraham's story ends with God telling him to take his son, to perform the akeida on "one of the mountains that I will show you," to again strive to see where God is directing him. It is thus at the critical moment that he sees what it is God truly wants from him; he sees the ram and offers it instead of his son.

An essential part of seeing the world through God's eyes is seeing God in the world. This is a choice that we make. We choose how we interpret the events in our lives; are they chance events brought about by an arbitrary cosmos, or are they acts of divine providence, in which God's presence can be seen and felt? The culmination of Avraham's story is his declaration, his hope, that God will always be seen, "that is should be said until this day, on the mount God will be seen'."

How is this accomplished? Most essentially, by how we speak – "that it should be said until this day." How we narrate and interpret the events of our life becomes the lens through which we see the world. Avraham called out in the name of God everywhere he went. By invoking God constantly, Avraham changed people's perception of reality. People began to see a world in which God shapes all events. The famous rabbinic story of Avraham drives home this point:

> Reish Lakish said, *"Read not, 'he called' [in the name of God] but 'and he made to call'." This teaches that our father Abraham caused the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, to be uttered by the mouth of every passer-by. How was this? After [travelers] had eaten and drunk, they stood up to bless him; but, said he to them, "Did you eat of mine? You ate of that which belongs to the God of the Universe. Thank, praise and bless Him who spoke and the world came into being."*
> (Sotah 10b)

It is not the intellectual belief – that God provides – which was the most important, but the discourse that Avraham created. By talking about thanking God for the fruit, by encouraging others to "thank, praise, and bless," that is, to talk about this as well, Avraham shaped the way others saw the world. Such talk becomes habitual, it spreads and impacts others, whether they are aware of it or not. "God is with you in all that you do," Avimelekh says to Avraham (Breishit 21:22). **By talking about God, Avraham has made Avimelekh see God; Avraham has brought God into the world.** As Rashi (24:7), puts it: "[Avraham says to his servant:] 'God, Lord of the Heavens and the Earth.' [This is to say, while in the past God was only Lord of the Heavens,] now God is also Lord of the Earth, for I have made God's name commonplace in the mouth of all." [emphasis added]

This talking about God which leads to seeing God, is the blessing that Avraham passes on to his servant, to Yitzchak, and to the next generation. The God who has taken me from my father's house, says Avraham to his servant, will also be with you to ensure the success of your mission. This will become a reality if you see it as such. The servant has learned this lesson well; he prays and the right woman appears. A skeptic might say that this is luck but the servant knows it is God answering his prayers. When the servant acknowledges God's hand in the meeting of Rivka, he makes it a reality: "And he said: 'Blessed is God the Lord of my master Avraham… as for me, God has guided me to the house of my master's brother" (24:27).

These events could be understood in a radically different way if seen through different eyes. The Gemara (Hullin 95b) makes a shocking statement: "Rav… said: Any omen (nachash) which is not like that of Eliezer, Abraham's servant… is not considered [the Biblically prohibited act of] divination." Rishonim grapple to explain why, if this were the case, it was acceptable for Avraham's servant to perform his test; did he commit the sin of divination? (see, for example, Rambam, Avoda Zara 11:4, and Ra'avad and Kesef Mishne ad. loc.; Radak on Shmuel I, ch. 14; Gur Aryeh Breishit 24:14). The answer is that it all depends on the framing. Were the servant to have interpreted the sign as magical, it would have been nichush – something which happened "merely by chance, and not through God's providence." (Sefer HaHinukh, mitzvah 249). But **by praying, the servant saw what transpired as an answer to his prayers; he saw in the events not chance or magic, but God.** [emphasis added]

In the servant's long retelling of his encounter with Rivka, we hear how, through the eyes and in the words of the servant, God is ever-present. "And God blessed my master…", "God will…make your path successful", "And I said, 'God…[she] will be the one that God has chosen for my master's son", "And I blessed God… who led me down the true path to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son." And it is this discourse that is then consciously or unconsciously adopted by his listeners: "And Lavan and Betuel said, "From God the matter has come, we cannot speak to you bad or good" (24:50).

Avraham passed on this gift of talking to and about God not only to his servant, but also to his son. It is thus that we find as the servant is returning that Yitzchak had gone "to speak in the field in the evening time." The Rabbis tell us that this was speaking to God, but it is just as likely that he was speaking to himself about God (some translate the verb as "mediate" rather than "speak."), Indeed the two are one. It is our speaking about God, making God part of our regular discourse, that enables us to speak to God and to encounter God in the world.

We live in a world in which God does not speak to us directly. Despite this, we can in fact choose whether or not to see. Avraham's faith is sustained through learning to see, and how we see is first and foremost shaped by how we talk. Speaking is seeing, and seeing is believing. Indeed, "more beautiful is the conversation of the servants of the fathers, than the Torah of the sons." (Breishit Rabbah 60). It is through such conversation, such daily discourse, that our world is shaped and that God is seen.

Insights from Chassidic Tradition
Our Share in Your Torah: What the Torah Leaves for Us

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

Few things in my religious life mean as much to me as davening.

Although I daven regularly, I am still struck by the richness of tefillah. Even in familiar prayers, I continue to discover meanings I had previously overlooked.

One request in particular continues to intrigue me: '*Give us our share in Your Torah.'* We repeat it throughout Shabbos davening. Many also say it daily as part of the *Yehi ratzon* added at the end of the Amidah.

Just three words, but they ask for so much.

What exactly is our "share"? The request is both familiar and audacious. We assume that we each have a part in God's Torah, something uniquely ours, and ask Him to help us access it. But what does that mean? What is there for us to contribute to a Torah we have already received?

The Torah's way of telling its stories offers one possible answer. Again and again, we encounter gaps. We learn enough to become invested in the people and their experiences, but are left wondering about things the Torah does not tell us.

One glaring example concerns Sarah.

This week's parsha begins with her death, shortly after the account of the akeida. Yet we heard nothing from her during that episode. Sarah figures prominently in many stories in Bereishit. Here, when her son is nearly killed, she is absent from the narrative.

What did she know? What was she told? How did she respond?

The Torah does not say. Chazal, however, offer an answer. In the midrash quoted by Rashi, Sarah dies upon hearing what nearly happened to her son. Reading the two stories together — which is how they appear in the Torah — they give us an account of her anguish that the Torah itself leaves unspoken.

But there is more we might wonder about. How would Sarah have responded if she had been the one God asked to sacrifice her son?

I have a strong suspicion that her response would have been very different from her husband's. My guess is that she would have argued with God, insisting that her devotion to Him could not require her to sacrifice the very child He had promised her. I can even imagine her offering herself instead. Let me be the one sacrificed, she might have pleaded. Spare my child.

Perhaps — an audacious suggestion, I know. I would hardly presume to know Sarah's answer to God. But I cannot help wondering what her response might have added to our understanding of the akeida.

Too often, family experiences in our foundational religious stories are told primarily through the men. Think of Iyov. He and his wife's children die, yet we hear barely a sentence from her. We follow his anguish and his struggle with God. What might we have learned from hearing more about hers?

The same question arises here. We have Avraham's akeida. What would it mean to have Sarah's as well? Both are Yitzchak's parents. What might her account have added to our understanding of faith, parental devotion, and the demands God makes of us?

I find her absence frustrating. But perhaps that frustration can itself become an invitation. The missing voice gives us something to think about, something to contribute. We can consider what Sarah might have said and what her words might have taught us. Filling in these gaps becomes part of our role as readers, an opportunity to contribute our own share.

Perhaps this is part of what we ask for when we plead for a share in Hashem's Torah. [note: Rabbi Katz had the end of this sentence in Hebrew.]

Chazal's midrash teaches us to ask about what the Torah leaves unexplained. Our readings do not carry their authority, but we can learn from their example and continue the conversation as their students. We have to study carefully, allowing the text to guide and challenge our imagination. We must also distinguish what the Torah says from what we are suggesting. Our contribution can be tentative and still worth making.

A beautiful teaching speaks directly to this idea of a personal share in Torah. The word לארשי is read as an acronym: There are 600,000 letters in the Torah, corresponding to the 600,000 souls of Israel. Each of us has a letter that is ours to uncover. [Rabbi Katz has the original in Hebrew, which my software cannot reproduce properly.]

(The arithmetic is famously difficult: a Torah scroll contains just over three hundred thousand letters. Various explanations have been offered for the discrepancy.)

Everyone has a share. The questions we ask, informed by our experiences and sensibilities, can help us discover something another reader might overlook. There is Torah that will remain undiscovered unless we do the work of discovering it.

That makes our share a responsibility.

Chazal speak of becoming a partner with HaKadosh Barukh Hu in the work of creation. I think receiving the Torah involves a similar partnership. God deliberately left room for us to participate in its development. We received the Torah and became responsible for helping it grow.

When we plead for a share in Hashem's Torah, we ask God for the understanding to discover our share and the courage to contribute it.

This prayer is also a charge. We cannot ask God for our share and then wait for someone else to do the work. We have to learn, pursue our questions, and contribute what we discover. If we leave all the questions to others, something of our own understanding will remain unexpressed, and Torah will be poorer for it.

We cannot remain passive *mekablim.* Receiving the Torah calls on us to become partners in its continuing development. God has given us a share in His Torah. We owe Him, and one another, the work of bringing it forth.

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https://library.yctorah.org/2026/10/guests-come-first-god-can-wait/

Images and Realities: Thoughts for Parashat Hayyei Sara

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The election season is filled with slogans, sound bites, campaign posturing. Candidates employ experts who can best market them. The candidates are instructed on what to say and what not to say; the tone of voice they should use; the type of clothes and makeup they should wear. The goal is to create an electable image. News items are subject to p.r. spins; polls are used as signs of gained or lost momentum and are interpreted by candidates in a way that most favors themselves.

In the hurly-burly of the campaign season, image counts for a great deal. It influences voters, most of whom seem to make their decisions based largely on impressions — not on thorough research into the candidates' records and opinions. External glitz often eclipses internal content in determining how people will vote.

We are given grand promises and are shown grand gestures: but these are part of image-making, not necessarily reflective of the reality of the candidates' ability to deliver.

When we later learn that the grand promises and gestures were p.r. ploys, we feel betrayed and angered. We realize that we were deceived by clever publicity techniques. We are upset with ourselves for falling for the glitz, and we are upset with the candidates and their handlers for creating unrealistic images. When this same process happens time after time, we become cynical about the effectiveness and truthfulness of the "system."

Just as we are frustrated by artificial p.r. image-making for individuals, we also become frustrated when these same techniques are used to inaccurately promote institutions or products. We want genuine truthfulness — but we get manipulative words and gestures. The image-makers assume that the public is gullible and will fall for slick language and gestures. Often, the image-makers are correct! If the public does not demand or expect anything beyond surface glitz, that is what the public will receive. But when the public realizes that it has been deceived, there is a sense of dismay and anger.

Grand promises and grand gestures need to be matched by grand commitment to fulfill the promises and live up to the gestures. A healthy society must demand an honest correlation between image and reality.

In this week's Torah reading, we learn of Abraham's desire to buy a burial place for Sarah. He wanted to purchase land from Efron the Hittite. Efron was a master of the grand gesture and grand promise. He promoted himself as a generous and upstanding person, willing to give Abraham the land for free as a token of friendship. Abraham saw through Efron's mendacity and insisted on paying for the land. Efron then asked for a princely sum, and Abraham paid in full.

Rashi notes that the Torah spells Efron's name with a missing "vav" when Abraham hands over the money. *"The 'vav' is missing because he said a lot, but didn't do even a little."* Efron was diminished by the transaction. He had posed as a generous benefactor but was actually a small-minded manipulator seeking to maximize his own gain. There is a chasm between Efron's words and his deeds; and he becomes a despicable figure in our eyes.

The world is full of Efrons — people who offer slick words and grandiose promises, but who do not (and have no intention to) live up to these expressions. They are image-makers and self-promoters. They think they succeed…but in fact, they are diminished! The gap between their artificial image and their actual selves belies their authenticity as upstanding human beings. People ultimately realize the sham.

A story is told of a person who owned an old building with crumbling foundations. The owner decided to upgrade the building — by painting its exterior to make it appear more attractive. Indeed, it now looked like a new building. But its foundations were still rotten, and the building was doomed to collapse. The owner thought that a glitzy exterior could remake the building's image, but did not want to realize that the fanciest paint in the world cannot make up for structural flaws.

It is fine to create the best possible image; but the external image must be justified by internal integrity and strength. Image-makers — even when they seem to succeed - -are diminished when their reality does not — or cannot — live up to their projected image.

This is true of individuals, of institutions, of governments. Images must flow from strong, healthy, and truthful foundations.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/images-and-realities-thoughts-parashat-hayyei-sara

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Paired Perspectives on the Parashah
Hayyei Sarah: Abraham's Servant and the Art of Biblical Retelling

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

One of the most striking features of Genesis 24 is its extensive repetition. The Torah first narrates Abraham's servant's mission to find a wife for Isaac, and then recounts much of the same story through the servant's own words to Rebecca's family. Although the two accounts are substantially similar, they contain numerous differences in wording, emphasis, and sequence. Why does the Torah devote so much space to repeating the story, and what should we make of the variations?

This question reflects a broader methodological debate among biblical commentators. Ibn Ezra and Radak maintain that many differences between repeated accounts are ordinary literary variations. The Torah need not repeat an event in precisely the same words each time. One account may clarify the other without requiring us to assign independent significance to every variation.

Other commentators, including Rashi, Ramban, Abarbanel, and Malbim, often adopt an approach that emphasizes the significance of every detail in the biblical text. From this perspective, differences between parallel accounts invite interpretation rather than being dismissed as stylistic alternatives.

Genesis 24 provides a particularly rich opportunity to consider these approaches. Is Abraham's servant faithfully recounting his experience, with the Torah employing natural literary variation? Or does he deliberately modify his account to persuade Rebecca's family to approve the marriage?

Perspective One: A Carefully Crafted Persuasive Narrative

Rabbi Elhanan Samet, in the third series of his studies on the weekly Torah portion, identifies approximately twenty differences between the original narrative and the servant's retelling. He argues that these changes serve a coherent purpose: the servant wishes to convince Rebecca's family that her marriage to Isaac is both appropriate and divinely ordained.

Consider Abraham's original instructions: "Go to my land and to my birthplace (moladti) and take a wife for my son Isaac" (Genesis 24:4). In the straightforward reading of the original narrative, Abraham instructs his servant to travel to his homeland, rather than explicitly requiring him to marry Isaac into Abraham's extended family. Indeed, when the servant arrives at the well, he prays for a sign that will identify a suitable wife. He asks that the young woman who offers water not only to him but also to his camels be the one whom God has designated for Isaac (24:12–14).

The narrative describes the young women as "the daughters of the people of the city" (benot anshei ha-ir, 24:13). Nothing in the servant's prayer explicitly requires the chosen woman to be Abraham's relative. Moreover, after Rebecca fulfills the sign by generously watering the camels, the servant gives her jewelry and only afterward asks about her family: "Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" (24:23). This sequence suggests that the servant initially identifies Rebecca as a suitable candidate because of her extraordinary kindness, without yet knowing her ancestry.

When the servant recounts these events to Rebecca's family, however, he presents the mission somewhat differently. He reports that Abraham instructed him: "You shall go to my father's house, to my family, and take a wife for my son" (24:38).

The distinction is significant. Rather than describing a search for a woman from Abraham's homeland, the servant presents his mission as a search specifically within Abraham's family. Ramban, Abarbanel, and Malbim recognize the importance of this variation.

The servant also changes the sequence of his encounter with Rebecca. In his retelling, he first asks about her family, receives confirmation that she is Abraham's relative, and only then places the jewelry upon her (24:47).

This revised sequence strengthens his argument considerably. In the original narrative, the jewelry appears to reward Rebecca's generosity before the servant knows her identity. In the retelling, the jewelry follows his discovery that she belongs to precisely the family Abraham supposedly designated.

The servant carefully recounts his prayer, Rebecca's fulfillment of the sign, and his subsequent recognition of divine providence (24:42–48). By presenting the entire sequence as the fulfillment of Abraham's specific instructions, he makes the marriage appear to be the unmistakable will of God.

His presentation achieves its intended effect. Laban and Bethuel respond: "The matter has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. Here is Rebecca before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the Lord has spoken" (24:50–51).

Their conclusion is understandable even from the original narrative. Rebecca's appearance at precisely the right moment, her remarkable generosity, and her relationship to Abraham all point toward divine providence. Nevertheless, the servant's retelling makes the providential nature of the encounter even more compelling.

