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**INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON CHAYEI