On this reading, the servant is not merely repeating his experience. He is a skilled advocate who adapts his presentation to his audience. His objective is to secure Rebecca's marriage to Isaac, and he arranges the details to emphasize family connection, divine guidance, and the compelling nature of Abraham's request.

Perspective Two: A Faithful Retelling That Clarifies the Original Narrative

Although the differences between the accounts are undeniable, an alternative reading challenges the assumption that the servant substantially altered the facts. The central issue concerns Abraham's original instructions. Did he merely require a wife from his homeland, or did he specifically intend that Isaac marry a member of his extended family?

Rashbam understands the Hebrew word moledet in Genesis 24:4 as referring to family rather than birthplace. This usage is supported by Genesis 43:7, where the brothers explain that Joseph had questioned them about their family. On Rashbam's reading, Abraham instructed the servant from the outset to seek a wife among his relatives. The servant's later reference to Abraham's family therefore does not represent a change in the mission but an accurate clarification of its original purpose.

The possibility remains that Abraham specifically hoped to find Rebecca. Genesis 22:20–24, immediately preceding the account of Sarah's death, reports the birth of several members of Abraham's extended family, culminating in Rebecca. Abraham therefore may already have known of her existence and regarded her as a prospective wife for Isaac.

More importantly, the original narrative itself suggests that the servant was concerned with Rebecca's family identity before he regarded his mission as successfully completed. After Rebecca waters the camels, the Torah states: "The man stood gazing at her silently, to know whether the Lord had made his journey successful or not" (24:21). At this point, Rebecca has already fulfilled the sign. Why, then, is the servant still uncertain whether God has granted him success?

The answer becomes apparent from what follows. After presenting Rebecca with jewelry, the servant asks about her family. She identifies herself as the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah and Nahor (24:22–24). Only after learning this information does the servant bow and thank God: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His kindness and faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has guided me on the way to the house of my master's brothers" (24:27).

This sequence is crucial. The servant does not declare his mission successful immediately after Rebecca fulfills the sign. His expression of gratitude comes only after he learns that she belongs to Abraham's family.

Furthermore, his thanksgiving specifically identifies the family connection as part of God's providential guidance. The servant celebrates having been led to "the house of my master's brothers." This language suggests that reaching Abraham's family was an intended objective, rather than an incidental benefit that the servant subsequently exploited in his presentation. Consequently, the original narrative itself supports the possibility that the servant was seeking a woman from Abraham's family all along.

This observation significantly weakens the argument that the servant transformed a general search for a suitable woman into a family-specific mission only when speaking to Rebecca's relatives.

Ibn Ezra and Radak, consistent with their broader approach to biblical repetition, understand the servant's retelling as substantially faithful to the original events. Ibn Ezra maintains that the servant had indeed asked Rebecca about her family before giving her the jewelry, as he later reports. The initial narrative does not necessarily provide every detail in strict chronological order. The two accounts therefore may be read together to reconstruct the complete sequence.

Similarly, the servant's more explicit account of Abraham's instructions may clarify what the original narrative expressed more briefly. Rather than assuming that the servant modified Abraham's words, we may understand the two formulations as complementary descriptions of the same mission.

The servant's retelling, therefore, need not be understood as a calculated revision of the facts. It may instead be a natural and faithful restatement of the story, emphasizing details already implicit in the original account.

Nevertheless, this interpretation does not eliminate every possibility of deliberate rhetorical emphasis. Even if Abraham genuinely instructed the servant to find a wife from his family, and even if the servant faithfully conveyed that instruction, he may have rearranged the sequence concerning the jewelry to strengthen his appeal. By presenting the gifts as following his discovery of Rebecca's ancestry, he reinforces the connection between Abraham's instructions and their providential fulfillment.

Thus, acknowledging the general reliability of the servant's account does not require denying that he shaped his presentation for persuasive effect.

Two Approaches to Biblical Narrative

The two perspectives illuminate both the character of Abraham's servant and the literary character of the Torah.

According to the first approach, the servant demonstrates remarkable intelligence and diplomatic skill. He recognizes the importance of securing Rebecca's family's consent and deliberately highlights the elements most likely to persuade them. The differences between the original narrative and his retelling reveal his strategy and invite readers to appreciate the artistry of biblical characterization.

According to the second approach, the servant's retelling primarily clarifies the original narrative. Abraham's intention to find a wife from his family, the servant's concern with Rebecca's ancestry, and his recognition of divine providence form a coherent account. The variations need not all reflect deliberate changes to the underlying events.

The distinction also reflects the broader interpretive debate over repetition in Tanakh. Must every difference between parallel accounts communicate a separate message, or may the Torah employ the ordinary variations characteristic of human storytelling?

Genesis 24 suggests that the question cannot always be resolved by adopting one methodological principle to the exclusion of the other. The servant's account may be substantially faithful while still reflecting the rhetorical needs of the moment. Conversely, recognizing persuasive elements in his speech does not establish that every variation represents a conscious alteration.

Perhaps the most important insight emerges from the original narrative itself. The servant's prayer identifies generosity as the sign of a worthy wife for Isaac, but his thanksgiving follows the discovery that Rebecca belongs to Abraham's family. Her character and her ancestry together confirm the success of his mission.

Whether the servant carefully reshaped his story or faithfully clarified its details, both accounts ultimately point toward the same conclusion: Rebecca's marriage to Isaac brings together human initiative, moral excellence, family continuity, and divine providence.

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Chayei Sora: The Helpless Millionaire

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

L'Zecher Nishmas: In loving memory of Nesanel Ezra ben Shlomo Dovid z.l. whose Yartzeit is 25 Cheshvan

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

Eliezer, the loyal servant of Avraham, was on a search. He was looking for a wife for Yitzchak. Unsure how difficult the task would be, he set out with ten camels, laden with enormous wealth, to ensure the success of his mission.

When Eliezer arrived in the town to which Avraham sent him, he was thirsty. He stood himself in front of the city well and began to pray. He said, *"G-d, please grant me success on my mission. I stand at the well as the girls of the town come to draw water. The girl that offers to draw water for me and for my camels, she is the girl who is fitting for Yitzchok."* Eliezer finished his prayer, and immediately it was answered. Rivkah emerged from her home and offered to draw water for Eliezer and his camels. Through her act of kindness, she was chosen to be the next Matriarch of the Jewish people.

This is certainly a beautiful story about the power of prayer. Eliezer prayed sincerely for the success of his mission, and his prayer was answered instantly.

There is, however, a critical question that needs to be asked. Where did Eliezer get the chutzpah to offer such a prayer, and to make such a condition? *"The girl who provides for me…"* Since when did Eliezer, the loyal servant of Avraham become so lazy? Why didn't he pay from his enormous wealth, or better yet just draw the water himself?! Most astounding is that even as Rivkah draws the water for him and his ten camels, Eliezer stands by and doesn't offer to help.

Rav Shimon Schwab explains that the custom of the town was that a foreigner was not entitled to take water from the communal well. As a foreigner, Eliezer was simply not entitled to take water for himself. The only way that he could get water was if someone from the town would "adopt" him as their guest. Eliezer didn't make his condition out of laziness. Eliezer made his condition out of sheer desperation. Despite the wealth that he had with him on his ten camels, without someone's kindness of hospitality, Eliezer was helpless.

As Eliezer stood vulnerable in a foreign city he began to pray. He was praying both to be provided for, and for the success of his mission. At that moment Eliezer truly understood the legacy of Avraham, the legacy of kindness. Avraham set his tent in the desert where he would provide for the poor and the wealthy alike; he provided for the wanderers as well as for the merchants. Everyone basked in the benevolence of Avraham. Eliezer said, *"If there is a girl who is like Avraham, and will provide for me, then she is worthy of joining the Jewish family."*

Often in life we make the mistake of thinking that money runs the world. We figure that somehow, with money, we can provide for ourselves. But deep down we know that money has significant limitations. For all that it is worth, money can't buy a genuine kind word. It can't buy true friendship. Sometimes, it can't even buy a drink of water. Money doesn't run the world.

So, what does run the world? King David told us. *"The world runs on kindness."*

The clarity that Eliezer was granted on that day set the tone for the destiny of the Jewish people. Rivkah was chosen because of her act of kindness. Avraham, and by extension, his servant Eliezer, taught us a precious lesson. The world doesn't run on money. The world runs on kindness: The kindness of G-d to us, and the kindness that we extend daily to one another.

For Family Discussion:

– Eliezer shows up with ten camels loaded with wealth, and he's still stuck without a drink of water. Have you ever been in a spot where having money didn't help at all?

– If kindness is what runs the world, what's one small thing we could each do this week to keep it running?

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos.

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

Chayei Sarah – Intended Emotions

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From my archives.

* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer's recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

Sarah's Diaries

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

Introduction:

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

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

Haran, Spring of 367 AF (After Flood)

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

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

I can already see the announcements by the chroniclers of my husband's life: "Another divine test for the great man!"; "Avram abandons Haran for Canaan"; "Avram is chosen by an unknown deity!" And what am I? Chopped hay? Am I not

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

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

Egypt, Summer of 369 AF

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

Dear Diary, I'm back in my quarters, and Avram is not far from me, still agitated and upset. Turns out it was me… God plagued them for abducting me… It's heartwarming to know that God cares so much for you, but I should not have been there in the first place. I told Avram, I told him: "see now, God told you to come to Canaan, so Canaan it is! Why go to Egypt? Let us stay here and God will take care of us," I said, but he wouldn't listen. I know he wanted to save us from the famine, but we ended up in much greater danger. At least he asked for my opinion, which is something most men would never even think of nowadays.

Plains of Bethel, Winter of 377 AF

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

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

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

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

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

Be'er Sheva desert, Spring of 377 AF

I'm so excited! I have a solution! Surrogate mother! I know some very respectful families who have gone through this process successfully. All you need is assign one of your maids as a surrogate mother and have your husband marry her. We all sign a contract which clarifies that the baby will be mine and my husband's. I will finally be a mother, and I have the

perfect candidate. Hagar, the Egyptian girl. She is so sweet and submissive, and she has tremendous respect for me. I cannot wait to talk to Avram tomorrow…

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's over; she's gone. We don't know where or when, but she has disappeared from Be'er Sheva. I should be happy, I should be celebrating, but I'm not. I feel terrible. I didn't mean it to happen like that. All I wanted was to have a child we could call our own, but things got out of hand. I got carried away on tidal waves of anger and frustration, years of sterility, endless nights of crying and, worst of all, the notion that my husband doesn't understand me. I took it all on her and I am not so sure I did the right thing.

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

ENDNOTE:

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

* Senior Rabbi, Congregation Ramath Orah (New York, NY); Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Previously, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *
Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

This Shabbat, New Zealand goes to the polls. On 7 November, while we will be reading Parashat Chayei Sarah, New Zealanders all around the country will be casting their votes and deciding who will lead the country in the coming years.

I hope you have all voted in advance! And if you haven't, this is your Thursday reminder to go out and exercise your democratic right to vote in the elections (before Shabbat). Last week, Israel also went to the polls. The results have left no clear majority, with coalition negotiations still ahead and much uncertainty about what the next Israeli government will look like.

Two countries, two very different political systems, but both facing an important question about the future and the kind of society we want to build. There is an interesting connection to this week's parsha. Parashat Chayei Sarah begins with the death of Sarah, but much of the parsha is actually about the future. Avraham, now an old man, turns his attention to the next generation. He makes sure that Yitzchak will have a future, that he will find a wife and that the family and the values he has built will continue.

Avraham understands that building a future is not something that happens by itself. It requires thought, effort and, most importantly, taking responsibility. I think this is a particularly relevant message as we approach elections in both New Zealand and Israel. It is very easy to complain about governments, politicians and the direction in which a country is heading. It is much harder to recognise that we all have a part to play in shaping the society around us. We cannot simply leave the responsibility to those elected to lead. We have a responsibility as individuals, as members of our communities and as citizens to contribute, to care and to take an interest in the future.

For us as Jews, we carry this responsibility in both places. Israel is our home, and we have an eternal connection and responsibility to its future. At the same time, as members of the Jewish community here in New Zealand, we have an important role to play in the country in which we live. We should be active, engaged and positive contributors to the wider society. Perhaps this is the message of Avraham in this week's parsha: our responsibility is not only to look at what we have built, but to think about what comes next and what we are leaving for the generations after us.

As we look towards the elections here in New Zealand, and as Israel continues to work towards forming its next government, our hope and prayer is for leaders who understand the responsibility that comes with leadership, who look beyond the next election and who work towards a better future for the people they represent.

Every Shabbat, we say a special prayer for the State of Israel, asking Hashem to protect the country and guide its leaders:

Protect it with the shelter of Your kindness and spread over it the shelter of Your peace.

We continue by asking Hashem to send His light and truth to its leaders and advisers, and to guide them with good counsel.

And here in New Zealand, we have our own special prayer for the Royal Family and the people of this country. We ask Hashem to bless and protect them, and to put into the hearts of the King and his advisers a spirit of wisdom and understanding, so that they may deal kindly and truly with all Israel.

Perhaps this is where we leave our prayers this week: that Hashem should bless the people of Israel and the people of New Zealand, guide those entrusted with leadership, and give them the wisdom to make decisions that bring security, peace and prosperity. May Hashem bless the people of Israel, the people of New Zealand, and all those who work towards building a better future for the generations to come.

B'ahavat Yisrael,
Rabbi Netanel

[Ed.:] On Simchat Torah, the AHC shlichim, Roni and Ariel, Tomer and Arbel HaCohen, said good-bye to the shul after three special years in Auckland, as they return home to Israel. Roni and Ariel left Israel for New Zealand on October 8, 2023 – almost immediately after one of the worst days in the history of our people – and quickly became a part of the AHC community. The new shlichim, Nadav, Hodaya and Tzur Pearl, have arrived in Auckland, and the community welcomed

them last Shabbat. Tzur celebrated his first birthday on Shabbat, and the congregation sang “Happy Birthday” to him in three languages, to his great pleasure. The Pearls have moved into their home, engaged in some sightseeing, and have already been working with the day school students and various Jewish youth groups.

The annual KristalInacht Commemorative Concert in Auckland on November 10 will celebrate the extraordinary Holocaust survivors and refugees who found sanctuary in New Zealand and transformed the nation’s classical music landscape.

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobe, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is now Rabbi of the ACT Jewish Community in Canberra, the capitol city of Australia. I hope to be able to include his Torah insights soon.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher .

Rav Kook Torah
Chayei Sarah: Burial in the Double Cave

According to tradition, Sarah was not the first person to be buried in the Machpelah cave in Hebron. Already buried there were Adam and Eve. Subsequently three more couples joined them: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah.

Why was this burial cave called “Machpelah”? *Machpelah* means “doubled.” The Sages in Eiruvin 53a explained that it is a double cave, containing two rooms or two floors. The Talmud tells of one scholar who risked entering the cave. He found the Avot (the Patriarchs and Matriarchs) in one room, and Adam and Eve in the second.

What is the significance of the Machpelah cave having two rooms? In general, what is the function of burial?

Two Paths

There are two paths of spiritual growth and enlightenment, each with its own advantages. The first path utilizes our natural faculties of reasoning and analysis. When functioning properly, our powers of intellect can achieve wonderful results. They enable us to acquire precious character traits, and serve God through an inner awareness.

However, the mind is bound and influenced by the body. When the body is swept away by cravings for physical pleasures, the mind also loses its direction. These physical desires can distort our perceptions and warp our reasoning, and we are left without guidance to enlightened living.

Therefore, God created a second means for spiritual progress: the Torah. The Torah is independent of the physical body, unaffected by its proclivities and desires. It is an immutable guide to the path of integrity and holiness. Certainly the powers of the human mind can never provide for the same level of sanctity as that attained through the God-given instructions of the Torah and its mitzvot.

Yet, the path of the human intellect retains a special advantage. The observance of mitzvot, while very lofty, has no direct influence on the body itself. The body is still attracted to physical desires, and remains at odds with the Torah’s spiritual goals.

Optimally, the two methods should be combined. If our performance of mitzvot can awaken our hearts and inspire our minds, a harmony is established between our physical actions and our inner awareness. Since our mental faculties are part of our basic nature, when the mind connects with the Torah, the physical side also becomes integrated with the precepts of the Torah. This refinement of the body could not have occurred without combining together the Torah with our natural powers of intellect and reason.

Death and Burial

After the sin of Adam, death was decreed upon humanity. This was not an arbitrary punishment. The purpose of death is to separate body and soul, enabling both to be repaired and refined. The soul, unburdened with the body's physical desires, is mended and refined in the World of Souls.

The body also requires spiritual correction. It too was formed in God's image and has tremendous spiritual power when it complements the holiness of the soul. While the soul is corrected in the World of Souls, the body is repaired through burial, as it returns to its original elements.

Refining the Body

What does this have to do with the Machpelah cave? Burial in the double cave is a metaphor for the two methods by which the body is refined and elevated.

The first method, utilizing human intelligence and reason, is exemplified by Adam and Eve. The first man and woman were created with the highest level of pristine talents and powers. With their robust mental faculties, they embodied the use of native intellect and reasoning for spiritual advance.

The Patriarchs and Matriarchs, on the other hand, were the origin of the Jewish people, paving the way for the Torah's revelation at Sinai. They represent the second spiritual guide, that of the Torah.

The double burial cave of Machpelah combined together these two paths. One room contained Adam and Eve, the pinnacle of natural intellectual capability. The second room hosted the Avot, the progenitors of the Torah. The name of the city, Hebron, comes from the word hibur ("connection"), hinting at the combination of both paths of elevating the body.

(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 53-55. Adapted from *Midbar Shur* pp. 259-262.)

https://ravkooktorah.org/hayei63

Chayei Sarah: The Kindness of Strangers (5775, 5782)

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

[Ed. note: This Shabbat, November 7, marks six years since the passing of Rabbi Sacks]

In 1966 an eleven-year-old black boy moved with his parents and family to a white neighbourhood in Washington. Sitting with his two brothers and two sisters on the front step of the house, he waited to see how they would be greeted. They were not. Passers-by turned to look at them but no one gave them a smile or even a glance of recognition. All the fearful stories he had heard about how whites treated blacks seemed to be coming true. Years later, writing about those first days in their new home, he says, *"I knew we were not welcome here. I knew we would not be liked here. I knew we would have no friends here. I knew we should not have moved here*..."

As he was thinking those thoughts, a white woman coming home from work passed by on the other side of the road. She turned to the children and with a broad smile said, *"Welcome!"* Disappearing into the house, she emerged minutes later with a tray laden with drinks and sandwiches which she brought over to the children, making them feel at home. That moment – the young man later wrote – changed his life. It gave him a sense of belonging where there was none before. It made him realise, at a time when race relations in the United States were still fraught, that a black family could feel at home in a white area and that there could be relationships that were colour-blind. Over the years, he learned to admire much about the woman across the street, but it was that first spontaneous act of greeting that became, for him, a definitive memory. It broke down a wall of separation and turned strangers into friends.

The young man, Stephen Carter, eventually became a law professor at Yale and wrote a book about what he learned that day. He called it Civility.[1] The name of the woman, he tells us, was Sara Kestenbaum, and she died all too young. He

adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew. *"In the Jewish tradition,"* he notes, such civility is called chessed – *"the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of God."* Civility, he adds, *"itself may be seen as part of chessed: it does indeed require kindnesses toward our fellow citizens, including the ones who are strangers, and even when it is hard."* To this day, he adds, *"I can close my eyes and feel on my tongue the smooth, slick sweetness of the cream cheese and jelly sandwiches that I gobbled on that summer afternoon when I discovered how a single act of genuine and unassuming civility can change a life forever."*[2]

I never knew Sara Kestenbaum, but years after I had read Carter's book I gave a lecture to the Jewish community in the part of Washington where she had lived. I told them Carter's story, which they had not heard before. But they nodded in recognition. *"Yes,"* one said, *"that's the kind of thing Sara would do."*

Something like this thought was surely in the mind of Abraham's servant, unnamed in the text but traditionally identified as Eliezer, when he arrived at Nahor in Aram Naharaim, northwest Mesopotamia, to find a wife for his master's son. Abraham had not told him to look for any specific traits of character. He had simply told him to find someone from his own extended family. Eliezer, however, formulated a test:

> *Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too' — let her be the one You have chosen for Your servant Isaac. By this I will know that You have shown kindness [chessed] to my master."* Gen. 24:12-14

His use of the word chessed here is no accident, for it is the very characteristic he is looking for in the future wife of the first Jewish child, Isaac, and he found it in Rebecca.

It is the theme, also, of the book of Ruth. It is Ruth's kindness to Naomi, and Boaz's to Ruth, that Tanach seeks to emphasise in sketching the background to David, their great-grandson, who would become Israel's greatest King. Indeed the Sages said that **the three characteristics most important to Jewish character are modesty, compassion, and kindness.**[3] Chessed, what I have defined elsewhere as *"love as deed,"*[4] is central to the Jewish value system. [emphasis added]

The Sages based it on the acts of God Himself. Rav Simlai taught:

> *"The Torah begins with an act of kindness and ends with an act of kindness. It begins with God clothing the naked – "The Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them," (Gen. 3:21) – and it ends with Him caring for the dead: "And He [God] buried [Moses] in the Valley."* (Deut. 34:6). Talmud Bavli, Sotah 14a

Chessed – providing shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry, assistance to the poor; visiting the sick, comforting mourners and providing a dignified burial for all – became constitutive of Jewish life. During the many centuries of exile and dispersion Jewish communities were built around these needs. There were chevrot, "friendly societies," for each of them.

In seventeenth-century Rome, for example, there were seven societies dedicated to the provision of clothes, shoes, linen, beds and warm winter bed coverings for children, the poor, widows and prisoners. There were two societies providing trousseaus, dowries, and the loan of jewellery to poor brides. There was one for visiting the sick, another bringing help to families who had suffered bereavement, and others to perform the last rites for those who had died – purification before burial, and the burial service itself. Eleven fellowships existed for educational and religious aims, study and prayer, another raised alms for Jews living in the Holy Land, and others were involved in the various activities associated with the circumcision of newborn boys. Yet others provided the poor with the means to fulfil commands such as mezuzot for their doors, oil for the Chanukah lights, and candles for the Sabbath.[5]

Chessed, said the Sages, is in some respects higher even than tzedakah:

> *Our masters taught: loving-kindness [chessed] is greater than charity [tzedakah] in three ways. Charity is done with one's money, while loving-kindness may be done with one's money or with one's person. Charity is done only to the poor, while loving-kindness may be given both to the poor and to the rich. Charity is given only to the living, while loving-kindness may be shown to the living and the dead.* Talmud Bavli, Succah 49b

Chessed in its many forms became synonymous with Jewish life and one of the pillars on which it stood. Jews performed kindnesses to one another because it was *"the way of God"* and also because they or their families had had intimate experience of suffering and knew they had nowhere else to turn. It provided an access of grace in dark times. It softened the blow of the loss of the Temple and its rites:

> *Once, as R. Yochanan was walking out of Jerusalem, R. Joshua followed him. Seeing the Temple in ruins, R. Joshua cried, "Woe to us that this place is in ruins, the place where atonement was made for Israel's iniquities." R. Yochanan said to him: "My son, do not grieve, for we have another means of atonement which is no less effective. What is it? It is deeds of loving-kindness, about which Scripture says, 'I desire loving-kindness and not sacrifice'"* (Hosea 6:6). Avot de-Rabbi Natan, 4.

Through chessed, Jews humanised fate as, they believed, God's chessed humanises the world. As God acts towards us with love, so we are called on to act lovingly to one another. The world does not operate solely on the basis of impersonal principles like power or justice, but also on the deeply personal basis of vulnerability, attachment, care and concern, recognising us as individuals with unique needs and potentialities.

It also added a word to the English language. In 1535 Myles Coverdale published the first-ever translation of the Hebrew Bible into English (the work had been begun by William Tyndale who paid for it with his life, burnt at the stake in 1536). It was when he came to the word chessed that he realised that there was no English word which captured its meaning. It was then that, to translate it, he coined the word "loving-kindness."

The late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel used to say*, "When I was young I admired cleverness. Now that I am old I find I admire kindness more."* There is deep wisdom in those words. It is what led Eliezer to choose Rivka to become Isaac's wife and thus the first Jewish bride. Kindness brings redemption to the world and, as in the case of Stephen Carter, it can change lives. Wordsworth was right when he wrote that the,

> "Best portion of a good man's [and woman's] life" is their "little, nameless, unremembered, acts
>
> Of kindness and of love."

From Wordsworth's poem, "Tintern Abbey."

Footnotes:

1] Stephen Carter, *Civility,* New York: Basic Books, 1999, pp. 61-75.

[2] Ibid., pp. 71-72.

[3] Bamidbar Rabbah 8:4.

[4] Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World,* pp. 44-56.

[5] Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages,* London, Edward Goldston, 1932, pp. 348-363.

Around the Shabbat Table (Questions to Ponder)

1. Why do you think chessed has become synonymous with leading a Jewish life?

2. What is the difference between chessed and tzedakah? How is chessed a higher value?

3. How many examples of chessed within your own community can you think of?

Because Likutei Divrei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, among other compilations, reprint columns by Rabbi Sacks for the current and last year, I select a Dvar Torah from a different year.

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/chayei-sarah/kindness-strangers/

Afraid of Getting Old? Learn to Age Instead

By Eliezer Shemtov *

One of the causes of anxiety and depression is the sense of having left youth behind and entered old age, which carries its own announcement of what must inevitably follow. People spend billions on diets, creams, and surgical interventions trying to slow or conceal this process.

What can we do to feel less troubled by the life that slips past us? I want to share two tools found in this week's reading, Chayei Sarah.

The reading is called Chayei Sarah, "The Life of Sarah," even though it describes what occurred after our matriarch's death: Abraham's mourning and his negotiation to purchase a burial plot for her.

Is it not paradoxical to call a story about what happened after her death "The Life of Sarah"? Here lies a great teaching: there is a profound difference between merely existing and truly living. *"The righteous, even in death, are considered alive,"* say our sages, *"and the wicked, even in life, are considered dead."*1

For a human to be truly considered alive, it is not enough to breathe, eat, and have all biological functions running smoothly. Those are the criteria for plant and animal life. What defines human life is the positive impact one has beyond personal survival and self-interest. The greater that impact, the fuller the life. Some lives continue to make an impact long after physical death; others, while still breathing, never touch anyone beyond themselves.

When can we tell whether someone truly lived or merely existed? We often see it only after they are physically gone. Whose world is affected by their absence? Whose words and deeds still matter? In Sarah's case, her true impact became visible precisely because the values and foundations she had established in life did not end with her death. Quite the opposite. Only then could one see that Sarah had not merely existed for 127 years; she had lived them, infusing them with a vitality that transcended her physical presence.

How does one live in such a way that it endures?

The Torah gives us the recipe when it describes the old age of Sarah's husband, Abraham: *"Abraham was old, advanced in days …"*2

Our sages note that the expression *ba bayamim — "advanced in days" —* can also be read as *"came with his days."* That is, when Abraham reached the age of 175, he could account for every single day of his life and show its positive contribution. Not one day was wasted, not one day was lived without purpose. Abraham was not simply old; he was, in the finest sense, aged, like a fine wine that only improves with time.

Have you ever wondered why people celebrate birthdays? What is the point of celebrating the passage of time, when each year lived means one less year remaining?

The answer is that a passing year does not necessarily mean one less. It can mean one more, depending on whether it was spent or invested. If you spend your life focused only on what you can get, then yes, each day that passes is a day less. But if you invest it, seeking and seizing every opportunity to contribute something of value to others, then each day adds to your total, leaving an ever-growing legacy.

The tool for this week: Whether your life is more than mere existence depends on you. Whether each day adds to or subtracts from your total depends on what you did with it. Wrinkles come on their own; you cannot control them. What you can control is whether they mark someone who is merely older, or someone who has truly aged well.

Footnotes:

1. Berachot 18a–b.

2. Genesis 24:1.

* Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in Montevideo, Uruguay.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/7584513/jewish/Afraid-of-Getting-Old-Learn-to-Age-Instead.htm

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Chayei Sarah: Full Price

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

When the news reached Sarah that Isaac was almost sacrificed, the shock of his near loss, coupled with the relief of his life being spared, was too much for her to bear, and she died. Abraham purchased the Machpelah Cave and the surrounding field in Hebron from Ephron, a local Hittite, for her burial grounds. Ephron offered to give the site to Abraham for free, but Abraham insisted on paying for it.

> *He spoke to Ephron so that all the local people could hear, in these words: "If only you would listen to me! I am giving you the money for the field. Take it from me so that I may bury my dead there."* (Gen. 23:13)

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

Similarly, each one of us has been assigned a portion of the world that we are responsible to make holy. We must do this at *"full price,"* with hard work and effort.

Even those of us who find it easy to study the Torah and observe the commandments must push ourselves beyond the boundaries of our natural inclinations. Only in this way can we achieve our purpose in the world.

– From *Daily Wisdom 3* *

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom 3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman

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Shabbat Shalom

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Hopes and Fears

The sedra of Chayei Sarah focuses on two episodes, both narrated at length and in intricate detail. Abraham buys a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and he instructs his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Why these two events? The simple answer is because they happened. That, however, cannot be all. We misunderstand Torah if we think of it as a book that tells us what happened. That is a necessary but not sufficient explanation of biblical narrative. The Torah, by identifying itself as Torah, defines its own genre. It is not a history book. It is Torah, meaning "teaching." It tells us what happened only when events that occurred then have a bearing on what we need to know now. What is the "teaching" in these two episodes? It is an unexpected one.

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

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

(2) After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Avram, "Raise your eyes and look around from where you are to the north, south, east, and west. All the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. . . Get up and walk through the length and breadth of the land, for to you shall I give it." Gen. 13:14-17

(3) And He told him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur Kasdim to give you this land to possess it." Gen. 15:7

(4) On that day the Lord made a covenant with Avram: "To your descendants I will give this land, from the River of Egypt to the great river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Refaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." Gen. 15:18-21

(5) "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout the generations: an eternal covenant. I will be God to you and your descendants after you, and I will give you and your descendants after you the land where you now live as strangers, the whole land of Canaan, an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." Gen. 17:7-8

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

(1) "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great. You will become a blessing." Gen. 12:2

(2) "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth: if anyone could count the dust of the earth, only then could your offspring could be counted." Gen. 13:16

(3) He took him outside and said, "Look at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them." He said to him, "that is how your descendants will be." Gen. 15:5

(4) "And God said to him, "As for Me – this is My covenant with you: you shall be father to a multitude of nations. No longer shall you be called Avram. Your name will be Avraham, for I have made you father to a multitude of nations. Gen. 17:4-5

(5) "I will bless you greatly and make your descendants as many as the stars of the heavens, as the sand on the seashore." Gen. 22:17

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

The significance of the two episodes is now clear. First, Abraham undergoes a lengthy bargaining process with the Hittites to buy a field with a cave in which to bury Sarah. It is a tense, even humiliating, encounter. The Hittites say one thing and mean another. As a group they say, "Sir, listen to us. You are a prince of God in our midst. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs." Ephron, the owner of the field Abraham wishes to buy, says: "Listen to me, I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead."

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

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

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

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

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

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Efron Loses A Vov From His Name

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

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

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

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

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

The wise men of the world took a cat and trained it to walk on its hind legs and carry a tray with its paws. Ultimately, they trained the cat to become a proficient waiter. They arranged a large banquet in which the cat would perform like a waiter and serve all the guests. The Rabbi was invited to the banquet to defend his position that an animal's nature cannot be changed. He took his snuff container with him, as he typically did. While he wasn't looking, a little mouse jumped into his snuff container.

They were at this banquet. The cat was doing its thing – carrying a little tray of wine and serving the people. The wise men said to the Rabbi, "Nu! You see!" The Rabbi pondered how to respond and while doing so, he took out his snuff container to smell a whiff of the aroma. Suddenly, the mouse jumped out and started running around. As soon as the cat saw the mouse running, the cat did what cats do. The cat dropped the tray and ran after the mouse to catch it. The Rabbi told the wise men, "My point has been proven."

How did the Alter from Kelm apply this story? He said as follows: Efron can dress up as the nicest and most respectable fellow in the world. He can talk the talk of generosity and magnanimity. "For sure, I will give you this land for free." However, this is all an act. That was not the real Efron. Efron was characterized – as are many people – by the attribute mentioned in the previously cited pasuk in Mishlei: "nivhal la'hon" (overeager for wealth). When he realized that he could make money, the act ended and the true Efron came out. The true Efron was a person who lusted money. That is why the same pasuk also contains the "full Efron" (with the vov), the civilized and generous person, to emphasize that he is not the real Efron.

Ironically, Efron is not the only character in this week's parsha who we see was afflicted by lust for money. There is another such fellow in this parsha who suffered from the same disease.

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

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

The Ari z"l writes that Lavan has three gilgulim (soul transmigrations) in this world, alluded to by the three letters of his name (Lamed Beis Nun). The three gilgulim were Lavan, Bilaam, and Naval Hakarmeli. Bilaam had this exact same lust from money. When

Balak wanted to hire him, his response was "If Balak gives me his full warehouse of silver and gold…" (Bamidbar 22:18). The third iteration of Lavan was the infamous Naval Hakarmeli, about whom the Tanach comments "Naval was his name and naval (despicable) was he." (Shmuel I 25:25) He too, as described there, was extremely tight with his money. The common denominator that runs through Lavan, through Bilaam, and through Naval was this lust for money, with which so many people are afflicted.

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

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

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What are the ingredients necessary for somebody to become an eternal role model?

In Parshat Chayei Sarah, Eliezer travels to Mesopotamia in search of a wife for Yitzchak. He meets Rivka and she engages in such incredible altruism at the well side. He asks for water and she says, "I will not only give you water, but I will give all your camels water as well," passing that test with flying colours.

Eliezer needed to stay in the area and so he posed a question to Rivka. He said "ha'yesh makom lalin"? – "is there place for me to stay with you in your house?" After all, he would need to negotiate with her family in order to try and bring her back to Canaan, so that she could marry Yitzchak. Rivka replied and she said, "gam makom lalun" – "of course, with pleasure, come inside, there is a place for you to stay."

But notice that Eliezer's question used the word "lalin", meaning to stay, and the answer was slightly different – "lalun". Rashi explains as follows: "lalin" means to stay for only one night. After all, Eliezer did not want to impose on Rivka and her family. "Lalun", however, means you can stay for as long as you like. That was Rivka's gracious response.

And indeed, notice that a vav is an extension of a yud. So, in "lalin", you have the yud and then Rivka used "lalun" meaning, no, not just one night, you can have an extended stay.

Now fascinatingly, the Da'at Zekenim and other commentators say just the opposite. They say that "lalin" means I would like to stay for a long time and "lalun" means you can only stay for one night. So, what is their rationale? Eliezer was saying that he might need more than one day to negotiate and therefore he wanted to be up front and he wanted Rivka and her family to know that he might be staying for a considerable amount of time. But how can you justify Rivka's response, that it has to be "lalin", only one night?

The Da'at Zekenim explains beautifully. Rivka, who was so spiritually motivated, realised her home was full of idols, that is not the right place for the servant of Avram Avinu, Abraham, our father, to be able to stay. So she said, all right, come in for one night but we will have to arrange something else for you after that. We do not want you on the street tonight.

What we see from here is that Rivka actually had two outstanding characteristics. She was that Ba'alat Chesed, full of altruism and selflessness and in addition to that, she was a person of great spiritual qualities. She wanted to cleave to Almighty God, raise her level of religiosity and ensure that others could as well, the ultimate considerations for a person who to this day is considered by us to be Rivka Imeinu, Rebecca, our matriarch.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Tent of Abraham vs. The Palace of David – How to Ensure Our Future

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

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

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

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

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

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

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

model sacrifice and commitment to principles greater than ourselves.

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

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig - "Nesi Elokim Atah Betocheinu": The Implications of National and Communal Torah Leadership

Parshat Chayey Sarah chronicles with great specificity the negotiations over the acquisition of mearat hamachpelah, as well as the details of the ultimate content of the transaction. Chazal comment on the extensiveness of the Torah's presentation. They particularly note the ten-fold repetition of "benei Cheit" ("ve-asarah peamim katuv benei Cheit, asarah keneged aseret hadibrot"), associating this number with the aseret hadibrot, thereby conveying the gravity of these apparently technical exchanges. The public nature of the negotiation, also highlighted by repeated formal bowing (23:8,13), recurring entreaties to be heard ("shemaeini"- 23:6, 8, 11, 13, 15), and multiple references to crowd posturing (23:7,10, 12, 13, 16, 18) betoken more than simple transparency.

In one respect, this public drama reflects the important stakes. Elsewhere (The Acquisition of Mearat Hamachpelah and the Centrality and Indispensability of Eretz Yisrael to Our Ancestral Values and National Identity) we have detailed the significance of purchasing the achuzat kever (23:5, 9, 20;49:30), a legacy resting place for the Avot, as well as the initiation of a concrete foothold in Eretz Yisrael. However, the public posturing and excessive, exaggerated transparency surrounding this transaction point to a crucial additional theme.

It is intriguing that while Avraham broaches the topic in a relatively low-key and informal manner (23:3-"…vayedaber el benei Cheit leimor") as a natural extension of his aveilut obligations ("vayakam Avraham meial penei meito…"), his apparently private request is subtly met with a more formal response (23:5): "vayanu benei Cheit et Avraham leimor lo". Upon further reflection, one may discern a transition in the tone and substance of the Avraham - benei Cheit exchanges with respect to the very legal foundation of this negotiation. While Avraham framed his proposal as an extension of his modest status as "ger ve-toshav anochi imachem", invoking universal and elemental rights, benei Cheit formalized ("shemaeinu adoni") the negotiation process and escalated the importance of the transaction by invoking his unparalleled spiritual and national stature as "nesi Elokim atah betocheinu"! This perspective, once spotlighted, necessarily redefined the parameters of this interaction. No longer could the purchase of mearat hamachpelah be perceived or undertaken as a quiet, personal real estate transaction, as it was now showcased as a a legacy acquisition consequential to Avraham's core mission as "nesi Elokim" and of lasting significance to the aspirations of Hashem's nation, Avraham's progeny. The more formal and legal tone, as well as excessive transparency including dramatic public posturing became de regur given the new reality. "Nesi Elokim atah betochenu" resonated with Avraham Avinu. It catapulted him and the purchase from a private acquisition to a consequential national mission in which he formally represented the national interests of Klal Yisrael. In this context, he did not have the luxury of informality or blind trust as matters that impact the future legacy and destiny of Klal Yisrael demand excessive, scrupulous rigor.

The next chapter of Avraham's life further reinforces this theme. After securing the mearat hamachpelah legacy, Avraham directs his attention to another indispensable national project, ensuring the continuity of the mesorah, the future of the nation, by pursuing the appropriate match for Yitzchak, the heir to national leadership. Notwithstanding his absolute confidence and trust in "damesek Eliezer" (Bereshit 15:2, Rashi etc.), again Avraham formalizes his approach, leaving nothing to chance or even trust. In the very context in which Eliezer's stature and worthiness is reaffirmed- "zekan beito hamoshel bekol asher lo" (24:2)- he is repeatedly addressed and referred to throughout this national mission simply as "avdo" (or "ha-eved" etc.). What would in other circumstances be an insulting, demeaning demand reflecting a complete absence of trust- "sim na yadchah tachat yereichi", supported by a binding oath, was undertaken in a spirit of national responsibility. This mission, like the previous task, was not a personal prerogative subject to personal reliance and polite etiquette, but a national trust that demanded maximalist safeguards.

At the conclusion of Bereshit, as the bechir ha-avot who bears the national moniker of "Yisrael" bequeaths his final legacy to his most trusted and beloved son, he, too, personifies this crucial principle of national leadership and responsibility. In a convergence of the legacy burial mearat hamachpela theme and language reminiscent of the mission to ensure Yizhak's future, the Torah reports that Yaakov-Yisrael legally and formally bound Yosef to the task of securing his and kelal yisrael's future (47:29-31)- "vayikrevu yemei Yisrael lamut…im na mazati chein be-einecha sim na yadcha tahat yereichi…vayomer hishava li, vayishava lo ' vayishtachu Yisrael al rosh ha-mitah."

When Prime Minister Menachem Begin was in office, he was often derided for his persistent refusal to refer to Yehudah and Shomron as the West Bank. His rigorous negotiating style and technique during the Camp David Peace accords sometimes infuriated critics, who, with an antisemitic edge, condescendingly complained that he was like a "Jewish lawyer" who demanded transparency and precision on every clause and who often displayed "inflexibility" when he remained steadfast to the core ideals of Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael. He repeatedly would clarify that his goal was not to confound his interlocutors or to emphasize some picayune truth or demand, but to responsibly represent Am Yisrael's core interests. As the leader entrusted with national security of the citizens of Israel and as the ambassador for all Jewish generations deciding issues of national sovereignty at a critical juncture in Jewish history, he did not have the prerogative to excessively compromise, appease, or exercise personal trust in matters that impact the legacy of Klal Yisrael.

We are living in challenging times, in which our ability to rely on friendly nations and forces, even those previously reliable, has been significantly eroded. The temptation to succumb to political pressures, to appease hostile forces, and even to acquiesce to the blandishments of those who mostly still count themselves as allies is enormous. We pray for abundant siyata Dishmaya, vision, and wisdom to achieve the appropriate balance in delicate decision making. The paradigm of Avraham Avinu, the ultimate ish chessed who knew when and how to conduct negotiations and secure national goals as a "nesi Elokim" serves as a model and inspiration. Maaseh avot siman lebanim.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez: Bringing Them Home

Last year, this past week, we attended funerals of the final four soldiers returned from Gaza: including Hadar Goldin Hy"d, after eleven-and-a-half years. Now, all the soldiers have come home.

It's striking that this week's parasha is so focused on burial. Sixteen verses describe, in great detail, the lengths Avraham went to in

order to bury Sarah – how he bowed, bargained, and paid to ensure her dignity in death. Later, Ya'akov's children do the same for him.

Why is the Torah so concerned with burial? Because how we treat the dead tells us everything about how we value life.

We see how our enemies desecrate bodies, treating them as objects to trade. And we see the Jewish people – going to extraordinary lengths, risking so much – to bring every fallen soldier home for burial.

Because to us, the body is holy. It housed the tzelem Elokim, the image of G-d. A cemetery is a place of holiness, a place where the sanctity of life is still present.

From Avraham Avinu to this very day, the way we honor the dead expresses how deeply we honor the living. That is one of the great privileges of being part of Am Yisrael – or lagoyim, a people who believe in life, and show it through the dignity we give in death.

May the memory of all our fallen be a blessing.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

The Age of the Giants

This past summer, the N.Y. Times carried a series of articles by one of its astute columnists entitled The Age of Giants. The author, in an attempt to explain the dynamics of the present American political set-up, maintains that our age is what it is primarily because it no longer has with it the giants, the great men of genius or near-genius, who used to lead its affairs. For instance, on the international scene, we no longer have such people like Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill, or De Gaulle who, whether we liked and agreed with them or not, were true giants. Science has lost its Planck and its Einstein. The one-time Rockefellers and Fords who built financial empires from scratch are not to be found. Philosophy has lost its Whitehead and Dewey and James. Few if any of these great spirits remain, and the active control of the affairs of our age, in all fields, has fallen into the hands of lesser men. The AGE OF GIANTS has come to an end.

In hearing this estimate of the secular, gentile world, it occurs to us that the same is true to such a large extent of the Jewish world. In the 1920s, we still had with us in the Land of the Living all the illustrious leaders of European Jewry, too numerous to mention by name. Even America had its great ones, such as R. Jacob Joseph of New York. Then, in that decade, the great Chofetz Chaim died. The next two decades saw the murder not only of millions of ordinary Jews, but thousands of Giants of Judaism and Jewry. This past year, there died in Israel one of the last of the great Giants – the Chazon Ish z"tz"l. Alas, the Age of Giants for us Jews seems to have come to a close.

Indeed, such an estimate seems to be an open invitation to pessimism and despair. With the gedolim, the Jewish Giants, gone, what can one expect of us ordinary Jews? As the Talmudic eulogizer put it centuries ago, im ba'arazim naflah shalhevess, mah yaasu ezovei ha'kir, if the giant cedar trees have been devoured by the flames, what shall the wall-flowers do? Can there be a bright future for our people under such conditions? Can Torah survive this disappearance of its giants?

I ask this more than just as a rhetorical question. It is more than an invitation to a pep talk. Psychologically speaking, it is a most crucial question. First, because many of our own people sometimes express such discouragement – sometimes it flies in the face of facts that are just contrary to it. Second, because the non-Jewish world, or sections of it, would like to believe that. That historian Toynbee, about whom we've heard so much, delights in calling us "fossils" – dead remains of a once-living people – and predicts our disappearance from the face of the earth. And third and most important, because people generally are not willing to give their lives for a lost cause, whether it is right or wrong. Everyone wants to be on the winning side. Just look at the present political campaign: each party claims to be "in league with the future" and "the party of the future." It is therefore important for us to try to peer behind the curtain of Time and take a glimpse of the future so as to ascertain whether we are or are not "in league with the future." What DOES the future hold for an age which has witnessed the end of the GIANTS?

The Torah, as amplified by the Tradition, gives us both the problem and its solution, all in one verse of today's Sidra. We are told first that Abraham had died – it was a rich, happy, and full life that had come to an end in dignity and in ripe old age. Abraham has died. His sons, Isaac and Ishmael, bury him. And here the Torah, it would almost seem, holds its breath for two sentences and describes the incidental details of where and how he came to his eternal rest. But then the stark realization must come – vayehi achrei mos Avraham – And it was after Abraham's death! The funeral was over, the Shiva was done – and the world was now faced with the dark and brutal and hard fact: the Giant of Giants was no more! The man who had by the force of his spirit stormed the heavens and wrested from them the secret of One G-d; the man who had engaged that G-d in debate for the sake of the miserable sinners of Sodom; the man who was ready to sacrifice his beloved son for his principles; the man who changed the face of the earth and brought thousands upon thousands to this new belief in G-d, who transfigured his whole society and all who lived in it – he was dead, and you had to face it and accept it and live up to the fact. The AGE OF GIANTS had come to an abrupt and tragic end.

Had we lived at that time, we would have been engulfed by a sudden deluge of pessimism, which would have overwhelmed us in succeeding waves of despair with each awakening realization that Abraham is no more. We would have stood by his bier and heard the gdolei ha'umos, the chiefs of all the peoples of that day, proclaim oy lo l'olam she'avad manhigo, oy lah l'sfinah she'avdah kabarnitah – woe to the world that has lost its leader, woe to the ship that has lost its captain. And into those pagan expressions of grief we probably would have read a feeling of delight: the unredeemed, pagan world could now go about its business as usual without an Abraham to summon it to greater destinies, to challenge its conscience…

Indeed, our Rabbis commenting on the word achrei, in vayhi achrei mot Avraham, tell us that upon his death, chazar ha'olam la'achorav, the world retrogressed, it went backwards, and the be'eiros, the wells which Abraham had dug, sasstum plishtim, the Philistines had choked off and closed down. Abraham was a GIANT; for the people of his day, he opened the wellsprings of holiness, the source of kindliness and generosity, the untapped reservoirs of human goodness. Now the little Philistines had come in to fill the vacuum – so they filled the wells, stopping the flow of G-dliness and goodness that Abraham had initiated.

A black, well-nigh desperate situation indeed had developed with the passing of the Giant Abraham. Surely his son Isaac was a saintly person – he had, after all, willingly submitted to the sacrifice at the Akedah as a man of 37. He was saintly, all good. But he was not the powerhouse, the dynamo of G-dliness that Abraham was. In our sacred history, Isaac, despite his holiness, is overshadowed both by his father and his son. He had a brother Ishmael, to contend with, and then a son, Esau. He was blind – having lost his sight at the Akedah where he beheld the heavenly vision. And now – now he was left on his own. Vayehi acharei mos Avraham – the Giant had died. What now?

But the Torah doesn't stop there. True, Abraham was dead, and an era of greatness had come to an end. But in the very same breath, we hear the words: vayvarech Elokim es Yitzchak bno, G-d blessed Isaac his son! – There is blessedness G-d bestows even upon those who are not Giants! There is a sacred and world-shaking responsibility on all men,

especially when the Giants aren't here to assume the burden for us! There is a blessing to be developed and handed on to generations to come! Isaac, G-d must have told him, until now you lived in Abraham's shadow and could rely upon him, now yours is the duty of a guardian, the blessing, of transmitting the teachings of Abraham to your society and your children! Now you must come into your own! Continue the heritage of Abraham, the tradition of your father, and you will prepare the ground for future Giants who will spring from your lines, for Jacob and Moseses and Isaiahs and Ezras and Akivas and Rambams! Without your rising to the challenge, they will never come into being. You are an indispensable link in the chain, for you can be a forefather of a people who will receive Torah! G-d will never allow the seed of Abraham to be destroyed, nor will He allow them to forget His Torah! And it is precisely when there are no Giants that every single Jew and Jewess must put his shoulder to the wheel of destiny!

That is what the brachah was – the ability of lesser men to make good where before only Giants had succeeded. Only the pagan chieftains were able to say that this world is lost and the ship is sunk. Only the Philistines stop off the wells. But the Isaacs gird their loins and go on with their holy work. For the Isaacs don't look at this moment alone and form judgments – they look at the whole expanse of Jewish history, and realize that where there were giants before, there will be giants later – provided that in the interim those who are not giants continue in their gigantic efforts at the being loyal sons of Torah. No wonder then that when the verse concludes vayeishev Yitzchak im be'eir lachay ro'i… that the Aramaic translator in the Targum (Yerushalmi) writes… v'yassiv Yitzchak samich l'birda d'isgali aloy ykar chay v'kayam, d'chami v'lo mis'chami… near the well where the glory of G-d sees, but is not seen. Few if any could have predicted then that out of this grieving, Isaac would come a Holy Nation and Kingdom of Priests. Few could have seen the glory of G-d that accompanied Isaac through a blessing. But G-d sees. G-d's perspective is limitless. Torah shall never be forgotten. The blessing will never die. There will be giants – a people of giants.

No, the Jewish people will not come to grief, chalilah, and the tradition of Torah will be kept alive. But this is the teaching of today's Sidra: when the Giants are not here to look after these treasures of our people, it is up to us ordinary people – who are, after all, not ordinary at all but Bnei Melachim – to keep it up.

A recent article in a popular magazine states that one need not be a genius to "go places," that if the person of the average IQ would use his brain-power to the fullest possible extent, he could learn and remember more than the greatest genius in the annals of human history!

Certainly, then, the end of the Age of Giants should not spell despair for us. If we are living in a time of crisis, as we surely are, let us not take a dim view of things. The giants are gone, and the world is in turmoil – crisis. But out of crisis can emerge greatness as well as destruction. In the Chinese ideogram script, the word "crisis" is composed of two figures, one representing "danger" and the other "opportunity." If we are lax and weak of heart, it may be a sign of danger. If we are strong and ready to summon up our greatest efforts for the sake of Torah and Israel, it will be an opportunity. For then it will mean that each of us will rise to the demands of greatness and each of us will become a giant in miniature.

The last 10-20 years in America have proven that. Without those great and towering spirits, the Abrahams of modern times, we have advanced steadily by doing our duties, imposed upon us by G-d and Torah. Orthodoxy today is far stronger than it was a decade and a half ago, and with signs for increasing influence in the future. We must not judge Torah's success by the scene of the moment. We must look at things from a perspective – it is better than it was, and it shall be better yet later. That is the point of view of G-d – dchami vlo mis'chami – the ability to see properly.

Maurice Samuel, in his latest book "The Professor and the Fossil," has a passage I believe worth quoting:... As the modern world opens, Jewry and Judaism are still very much on the scene. A fascinating historical drama is revealed. The auctioneer is Time, the Buyer Oblivion. The people come up on the block, one after the other, the hammer is lifted, the established formula is intoned: Going! Going! Gone!" But there is one people appears again; again and again it has looked like a sale; but the third word has never been pronounced over it.

And certainly we may add: that third word never will be pronounced over it. For vayvarech Elokim es Yitzchak Bno, for we are a people of the blessing. Our greatness lies in the ability of Yitzchaks to replace Abrahams, or ordinary Jews to hold fast and firm when the Giants have gone, so that Giants may arise in the future.

Let us carry on that blessing with courage and unimpeded. Let us dwell at the side of Be'er Lachay Ro'i, at the well of Jewish life and learning which is Torah, so that although we may not always catch a glimpse of the glory of G-d and the Divine plan for our generations, we will always be visible to Him who is the Shomer Yisrael, the guardian of Israel. May He watch over us and bestow the blessing upon us.



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **CHAYEI SARAH** - 5787

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Table of Contents:

- R' Zalman Sorotzkin on What Does the Torah Call Life
- Chaim Shulman on Sarah at One Hundred, Twenty and Seven
- N. Leibowitz & R' Nachshoni on A Stranger in the Promised Land
- R' Dovid Hofstedter on A Perfect Shidduch
- Candle Lighting & Kabbalas Shabbos (Radiance of Shabbos)
- R' Aharon Kotler on Eliezer: the Torah of Derech Eretz
- R' Y.Y. Jacobson on What Comes First: Love or Marriage

Adapted from
Oznayim LaTorah by **Rav Zalman Sorotzkin** (1881-1966)

What Does the Torah Call Life?

The parsha that begins with Sarah's death is called *Chayei Sarah* - the life of Sarah. That itself seems strange. ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים - *The life of Sarah was one hundred years, twenty years and seven years*, and immediately afterward the Torah tells us ותמת שרה - *Sarah died*. Why is the parsha of her death introduced as her life? There is another difficulty. After giving Sarah's age, the Torah concludes שני חיי שרה - *the years of Sarah's life*. Once the Torah has already told us that she lived 127 years, what does this repetition add?

Years That Were Truly Lived

The *Oznayim LaTorah* explains that the Torah is not merely telling us how long Sarah lived, but what kind of life she lived. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 58:1) applies to Sarah the pasuk יודע ה' ימי תמימים - *Hashem knows the days of the perfect* (Tehillim 37:18), and explains כשם שהם תמימים כך שנותיהם תמימות - *Just as they were complete, so were their years complete*. Avraham and Sarah devoted their lives to spreading knowledge of Hashem and performing chesed. Their days were not simply filled with activity. Each day was used for the purpose for which Hashem had given it to them.

The Torah makes a similar point when recording Avraham's age: ואלה ימי שני חיי אברהם אשר חי - *These are the days of the years of Avraham's life that he lived* (Chayei Sarah 25:7). The additional words אשר חי emphasize that his years were truly lived. From the time Avraham recognized his Creator, he did not allow a day to pass without purpose. This is also the meaning of שני חיי שרה. All 127 years were years that deserved to be called חיים.

The *Oznayim LaTorah* develops this idea through a Tefillah recited before Tehillim, asking Hashem not to take us from this world קודם זמננו עד מלאת שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה - *before our time, until we complete our seventy years*. The *Mishnah Berurah* recommends omitting the words בהם שבעים שנה. But the *Oznayim LaTorah* suggests a deeper understanding of the prayer. Even a person who has already lived a hundred years may still ask for seventy years of genuine life. If he were to count only the days and hours devoted to Torah, Tefillah, mitzvos and chesed, how many years would he actually have lived?

This, he explains, is the meaning of Dovid HaMelech's Tefillah: ימי שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה ... ורהבם עמל ואון ... למנות ימינו כן הודע ונבא לבב חכמה - *The days of our years are seventy ... yet their pride is toil and trouble ... Teach us to count our days, that we may acquire a heart of wisdom* (Tehillim 90:10-12). We do not need wisdom merely to count the number of days we have lived. We need wisdom to understand the value of our days, to recognize how much time has been wasted, and to ensure that the days remaining will be used properly.

A Higher Meaning of Life

The *Oznayim LaTorah* then brings an explanation he heard from his brother-in-law, Rav Yosef Yehudah Bloch, the Telzer Rosh Yeshivah. There are different levels of life. A plant grows and draws nourishment. An animal has movement and instinct. A human being possesses intellect and speech. Each has a higher form of life than the level beneath it. But the Torah reveals a form of life beyond ordinary human existence: לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת ... כי הוא חייכם - *To perform all the words of this Torah ... for it is your life* (Haazinu 32:46-47).

Torah and mitzvos are not merely things that a living person performs. They constitute a higher form of life. Without that dimension, even human existence, with all its intellectual accomplishments, does not attain what the Torah calls חיים.

But the *Oznayim LaTorah* adds that even within חיי תורה there are different levels. The Gemara (Kesubos 17a) distinguishes between the honor accorded at the funeral of one who studied Torah and one who taught Torah to others. Teaching Torah is greater than acquiring knowledge for oneself, because it extends the life of Torah to other people.

There is, however, an even higher level: bringing Torah to someone who has never learned it, or bringing knowledge of Hashem to people who did not previously recognize Him. This was the greatness of R' Chiya, concerning whom Rebbi declared כמה גדולים מעשי חייא - *How great are the deeds of Chiya* (Bava Metzia 85b). R' Chiya described how he prepared parchment, wrote the Chumash, taught children and arranged for them to teach one another, so that Torah

would not be forgotten from Klal Yisrael. His greatness lay not merely in transmitting what he knew, but in establishing Torah where it otherwise might not have existed.
This was the level of Avraham and Sarah. ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן - *The souls that they made in Charan* (Lech Lecha 12:5). Chazal explain that Avraham brought the men under the wings of the Shechinah, while Sarah brought the women. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 39:14) explains that one who brings another person to recognize Hashem is regarded as though he created that person. Avraham and Sarah did not merely live lives of Torah themselves. They brought spiritual life to others.

The Life of Sarah

This gives שני חיי שרה a deeper meaning. The Torah is not simply repeating Sarah's age. It is testifying to the nature of her years. They were not years of ordinary existence, nor even merely years of personal righteousness. Sarah devoted her life to bringing other people closer to Hashem, giving them a higher form of life.
We can now better understand why the parsha of Sarah's death is called *Chayei Sarah*. Physical life comes to an end, but a life spent bringing Torah and knowledge of Hashem into the world continues through those who were influenced by it. Bereishis Rabbah (58:1) itself teaches that the repetition of חיי שרה reflects how precious the lives of tzaddikim are before Hashem, both in this world and in the World to Come.
Sarah lived 127 years, but the Torah tells us something far more important than the number. שני חיי שרה - every year was truly a year of life, and through the lives she helped create, her influence continued beyond her own lifetime.

Sarah at One Hundred, Twenty and Seven
Chaim O. Shulman

The Torah begins Parshas Chayei Sarah: ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים שני חיי שרה - *Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years and seven years, the years of Sarah's life* (Chayei Sarah 23:1). Rashi explains that the word שנה is written with each number to teach us that each number is expounded on its own. בת מאה כבת עשרים לחטא מה בת עשרים לא חטאה שהרי אינה בת עונשין אף בת מאה בלא חטא - *at one hundred she was like twenty with respect to sin; just as at twenty she did not sin, since she was not yet subject to punishment, so at one hundred she was without sin*. ובת עשרים כבת שבע ליופי - *and at twenty she was like seven in beauty*. Rashi then says שני חיי שרה כולן שוין לטובה - *the years of Sarah's life were all equally good*.
Many ask, how being twenty proves that Sarah did not sin? It is true that there is a special rule that Heavenly punishment does not begin until twenty, but a person of twenty is certainly capable of sinning. What is also difficult is the comparison to seven in beauty. If the Torah is praising Sarah's beauty, why compare her to a seven-year-old? A twenty-year-old would seem to be the more natural comparison. Rav Soloveitchik therefore suggested that perhaps the two phrases were switched, and the original reading was בת מאה כבת עשרים לנוי ובת עשרים כבת שבע לחטא - *at one hundred she was like twenty in beauty, and at twenty she was like seven with respect to sin*.
In truth, this is not just a suggested correction. Midrash Lekach Tov (Pesikta Zutrasa) quoted in the Chizkuni has this version: *בת מאה שנה היתה כבת עשרים לנוי ובת עשרים כבת ז' לחטא* - *at one hundred she was like twenty in beauty and at twenty she was like seven with respect to sin*.
The Yalkut on Tehillim also has this reading, on the pasuk יודע ה' ימי תמימים - *Hashem knows the days of the wholehearted* (Tehillim 37:18). This is not a coincidence. The Midrash on our parsha in Bereishis Rabbah (58:1) opens with this very pasuk, so the Yalkut is really quoting the same Midrash, just with a different nusach.
It is interesting to note that the printed Bereishis Rabbah has the same comparisons as our Rashi, but the commentary on Bereishis Rabbah attributed to Rashi has the other reading. The Maharzu also quotes the Yalkut Tehillim version and says וגי' זו עיקר - *this is the correct version*. So Rav Soloveitchik's suggestion had already been preserved, and even preferred, in earlier sources.
With this nusach both questions are answered. בת עשרים כבת שבע לחטא means that at twenty Sarah was like a seven-year-old with respect to sin. A seven-year-old is not just free from punishment; he is not yet obligated in mitzvos at all. בת מאה כבת עשרים לנוי means that at one hundred she was like twenty in beauty, and twenty is the age one would naturally use to describe beauty. So each comparison is to the age that really has that quality. Sarah became an adult without losing the innocence she had as a child, and she became old without losing the vitality she had when she was young.
With this we can also understand Rashi's conclusion, שני חיי שרה כולן שוין לטובה. It does not mean that every period of Sarah's life was the same. Her life had many different experiences and many difficult challenges. Rather, each stage stayed with her, and that is why all of her years were equally good. So the Torah is not just telling us how long Sarah lived. It is telling us that she continued to grow without losing what was best in the years that came before.

Adapted by CS from
Iyunim B'Sefer Bereishis by **Nechama Leibowitz** and **Hagos B'Parshiyos HaTorah** by **Rabbi Yehuda Nachshoni**

A Stranger in the Land Hashem Promised Him
Why Does the Torah Record the Entire Purchase?

The Torah devotes an extraordinary amount of space to Avraham's purchase of Me'aras HaMachpelah. It records his request to the Bnei Cheis, their response, Avraham's repeated bows, Ephron's offer, Avraham's insistence on paying, the price of four hundred shekels, and finally the formal transfer of the field, the cave and all the trees within its borders. Chazal attach unusual importance to these details, observing עשר פעמים כתיב בני חת כנגד עשרת הדברות - *the Bnei Cheis are mentioned ten times, corresponding to the Aseres HaDibros*, and praising those who helped establish the purchase of a *tzaddik* (Bereishis Rabbah 58:8). But why does the Torah consider this transaction so important?
Ancient legal customs may explain some of the formalities. But even if this is precisely how a land transaction was conducted, that does not answer the more fundamental question: why did the Torah consider it necessary to record the negotiations at such extraordinary length?
One explanation is that this was Avraham's first acquisition in Eretz Yisrael. The Midrash identifies Me'aras HaMachpelah as one of three places concerning which אין אומות העולם יכולין להונות את ישראל לומר גזולים הם בידכם - *the nations cannot accuse Israel and say that they are stolen property*, because each was openly purchased (Bereishis Rabbah 79:7). Ibn Ezra (Chayei Sarah 23:19) likewise sees in the parsha an expression of מעלת ארץ ישראל לחיים ולמתים - *the special importance of Eretz Yisrael for the living and for the dead*.

He also connects the purchase with Hashem's promise that the land would ultimately become Avraham's inheritance.

Ramban (23:19) questions these explanations. What particular praise of Eretz Yisrael is demonstrated merely by the fact that Sarah was buried there rather than being taken elsewhere? Nor could the purchase of one burial plot represent the fulfillment of Hashem's promise to give Avraham the entire land, a promise that would be realized only through his descendants. Ramban instead emphasizes חסדי ה׳ toward Avraham. Although he entered the land as a stranger, its inhabitants now called him נשיא אלקים - *a prince of Hashem* (23:6). Hashem's promise ואגדלה שמך - *I will make your name great* (Lech Lecha 12:2) had already been fulfilled. Sarah was buried בנחלת ה׳, and the Torah also wished to preserve the location of קבורת אבותינו הקדושים - *the burial place of our holy forefathers*. Ramban further notes that Chazal regarded the difficulty Avraham encountered in purchasing Sarah's grave as one of his *nisyonos*.

The Contradiction Between Promise and Reality

But Nechama Leibowitz asks us to look again at the scene itself. Can this really be described as the beginning of the glorious fulfillment of Hashem's promises?

Hashem had told Avraham קום התהלך בארץ לארכה ולרחבה כי לך אתננה - *arise, walk through the land, its length and its breadth, for I will give it to you* (Lech Lecha 13:17). He later promised ונתתי לך ולזרעך אחריך את ארץ מגריך את כל ארץ כנען לאחזת עולם - *I will give to you and to your descendants after you the entire land of Canaan as an everlasting possession* (Lech Lecha 17:8). Yet when Sarah dies, Avraham does not possess even enough land in which to bury her. He must approach the people who presently control the land and ask תנו לי אחזת קבר עמכם - *give me a burial possession among you* (Chayei Sarah 23:4).

The Bnei Cheis respond with apparently generous words: במבחר קברינו קבר את מתך - *bury your dead in the choicest of our graves* (23:6). Radak explains that they had burial chambers used by individual families. But Avraham wants more than permission to use a grave belonging to someone else. He seeks his own אחוזת קבר, a permanent burial possession. The Bnei Cheis are offering him a place among them; Avraham seeks a place that will belong to him and his family.

Even that requires the cooperation of others. Chizkuni (23:7) explains that although Ephron owned the field, Avraham needed the consent of the other inhabitants to establish a burial place there. This gives the repeated bows a practical explanation, but they also emphasize the contrast between Hashem's promise and Avraham's circumstances. The man to whom Hashem promised all of Eretz Yisrael must rise and bow before its inhabitants because he needs their permission to bury his wife. He is not acting as the master of the land, but as someone dependent upon those who presently possess it.

Nor do Ephron's generous words eliminate that dependence. Ephron publicly declares השדה נתתי לך והמערה אשר בו לך נתתיה - *I give you the field and the cave within it* (23:11). Yet the negotiations end with Avraham paying four hundred shekels of silver. Chazal describe Ephron as one who אמר הרבה ואפילו מעט לא עשה - *promised much and did not even do a little* (Bava Metzia 87a). Rashi (23:16) connects this with the defective spelling עפרן, without a *vav*. Ephron's expressions of generosity cannot obscure the actual circumstances in which Avraham finds himself.

Indeed, the contrast between גר ותושב אנכי עמכם - *I am a stranger and a resident among you* (23:4) and נשיא אלקים אתה בתוכנו - *you are a prince of Hashem among us* (23:6) captures Avraham's peculiar position. Nachshoni emphasizes that Avraham is wealthy, honored and apparently established. But he knows that all this recognition does not make him the owner of the land. They call him נשיא אלקים, yet he describes himself as גר ותושב because that is his actual position.

Nachshoni also cites Chizkuni concerning ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולבכתה - *Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her* (23:2). Avraham had an additional reason for sorrow: he did not even have a prepared burial place in the land. Sarah's death exposed in the most painful way what it still meant for Avraham to be a *ger* in the very land Hashem had promised him.

The Nisayon of Emunah

The central meaning of the episode thus lies precisely in the contradiction between Hashem's promise and the reality before Avraham. The greater the distance between what Hashem has promised and the actual circumstances a person encounters, the greater the *nisayon*. When everything visible seems to contradict what Hashem has said, the temptation is to question, complain or even rebel.

A similar difficulty appears in the experience of Gideon. When he sees the suffering of Klal Yisrael, Gideon asks ויש ה׳ עמנו ולמה מצאתנו כל זאת - *if Hashem is with us, why has all this happened to us?* (Sefer Shoftim 6:13). The promises and the reality seem irreconcilable.

Avraham faces that same contradiction. Hashem has promised him Eretz Yisrael, yet every social, economic and political fact tells him that the land belongs to others. He cannot even bury Sarah without obtaining their agreement.

Nevertheless, Avraham does not question Hashem. The *Midrash HaGadol* emphasizes both his *emunah* and his humility. Hashem had promised him the land, yet when Sarah died he could find no burial place without paying a substantial sum. ולא הרהר אחר מדותיו של הקב״ה ולא קרא תגר - *he did not question the ways of Hashem and did not protest*. Nor does he respond to the contradiction by asserting his promised rights against the Bnei Cheis. Instead, he approaches them with humility and says גר ותושב אנכי עמכם - *I am a stranger and a resident among you*.

That combination is important. Avraham's *emunah* does not cause him to deny the world as it presently exists. He knows what Hashem has promised, but also recognizes that the land is presently controlled by others. He neither questions the promise nor uses it as an excuse to disregard reality. He bows, negotiates and pays.

Chazal make the point even more forcefully by comparing Avraham with the other Avos. Hashem promised Avraham the land, yet he had to purchase Sarah's grave. Yitzchak was told גור בארץ הזאת - *dwell in this land* (Toldos 26:3), yet the shepherds of Gerar fought with him over his wells. Yaakov was promised the land, yet he had to purchase the place where he pitched his tent for מאה קשיטה - *one hundred kesitos* (Vayishlach 33:19). Nevertheless, Chazal say, ולא הרהרו על מדותי - *they did not question My ways* (Sanhedrin 111a).

Only then does the Gemara contrast Moshe, who complained to Hashem ומאז באתי אל פרעה לדבר בשמך הרע לעם הזה - *from the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has harmed this people* (Shemos 5:23). The lives of the Avos repeatedly contained this pattern: Hashem gives a promise, yet the next stage of history may

appear not to fulfill it but to contradict it. Their greatness was to remain faithful during the contradiction itself.

This is why the Torah records the entire story of Me'aras HaMachpelah. Had it simply stated that Avraham purchased a burial place for Sarah, the *nisayon* would not be apparent. The reader must see Avraham standing before the Bnei Cheis, bowing, requesting, negotiating and paying. The enormous distance between אתננה לך כי - *I will give it to you* and תנו לי אחזת קבר עמכם - *give me a burial possession among you* is what gives the episode its significance.

The First אחוזה

Nachshoni adds another dimension without eliminating that tension. Avraham does not accept permission to use someone else's grave. He insists upon acquiring the property בכסף מלא - *for its full price* (23:9). The negotiations end with unusually formal language: ויקם שדה עפרון אשר במכפלה - *the field of Ephron in Machpelah was established*, followed by the specification of the field, the cave and the trees, all transferred לאברהם למקנה - *to Avraham as a possession* (23:17–20). Nachshoni suggests that an ancestral burial place had a significance beyond the grave itself. A traveler may live in a place temporarily, but a family whose dead are buried there has permanent roots in the soil. Avraham therefore asks not merely for a קבר, but for an אחזת קבר. In that sense, Sarah's burial begins to establish a lasting connection between Avraham's family and Eretz Yisrael. The Torah records the formal acquisition of the property because this is not merely permission to bury Sarah. It is a permanent possession.

This does not diminish Nechama's point. The purchase of Machpelah was hardly the grand fulfillment of לך אתננה. Indeed, the necessity of purchasing it demonstrated how distant that fulfillment still seemed. But Nachshoni allows another aspect of the same event to emerge. The transaction that most dramatically exposed how little of the land Avraham possessed also became the first small piece that was permanently his.

Nachshoni cites the Chasam Sofer, who sharpens the paradox. Avraham's first acquisition in Eretz Yisrael was not a home or a field in which to begin a new life, but a burial place. His first permanent foothold in the promised land came through Sarah's death. The Chasam Sofer connects this with the prayer ותוליכנו קוממיות לארצנו - *bring us upright to our land*. The aspiration is to return to Eretz Yisrael alive and upright, rather than first reaching it through burial. Avraham, however, had to endure the pain of establishing his family's first permanent possession through the death of Sarah.

Conclusion

The two descriptions גר ותושב and נשיא אלקים capture the tension that runs through the entire parsha. Avraham is already a נשיא אלקים in stature, but still a גר in possession. Hashem's promise is certain, yet its realization remains largely in the future. Avraham does not demand that the future arrive immediately. He does not deny what his eyes see, nor does he allow what his eyes see to weaken what Hashem has told him.

Me'aras HaMachpelah does not eliminate the contradiction between promise and reality. It preserves it. Avraham stands in the land Hashem has promised him, without even a grave of his own, and remains faithful. From within that *nisayon* comes the first permanent אחוזה in Eretz Yisrael. The field, the cave and the trees now belong to Avraham, but the promise of an entire land still lies ahead. His greatness was not that he already saw Hashem's promise fulfilled, but that he remained certain of its truth when everything before him seemed to say otherwise.

Adapted from

Dorash Dovid by **Rav Dovid Hofstedter**

Parshas Chayei Sarah: A Perfect Shidduch

When Eliezer recounts his mission to the family of Besuel, he repeats what he said to Avraham before setting out: ואמר אל אדני אלי לא תלך האשה אחרי - *I said to my master, perhaps the woman will not follow me* (Chayei Sarah 24:39). Rashi notes that the word אלי, *perhaps*, is written here without a vav, so that it can also be read as *to me*: אלי כתיב, בת היתה לו לאליעזר והיה מחזר למצוא עילה שיאמר לו אברהם לפנות אליו להשיאו בתו - *Eliezer had a daughter, and he was looking for a pretext so that Avraham would turn to him and marry Yitzchak to his daughter*. Avraham's answer was decisive: בני ברוך ואתה ארור, ואין ארור מדבק בברוך - *my son is blessed and you are cursed, and the cursed cannot cleave to the blessed*. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 59:9) adds that Eliezer would sit and weigh his daughter's qualities, ראויה היא או אינה ראויה - *is she fit for Yitzchak or not*.

Eliezer's Greatness. What is difficult to understand is why Avraham rejected Eliezer's daughter out of hand. Eliezer was no ordinary servant. The Torah describes him as המושל בכל אשר לו - *who ruled over all that was his* (Chayei Sarah 24:2), and the Gemara (Yoma 28b) explains שמושל בתורת רבו - *he had mastery over his master's Torah*. Similarly, the name דמשק אליעזר (Lech Lecha 15:2) is expounded as דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו לאחרים - *he draws from his master's Torah and gives others to drink*. Nor was his greatness limited to learning. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 59:8) reads the same words המושל בכל אשר לו as שהיה שליט ביצרו כמותו - *he ruled over his yetzer hara just as Avraham did*. Eliezer was one of the few who entered Gan Eden alive (Kallah Rabbasi ch. 3; Derech Eretz Zuta ch. 1), and the Gemara (Bava Basra 58a) relates that to this day he stands guard at the entrance to Me'aras Hamachpelah.

Besuel and his son Lavan, on the other hand, were wicked men steeped in avodah zarah. Why would Avraham prefer to bring a girl from such a home into his family rather than the daughter of the great talmid chacham and tzaddik Eliezer?

The Baalei Tosafos (24:39) sharpen the question further. Eliezer's daughter, they write, would have been a worse choice than even the daughters of Aner, Eshkol and Mamrei. Although they too descended from Canaan, Avraham would have accepted a daughter-in-law from one of their families had no suitable girl been found in Charan. Eliezer had two things against him: he was a descendant of Cham, and he was a slave. The Ran (Drashos, drush 5) writes that the people of Canaan were born with wicked character traits which they passed on to their children, almost as an inherited illness. It is apparent from Chazal that all of Eliezer's Torah and righteousness could not overcome these flaws. But this is exactly what remains to be understood. What is it about slavery that all of Eliezer's Torah and yiras Shamayim could not overcome it?

Two Further Questions. The parsha opens with another puzzling statement: ואברהם זקן בא בימים וה' ברך את אברהם בכל - *Avraham was old, advanced in days, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything* (Chayei Sarah 24:1). Rashi comments: בכל עולה בגימטריא בן, וכיון שהיה לו בן היה צריך להשיאו אשה - *bakol has the numerical value of ben, son, and since he had a son he needed to find him a wife*. The

Torah has already told us that Avraham had a son. Why does it need to hint at this through a gematria?

What is also troublesome is the timing. The Torah states clearly ויהי יצחק בן ארבעים שנה בקחתו את רבקה - *Yitzchak was forty years old when he married Rivkah* (Toldos 25:20). Why did Avraham put off this important task for so many years? The Maharam Shick (Teshuvos, Even Ha'ezer 1) strengthens the question. Avraham excelled in the middah of *zerizus*, performing every mitzvah quickly and without delay, yet he seemingly left the mitzvah of marrying off his son unfulfilled for years.

The Mizrachi, Gur Aryeh and Ohr Hachaim (25:20) answer that Yitzchak could not have married any earlier, since he had to wait until Rivkah was three years old. This answer does not suffice according to the Ramban, however. The Ramban (24:7) apparently understood that Avraham did not know Rivkah was Yitzchak's intended bride, for had he known, he would have sent Eliezer to Charan specifically to bring her. If Avraham did not know about Rivkah, he certainly was not waiting for her.

Brachah Means Increase. The key to all of these questions lies in the meaning of the word ברוך. Rav Chaim of Volozhin (Nefesh Hachaim 2:2) writes that ברוך is not an expression of praise, as is commonly thought. Its true meaning is increase and addition. When Yaakov offered his gift to Eisav, he said קח נא את ברכתי - *please take my brachah* (Vayishlach 33:11), meaning a gift that would add to Eisav's wealth. Hashem promises וברך את לחמך - *He will bless your bread* (Mishpatim 23:25), meaning He will increase our sustenance, and וברך פרי בטנך - *He will bless the fruit of your womb* (Eikev 7:13), meaning He will increase the number of our children. In these and countless other places, brachah cannot mean praise. It can only mean increase.

With this, the difference between Yitzchak and Eliezer becomes clear. Yitzchak learned from his father and followed his ways as a talmid, but he also brought the quality of ברוך into his avodas Hashem. After mastering his father's teachings, he went on to forge his own path, becoming a source of new ways of serving Hashem. This is the meaning of Chazal's teaching (Berachos 26b) that אברהם תקן תפלת שחרית - *Avraham instituted Shacharis*, while יצחק תקן תפלת מנחה - *Yitzchak instituted Minchah*. Rabbeinu Menachem Rekanati (Noach 11:26) explains that Avraham served Hashem through the middah of chessed, while Yitzchak, who received everything from his father, served Hashem through an entirely different middah, gevurah.

This ability to build new structures of Torah and avodas Hashem is what set Yitzchak apart from Eliezer. Eliezer mastered his master's Torah, but he could not create a Torah path of his own. The very drasha that praises him says it precisely: דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו, he drew from his master's Torah and passed it on to others, without adding any insight of his own. He gained control over his yetzer hara, but the Midrash says כמותו, just like Avraham. His strength was a duplicate of Avraham's strength, and he did not have the spiritual tools to go beyond it.

The Curse of Slavery. The limitation on Eliezer's greatness was a direct result of his being a slave. It was rooted in the curse Noach placed upon his ancestor: ארור כנען עבד עבדים יהיה לאחיו - *cursed is Canaan, a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers* (Noach 9:25). The Ohr Hatzafun (essay Hasheleimus Tamid Bereishisah) writes that as a result of what Cham did to Noach, his descendants were forever marked with the lowly nature of slaves. It became so deeply ingrained in them that even the fire of Torah study could not remove it, and this can be seen in Eliezer, Avraham's faithful servant. A slave's entire being is subordinate to his master, and he has no independent existence of his own.

This explains Avraham's words, בני ברוך ואתה ארור. Yitzchak was ברוך in the fullest sense, possessing the potential for unlimited growth in avodas Hashem, while Eliezer was ארור, bound by the curse of Canaan to be a servant to his master. A *ben bayis* of Avraham might have been suitable for a son who would only preserve Avraham's ways, but not for a son who would build upon them. Despite all her fine qualities, Eliezer's daughter was not fit to be Yitzchak's wife. To continue the path Avraham had forged, the next generation needed the same quality of independent growth that Avraham and Yitzchak possessed. This also explains why the Baalei Tosafos joined Eliezer's descent from Cham together with his being a slave. They are really one flaw, since the slavery itself is the curse of Canaan.

So Avraham sent Eliezer to his family in Charan. Although they did not excel in yiras Shamayim or righteousness, they were free of the stifling nature of slavery. There was nothing inherently flawed in their souls that would prevent them from growing independently in avodas Hashem. Eliezer carried out his mission faithfully, and Hashem led him to Rivkah. She was devoted to chessed and had fine middos, but she also did more than what was asked of her. Eliezer asked only for a little water, and she added on her own, גם לגמליך אשאב - *I will draw for your camels too* (Chayei Sarah 24:19). This is the very quality of ברוך, adding beyond what one is given. Eliezer realized she was the ideal choice, and with her the foundation of Klal Yisrael was laid.

Akeidas Yitzchak, the Proving Ground. Now the other questions can be answered as well. Avraham could not choose a wife for Yitzchak until it was clear what direction Yitzchak's avodas Hashem would take and how great he would become. That was revealed at Akeidas Yitzchak, when his enormous power of *mesirus nefesh* came to the fore, and only then could Avraham look for a partner who would complement it.

It was at the Akeidah that Yitzchak showed he was truly ברוך, that his avodas Hashem was his own and went beyond what he had received from his father. He did not passively submit to being brought on Avraham's mizbeach. Chazal (Yalkut Shimoni 101) relate that he took an active part in all the preparations. Father and son gathered the stones together, prepared the fire together, and gathered the wood together. Avraham acted as if he were preparing his son's wedding, and Yitzchak acted as if he were building his own chuppah. In a sense, the Akeidah was Yitzchak's chuppah, and only after it could Avraham turn to the real one. Yitzchak also showed his eagerness to fulfill the mitzvah in the most complete way. Abba, he said, tie my hands and feet well, lest I flinch when the knife touches me and ruin the shechitah, making me unfit to be a korban. Be careful not to make me blemished. Abba, act quickly to fulfill the will of the Creator (compare Tanchuma Vayeira 13 and Bereishis Rabbah 56:8). This is what the Torah teaches with the gematria of בכל and בן. It is not telling us that Avraham had a son, which is already known. It is telling us what kind of son he was. Yitzchak was the embodiment of בכל, complete and perfected in every aspect of avodas Hashem. Once Avraham saw this at the Akeidah, he knew it was time to find him a

wife. This is why the gematria is connected specifically to finding Yitzchak a wife, וכיון שהיה לו בן היה צריך להשיאו אשה. This also answers the question of the Maharam Shick. Avraham did not delay the mitzvah. Before Yitzchak's greatness was revealed, the mitzvah could not be fulfilled properly, and once it was revealed, Avraham acted immediately.

This fits in nicely with Rashi (Vayeira 22:20), who writes that it was on his return from Har Hamoriah that Avraham first began to think about marrying off Yitzchak, considering even the daughters of Aner, Eshkol and Mamrei. Rashi gives a different reason for the thought, that Avraham realized Yitzchak could have died without children, but the turning point is the same. The shidduch began with the Akeidah.

One Last Thought. This is where Eliezer's reckoning fell short. He sat and weighed his daughter's virtues, ראויה היא או אינה ראויה, as if a shidduch were a matter of tallying good qualities. Avraham first asked a different question, whether her nature could match the path of growth Yitzchak was destined to take. The same holds for anyone building a home. The first thing to understand is the other person's nature and life goals, and whether they match one's own. Other qualities and talents matter, but only as enhancements of what is already there.

When Does Hadlakas Neiros Bring in Shabbos?

By CS -- Based primarily on

The Radiance of Shabbos by **Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen**

When Yitzchak brought Rivkah into Sarah's tent, the Torah says ויבאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו - *Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother* (Chayei Sarah 24:67). Rashi, citing the Midrash, explains that while Sarah was alive there was נר דלוק מערב שבת לערב שבת - a candle burning from one Erev Shabbos to the next. The light ceased after Sarah's death and returned when Rivkah entered the tent. Hadlakas Neiros remained a central part of the Jewish home. But beyond providing light for Shabbos, it ordinarily marks the moment when an Ashkenazic woman personally accepts Shabbos. Exactly when does that happen? May she extinguish the match after lighting? What if she still needs to daven Minchah, eat or travel? Can she light without accepting Shabbos, and does her acceptance affect the rest of the family?

When Does She Accept Shabbos?

Rav Moshe Isserles (c. 1530–1572), the Rema, writes והמנהג שאותה אשה המדלקת מקבלת שבת בהדלקה - the custom is that the woman who lights accepts Shabbos through Hadlakas Neiros (O.C. 263:10). Under Ashkenazic practice, a woman first lights and then recites the berachah. Ordinarily, a berachah precedes a mitzvah, *oveir la'asiyasan*, but here reciting it first would mean accepting Shabbos before lighting the candles. The Rema therefore explains that she covers her eyes or the light after lighting, recites the berachah, and then uncovers her eyes to benefit from the light, so that the berachah still precedes the enjoyment of the candles (O.C. 263:5).

Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829–1908), the Aruch HaShulchan, explains that after lighting she may extinguish the match and then recite the berachah: שפיר יכולות לכבות ואחר כך יברכו - they may extinguish and afterward recite the berachah, because דזהו פשיטא דקודם הברכה לא הוי קבלת שבת עדיין - before the berachah she has clearly not yet accepted Shabbos (Aruch HaShulchan 263:13–14). Thus, she may also relight a candle that has gone out before reciting the berachah. After completing the lighting, when she recites the berachah, she accepts Shabbos and may no longer perform ordinary melachah.

This discussion follows Ashkenazic practice. Many Sephardic authorities, including Rav Ovadia Yosef, rule that the berachah precedes lighting, although Sephardic customs are not uniform (*Yabia Omer* II, O.C. 16).

What May She Still Do After Accepting Shabbos?

Her acceptance is effective immediately, even before sunset, and ordinary melachah becomes prohibited to her. There is, however, a narrower question concerning activities that Chazal permitted during *bein hashmashos*, the twilight period. For example, the Shulchan Aruch permits asking a non-Jew during *bein hashmashos* to perform certain activities needed for a mitzvah or an important Shabbos preparation (O.C. 261:1).

The Poskim disagree whether a woman who has accepted Shabbos early may rely on these leniencies. Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen concludes that in a case of need she may rely on the lenient position and perform an activity otherwise permitted during *bein hashmashos* (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, pp. 35–36). Thus, personal acceptance of Shabbos does not necessarily make every halacha identical to the situation after nightfall.

Eating After Hadlakas Neiros

Once a woman has lit, recited the berachah and accepted Shabbos, she generally may not eat or drink until she makes or hears Kiddush. The Shulchan Aruch states אסור לטעום כלום קודם שיקדש אפילו מים - one may not taste anything before Kiddush, even water (O.C. 271:4). Rav Cohen notes a limited exception: if she is very thirsty, she may drink water until sunset. If she knows beforehand that she will need to eat after lighting and does not intend to make Kiddush then, she should make a *tenai* before lighting that she is not yet accepting Shabbos. She may then eat until sunset (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 36).

What If She Still Wants to Daven Minchah?

For a woman who wishes to daven Minchah on Friday, the proper order is to daven before lighting. Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838–1933), the Mishnah Berurah, writes ותתפלל מנחה תחלה דהואיל דכבר קבלה שבת שוב א"א להתפלל תפלה של חול - she should first daven Minchah, because once she has accepted Shabbos she can no longer daven a weekday tefillah (Mishnah Berurah 263:43).

If she must light before davening Minchah, Rav Cohen explains that she may make a *tenai* that she is not accepting Shabbos through the lighting and then daven Minchah afterward (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 37). The Mishnah Berurah also discusses the alternative of davening Maariv twice, with the second Shemoneh Esrei serving as *tashlumin* for a missed Minchah.

Can She Light Without Accepting Shabbos?

The Rema expressly allows a woman to separate the mitzvah of lighting from her personal acceptance of Shabbos: אם לא שתתנה תחלה, ואפילו תנאי בלב סגי - unless she stipulates beforehand, and even a mental stipulation suffices (O.C. 263:10). She may therefore make a verbal or mental *tenai* before lighting that Shabbos will not begin for her with Hadlakas Neiros.

The Magen Avraham, Rav Avraham Gombiner (c. 1635–1682), cautions דאין להתנות כי אם לצורך מאחר שיש חולקין - one should make such a stipulation only when necessary, because some authorities disagree that it is effective (Magen Avraham 263:20; see Mishnah

Berurah 263:44). A *tenai* is therefore not simply a matter of ordinary convenience. Rav Cohen gives examples of genuine need: completing preparations for the mikveh; traveling to the home where the Friday-night meal will be eaten; transportation after lighting, such as to the Kosel; davening Minchah; eating before Kiddush; or an urgent trip to the hospital (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, pp. 37–38).

Does a Tenai Change the Order of the Berachah?

One might reason that if a woman makes a *tenai* not to accept Shabbos through her berachah, she should revert to the usual order of reciting the berachah before performing the mitzvah. Rav Cohen explains that she does not. Even with a *tenai*, she follows the established Ashkenazic practice: she lights first and recites the berachah afterward (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 60). The stipulation affects when Shabbos begins for her, not how she performs Hadlakas Neiros.

Which Lights Bring in Shabbos?

A woman may switch on numerous lights throughout the house in preparation for Shabbos, but doing so does not itself constitute her principal Hadlakas Neiros or acceptance of Shabbos. The Rema writes ועיקר הדלקה תלויה בנרות שמדליקין על השולחן אבל לא בשאר הנרות שבבית - the principal lighting depends on the candles lit at the table, not on other lights elsewhere in the home (O.C. 263:10).

The practical point is that the ordinary electric lights needed throughout the home should be turned on before Hadlakas Neiros. Once she has recited the berachah and accepted Shabbos, she may no longer turn them on herself unless she made an effective *tenai*. Her *kabbalas Shabbos* is ordinarily associated with the principal Hadlakas Neiros and its berachah, not with the other lights turned on beforehand.

What If a Man Lights?

The rule is different when a man performs Hadlakas Neiros. The Magen Avraham writes ואם האיש מדליק ליכא מנהגא ומותר במלאכה ומ"מ טוב להתנות - when a man lights, there is no established custom that he thereby accepts Shabbos, and he remains permitted to perform melachah, although it is preferable to make a *tenai* (Magen Avraham 263:18; Mishnah Berurah 263:42).

There is also a difference in the order of the berachah. Since a man does not ordinarily accept Shabbos by reciting the berachah, he follows the usual rule of *oveir la'asiyasan*: he recites the berachah first and then lights. An Ashkenazic woman continues to follow her established practice of lighting first, even when she has made a *tenai* (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 60). Hadlakas Neiros and *kabbalas Shabbos* are closely connected, but they are not inherently the same act.

Does Her Acceptance Bind the Household?

The Rema continues אבל שאר בני הבית מותרין במלאכה עד ברכו - the other members of the household remain permitted to perform melachah until *Barechu* (O.C. 263:10). Thus, when a woman accepts Shabbos through Hadlakas Neiros, her husband and the rest of the household do not automatically accept Shabbos with her. Rav Cohen adds that even if a man lights and personally accepts Shabbos through his lighting, his wife and other household members do not thereby accept it with him (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 39).

The Rema's words עד ברכו refer to the congregation's acceptance of Shabbos through Maariv, which, according to the customary practice of his time, occurred at *Barechu*. This introduces a separate question: whether acceptance through tefillah, particularly by the husband or the community, can bind others who have not yet personally accepted Shabbos.

What If the Husband Accepts Shabbos Through Tefillah?

Rav Yair Chaim Bacharach (1638–1702), the Chavos Yair, in *Mekor Chaim* (O.C. 263:17), maintains that when the husband accepts Shabbos through tefillah, his wife and household are drawn after his acceptance. Rav Shmuel Wosner likewise adopts a stringent position (*Shevet HaLevi* VII:35). On this view, the wife must complete her melachah and light before her husband's acceptance of Shabbos through tefillah.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (1895–1986), however, distinguishes between a husband's personal acceptance and an established family practice (*Igros Moshe*, O.C. III:38). He explains that a husband cannot ordinarily impose his own *kabbalas Shabbos* upon his wife merely by accepting Shabbos himself. However, where the husband has an established practice of accepting Shabbos early as a mitzvah of *tosefes Shabbos*, or to avoid performing melachah too close to Shabbos, his wife is also expected to follow that practice.

Summer early Shabbos is often different. A congregation may daven early simply because otherwise the Friday-night meal would begin very late. Where the early tefillah is principally for convenience, Rav Moshe holds that the wife and family need not accept Shabbos when the husband does. She may continue performing melachah for herself, although she should not ordinarily perform melachah specifically for him, such as ironing his shirt after he has accepted Shabbos.

Other authorities are more lenient concerning the effect of a husband's acceptance on his household (see *Minchas Yitzchak* I:24; *The Radiance of Shabbos*, pp. 39–40). The fact that a husband has davened an early Maariv therefore does not, by itself, determine when his wife must accept Shabbos. The nature of his acceptance and the family's established practice also matter.

When the Community Accepts Shabbos

The Shulchan Aruch rules אם רוב הקהל קבלו עליהם שבת, המיעוט נמשכים אחריהם על כרחם - if most of the community has accepted Shabbos, the minority is drawn after them even against its will (O.C. 263:12). In a community with one established shul, individuals could not simply continue treating the time as weekday after the community had accepted Shabbos. The stage of tefillah constituting communal acceptance depends upon the established practice, and need not always be *Barechu* (see Mishnah Berurah 263:58).

Rav Cohen explains that the application differs in many contemporary communities with several established shuls or minyanim. Even if most people happen to daven in one shul, those in other established minyanim generally are not forced to accept Shabbos at the same time (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 41). The older rule may still apply where there is only one functioning shul or minyan, such as a camp, bungalow colony or hotel. Rav Cohen notes that many authorities regard everyone there as bound by the community's acceptance, although particular circumstances may require a halachic ruling (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 42).

Conclusion

For an Ashkenazic woman, Hadlakas Neiros ordinarily marks the moment when Shabbos begins for her: she completes the lighting, extinguishes the match, recites the berachah and accepts Shabbos. A *tenai* can defer that acceptance in a case of need, but does not change her customary order of lighting and berachah. A man who lights

follows a different rule, while a husband's acceptance through tefillah and the acceptance of the community present separate questions.
The candle that returned when Rivkah entered Sarah's tent represented the restoration of Sarah's home. Just as the Shabbos light was associated with Sarah and returned when Rivkah became the *akeres habayis*, Hadlakas Neiros continues to occupy a special place in the Jewish home. For the woman lighting, it is not merely the kindling of a candle, but ordinarily the moment when she personally welcomes Shabbos.

Adapted from
משנת רבי אהרן על התורה by **Rav Aharon Kotler** (1892-1962)

Eliezer: The Torah of Middos and Derech Eretz

Why Is Eliezer's Story Repeated?

The Torah devotes an extraordinary amount of space to Eliezer's mission to find a wife for Yitzchak. First it describes what happened, and then Eliezer repeats almost the entire account when he arrives at the home of Besuel and Lavan. Rashi (Chayei Sarah 24:42), quoting Chazal, explains:
יפה שיחתן של עבדי בתי אבות לפני המקום מתורתן של בנים שהרי פרשה של אליעזר כפולה בתורה והרבה גופי תורה לא ניתנו אלא ברמיזה - *The conversations of the servants of the Avos are more precious before Hashem than the Torah of their descendants, for the account of Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, while many fundamental laws are given only through allusion.*
This is difficult to understand. How can the conversations of a servant be more precious before Hashem than fundamental *halachos*? And why does the Torah repeat the entire account when so many important laws are taught through only a brief reference?

The Torah of Derech Eretz

The answer lies in the importance of *middos* and *derech eretz*. The Torah teaches not only what a person must do, but how he should think, speak and conduct himself. Chazal say דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה - *derech eretz preceded the Torah*. Proper conduct is not merely something desirable alongside Torah; it is part of the foundation upon which Torah life is built.
This is also why Sefer Bereishis is called ספר הישר - *the Book of the Upright*. The Avos were called *yesharim*, and their lives teach the *yashrus* with which a Torah Jew must conduct himself. Their greatness was expressed not only in their Avodah, but also in their relationships with others and in the ordinary details of daily life.
There is, however, an important difference between *halachah* and *derech eretz*. Many *halachos* can be expressed through definite rules. Proper *middos* and *derech eretz* cannot always be reduced to a fixed formula. אין קבועות כל כך בכל הפרטים ותלויות במצב הדברים ולפי הענין - *the proper conduct is not fixed in every detail, but depends upon the circumstances and the particular situation*. What is considerate in one situation may be thoughtless in another. The proper response depends upon the person involved, his feelings and the circumstances.
That is why הדרכה ושימוש תלמידי חכמים - *guidance and shimush talmidei chachamim* - are so important. One must learn not only the principles of proper conduct, but how great people apply them. The Torah therefore records the conversations and actions of the Avos and their households in extraordinary detail. Their conduct teaches lessons that could not be conveyed as effectively through a series of rules.

Learning Middos from Others

A person is also deeply influenced by those around him. Chazal ask איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם - *What is the proper path to which a person should attach himself?* Among the answers are חבר טוב - *a good friend* and שכן טוב - *a good neighbor* (Avos 2:9). A person who wishes to develop good *middos* must surround himself with people whose conduct he can learn from.
This is especially important in choosing a wife. The person with whom one builds a home becomes part of his daily environment and helps shape the next generation. Eliezer therefore looked for more than family standing or wealth. He sought the *middos* necessary for the home of Avraham and Yitzchak.
His test of Rivkah illustrates how much depends upon the details of conduct. Eliezer had proposed that the proper young woman would answer שתה וגם גמליך אשקה - *Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink*. Rivkah, however, first said שתה אדני - *Drink, my master*, and only after Eliezer finished drinking did she add גם לגמליך אשאב עד אם כלו לשתת - *I will also draw water for your camels until they have finished drinking*.
Her response displayed more than a willingness to perform *chesed*. By first attending to Eliezer and only afterward offering to water the camels, she showed consideration for his dignity and sensitivity to how a favor should be offered. True *chesed* requires understanding not only what another person needs, but how to give it without causing discomfort.

עבד אברהם אנכי

Yashrus is not limited to one's dealings with others. It also governs how a person regards and conducts himself. לא רק ביחס לחבירו אלא גם בנוגע לעצמו - *not only in relation to another person, but also in relation to oneself*. A person must recognize his own חשיבות - *his dignity and significance* - particularly as someone who has been given Torah. He should not lower himself through conduct unworthy of that dignity.
Yet recognizing one's true worth is very different from seeking honor. A person secure in his position has no need to exaggerate his importance before others. Eliezer provides a remarkable example. When he arrived at Besuel's home, he introduced himself with three words: עבד אברהם אנכי - *I am Avraham's servant* (24:34). Chazal derive from this very pasuk the principle מילתא דגנאי דאית בך קדים אמרה - *if there is something about yourself that might be viewed unfavorably, say it yourself first* (Bava Kamma 92b).
This was an extraordinary introduction. Eliezer was המשל בכל אשר לו - *the one who ruled over everything Avraham possessed*. Chazal describe him as דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו לאחרים - *one who drew from his master's Torah and gave it to others to drink* (Yoma 28b). He was a great *talmid chacham*, the administrator of Avraham's enormous household and his trusted representative.
He could easily have introduced himself through his accomplishments and responsibilities. Instead, he stated his position simply and truthfully: עבד אברהם אנכי. His greatness did not require embellishment. That too is *yashrus*.

The Hidden Negiah

Yet the Torah reveals another, more subtle aspect of Eliezer's character. When Avraham first instructed him to find a wife for Yitzchak, Eliezer asked perhaps the woman would not agree to follow him. Later, when recounting this conversation to Besuel's household, he said:

אולי לא תלך האשה אחרי - *Perhaps the woman will not follow me* (24:39). Rashi notes אלי כתיב - *the word is written defectively*, allowing it to be read as אלי, *to me*. Eliezer had a daughter, and he hoped that perhaps Avraham would consider her as a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham answered: בני ברוך ואתה ארור ואין ארור מדבק בברוך - *My son is blessed, while you are descended from one who was cursed, and one who is cursed cannot join with one who is blessed*.

This is astonishing. Eliezer was entirely devoted to Avraham. He carried out his mission faithfully, and Chazal describe him as having emerged from ארור - *cursed* - and entered ברוך - *blessed*. Yet even such a person could have a subtle personal interest affecting his judgment.

The Navi says כנען בידו מאזני מרמה - *Canaan has deceitful scales in his hand* (Hoshea 12:8). Chazal apply this description to Eliezer. He may sincerely have considered whether his daughter was a suitable match for Yitzchak. He was not necessarily attempting to deceive anyone. But because the question touched his own interests, his judgment could not be entirely free of *negiah*.

This is the opposite of complete *yashrus*. Even when a person believes that he is weighing a matter fairly, a personal interest may affect the scales without his realizing it. A person can be intelligent, sincere and devoted to the truth, yet still fail to recognize the influence of his own desires.

Why the Torah Repeats the Story

We can now better understand why the Torah records Eliezer's account a second time. It is precisely in his retelling that we hear עבד אברהם אנכי - *I am Avraham's servant*, and discover through אלי כתיב the subtle personal interest that lay beneath his earlier question. The first reveals his *yashrus* in presenting himself without exaggeration; the second shows how even a great person must examine himself for hidden *negios*.

Neither detail is incidental. They teach us to observe how a person speaks, what he emphasizes and what his choice of words may reveal about his character. These are lessons that cannot be taught adequately through rules alone. They require the detailed accounts of how people actually conducted themselves.

From Derech Eretz to Kiddush Hashem

There is a further lesson. דרכי קידוש השם והפכו חס ושלום - *the ways of Kiddush Hashem, and its opposite* - are also part of *derech eretz*. Here too, proper conduct depends upon the circumstances. A person must develop the judgment and sensitivity to recognize what כבוד שמים requires in each situation.

The ordinary details of conduct therefore have consequences far beyond the immediate situation. A person who trains himself in *yashrus*, sensitivity and proper *middos* is preparing himself for greater tests. But one who becomes accustomed to lowering himself or compromising proper conduct to obtain what he wants may eventually fail when much greater matters of כבוד שמים are at stake.

This is the deeper meaning of יפה שיחתן של עבדי בתי אבות לפני המקום מתורתן של בנים. The Torah repeats Eliezer's conversations because they teach us how Torah shapes a person's character, judgment and conduct. These lessons cannot all be stated in a few words or reduced to a fixed set of rules. They must be learned through the lives of those who lived them.

The conversations of the servants of the Avos are themselves Torah, because they teach us not only what a Jew must do, but what kind of person he must become.

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from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>
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What Comes First: Love or Marriage?

By Rabbi YY Jacobson

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

Isaac and Rebecca

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

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

Of course, Abraham and Sarah enjoyed a profoundly loving relationship. Married for many decades without children, they trailblazed together a new trail in history. They heeded the voice of G-d to leave behind their families and chart a new path to change the world. Sarah risked her life twice for Abraham when she maintained she was his sister, not his wife. Abraham refused to cohabit with her maid Hagar, but after she insisted that he do, "Abraham heeded the voice of Sarai."[3] Abraham listened to Sarah's advice to expel Ishmael from their home, even when he personally disagreed.[4]

After Sarah's death, one senses the depth of Abraham's grief and his intricate negotiations to grant his wife her final honor by burying her in the cave where he too would one day be interred.

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

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

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

No Friction

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

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

Dawn and Darkness

The sages in the Talmud present a fascinating tradition about the three daily prayers in Judaism.[10] Abraham instituted the morning

prayer, shacharis; Isaac instituted the afternoon prayer—mincha; and Jacob initiated the evening prayer, maariv.[11]

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

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

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

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

Jacob, in contrast, embodies the night of Judaism. The kingdom of night is full of mystique, solitude, darkness, drama, and romance. Jacob's life is riddled with darkness, uncertainty, loneliness, and struggle, fraught with drama and mystery. Already emerging from the womb he struggles with his twin brother; later he wrestles with a mysterious adversary, and in the process he receives a new name, Israel, which means struggling with G-d. In the words of the prophet Isaiah:[16] "Why do you say, O Jacob, why declare, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is ignored by my G-d'"?

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

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

The Monotony of Afternoons

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

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

It is the story of Isaac.

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

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

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

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

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

Isaac is the founder of the afternoon prayer, the "mincha" of Judaism. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at dusk," the Torah states in this week's portion.[26] Isaac tapped into the spiritual energy of

the "afternoons", showing us that a relationship with G-d does not consist only of the spontaneous exuberant morning inspiration, or of the drama and romance of the night. A relationship with G-d is expressed even more profoundly in the daily commitment and sacrifices we make for truth, love, goodness, and holiness. He bequeathed us with the internal resilience and strength to bring G-d into the dull and tedious journeys of life.

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

A Tale of Three Marriages

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Tale of Two Loves

What is the difference between the two loves?

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

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

The first marriage described in Torah is the one of Isaac and Rebecca, in order to teach us one of the most important principles in marriage: Passion and romance are awesome, and we can all use a nice dose of them, but as our circumstances change, they can fade away. A marriage must be built on good judgment, sound reason, an appreciation of the inner, enduring qualities and values of the other person, and it must possess the enduring commitment of a couple to each other, day-in, day-out, in a bond of steadfast, and simple faithfulness and trust. It is the capacity to hold your boundaries while connecting to the other person as a mature adult.

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

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

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

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

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT HAYYEI SARA:

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

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

THINK ABOUT IT:

1. The story of the purchase is told in excruciating detail. Read through the text slowly and carefully, unpacking every line. Imagine you are Avraham, telling your family or a few friends over the dinner table this story of a real estate purchase, and you'll see what I mean. Why is there so much detail? What is the message? And why is the whole story important enough to appear in the Torah?

2. The two parties to the conversation -- Avraham and the Hittites -- seem to be having trouble communicating, as each one repeatedly claims that the other side is not really listening. Why won't either side accept the kind generosity of the other side? Why are both sides trying to out-nice each other?

3. What other features of this section strike you as strange, and how do you account for them?

PARASHAT HAYYEI SARA:

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

1) When the Talmud and Midrash talk about sinful Jews, they often use the term, "The ENEMIES of Israel." We don't ever want to refer explicitly to our own people as sinful.

2) When the Talmud discusses the laws of one who curses God, the Gemara refers to the act of cursing God by its opposite: instead of calling it "cursing God," the Gemara refers to this evil act as "BLESSING God." Cursing God is something so terrible that we don't even want to refer to it as such, so we call it by its opposite.

3) When the Talmud refers to someone who is blind, it often uses the term, "One who has plenty of light." Of course, a blind person has no "light" at all, but instead of accenting the disability, the Gemara expresses the same thing by its opposite.

BURYING THE BODY:

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

BERESHIT 23:2-20 --
Sara died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hevron, in the Land of Cana'an. Avraham came to mourn for Sara and cry over her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE SWEETNESS OF THE BNEI HET:

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

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

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

1) Whether Avraham will acquire a gravesite through sale or as a gift.

2) Whether Avraham will receive an independent, permanent family burial place (an "ahuza"), or only a place within one of the gravesites of the Bnei Het.

3) Whether Avraham will receive the cave only (as he proposes), or the cave and the field next to it (as Efron proposes).

WHY BOTHER?

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

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

1) "Bnei Het": Pasuk 3 refers to them as the "Bnei Het," the "Children of Het": this is who they are in the simple sense, and this is how they are referred to throughout this section.

2) "Am Ha-Aretz": Pesukim 7, 12, and 13 refer to Avraham's interlocutors as the "am ha-aretz," the "people of the land." Notice that this phrase is *always* used just before Avraham speaks, not when *they* themselves speak! This hints to us that the reason they are called "am ha-aretz" is because Avraham in particular relates to them as the "people of the land"; he sees them as the "am ha-aretz" because that's exactly what he wants from them -- land!

3) "Those within the gates of the city": Pesukim 10 and 18 refer to the crowd of Hittite observers as "all those within the gate of the city" [i.e., everyone in town]. This description of the Bnei Het emphasizes that the whole deal takes place publicly, in front of the entire crowd of Bnei Het who live in Hevron. We will soon see why this is important.

CLOSING THE DEAL:

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

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

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

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

Let us now take the evidence and put it together:

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

* We know that he wants to pay for it and will not accept it as a gift.
* We know he views the Bnei Het as the "am ha-aretz," "the people of the land," from whom he wants land.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AVRAHAM FINALLY "LISTENS":

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

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

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

BERESHIT 35:27 --

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

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

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

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

BERESHIT 25:8-10 --
Avraham expired and died at a good old age, old and satisfied, and was gathered to his people. Yitzhak and Yishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Mahpela, in the **FIELD** of Efron, son of Tzohar the Hiti, which is before Mamre. [In] the **FIELD** which Avraham bought from the children of Het -- there were buried Avraham and Sara, his wife.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Chayei Sarah: The Slave's Mission

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE RESULT OF THE AKEDAH: YITZHAK BECOMES A LIVING OLAH

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

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

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

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

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

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PARSHAT CHAYEI SARA

A WIFE FROM 'TOLDOT TERACH'

'**Yichus**' [family lineage] has always been an important consideration when selecting one's spouse. Nevertheless, Avraham's insistence that his 'chosen' son marry specifically a descendant of his brother **Nachor** requires explanation.

In this week's shiur, we return to our discussion of the 'toldot' in Sefer Breishit in order to answer this question.

INTRODUCTION

As you surely must have noticed, the phrase 'eileh **toldot**...' appears numerous times in Sefer Breishit. In our shiur on Parshat Noach, we explained how these toldot [genealogies] form the 'backbone' of Sefer Breishit.

In that shiur, we also explained how Sefer Breishit divided into two distinct sections. The first eleven chapters included three units that began with toldot, each unit containing a primary story relating to God's dissatisfaction with mankind's behavior:

Adam's sin in Gan Eden (and Cain's sin) / chapters 2-4,
The corruption of dor ha-**mabul** / the Flood -chps. 5-9
The story of Migdal Bavel & their dispersion / chps 10-11.

After that incident - the Torah begins the 'second (and primary) section of Sefer Breishit - introduced by 'toldot Shem' (see 11:10). From this point and onward, the focus of the Sefer shifts to God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His model nation [what we refer to as the 'bechira' process]. Each unit of this section is introduced by toldot as well, be it 'toldot Yishmael' or 'toldot Yitzchak' etc, concluding with the story of Yosef and his brothers - introduced by 'eileh toldot Yaakov' (see 37:2). Sefer Breishit ends, as **all** of Yaakov's offspring are chosen to become Am Yisrael - God's special nation.

Our introduction as noted the rather obvious 'linear' progression of toldot in Sefer Breishit. We begin our shiur by noting the existence of a 'parallel' progression as well, which will highlight the significance of the pasuk that introduces 'toldot Terach'. Afterward, we will show how the nation of Israel stems not only from Avraham Avinu, but from Terach as well. [And we'll try to explain why.]

CHARTING THE TOLDOT

The following chart illustrates the progression of these toldot in Sefer Breishit. The chart lists the names that follow the phrase 'eileh toldot...' and highlights the parallel in their progression in each of the two sections described above. [The '*' star symbol represents the phrase 'eileh toldot'.]]

Study this chart carefully.

SEFER BREISHIT - UNITS OF 'EILEH TOLDOT...'

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

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

'TEN GENERATIONS' - TWICE!

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

Section One: - 5:1-32 / from Adam to Noach)
Section Two - 11:10-26 / from Shem to Terach
[Technically speaking one may be 9 generations, but it's the overall pattern that is very similar. Note also how the mishna in Pirkei Avot 5:2-3 relates to this structure.]

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

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

Note how:

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

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

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

* Avraham, like Shem, is blessed with the privilege of representing God.
* Haran's son Lot, like Cham's son Canaan, is involved in a sin relating to incest.
* Nachor's offspring Rivka, Rachel & Leah return to 'dwell within the tent' of the children of Avraham, just as Yefet is destined to dwell within the 'tent of **Shem**'. [See 9:24-27 / 'yaft Elokim le-Yefet ve-yishkon be-ohalei Shem'.]

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

TOLDOT TERACH vs. TOLDOT AVRAHAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY TERACH?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

3. TOLDOT AVRAHAM

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

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

Nonetheless, the question still remains stronger than the answer.

PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH - 3 mini shiurim

SHIUR #1 - "HASHEM ELOKEI HA-SHAMAYIM"

How should one describe God?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Earth (see 24:1-4).

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

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

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

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

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

HEAVENS 'and' EARTH

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

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

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

A. RADAK - 'Helping his servant understand'

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

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

B. SFORNO - 'Scare tactics'

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

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

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

D. RAMBAN - "Eretz Yisrael"

Finally, Ramban offers a very 'zionistic' explanation. Unlike the other commentators who understand 'aretz' as referring to the 'earth', i.e. to events taking place on earth or in this world, Ramban understands 'aretz' as referring to the 'land of Israel'. Because his servant is now leaving Eretz Yisrael (but must bring Yitzchak's future wife back to this land), Avraham adds the phrase 'Elokei ha-aretz' to the standard phrase of 'Elokei ha-shamayim' in his description of God at this time.

ELOKEI HA-SHAMAYIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SHIUR #2 - AVRAHAM AVINU & 'REAL' ESTATE

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

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

TWO PERCEPTIONS

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

1) Bnei Chet's perception:

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

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

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

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

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

2) Avraham Avinu's perception:

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

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

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FOR FURTHER IYUN:

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

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SHIUR #3 "ZERA VA-ARETZ"
- A PROMISE, COVENANT, AND OATH

Just prior to sending his servant in search of a wife for his son, Avraham briefly reviews the various stages of his 'bechira':

> "Hashem Elokei ha-shamayim asher lekachani mI-BEIT AVI u-ME'ERETZ MOLADETI ve-asher DIBER li, ve-asher NISHBA li leimor - le-ZAR'ACHA ETeiN et ha-ARETZ ha-zot..." (24:7)

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

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

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

"Asher lekachani mi-BEIT AVI ußMe'ERETZ MOLADETI"

clearly echoes God's opening command of:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE OATH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
Menachem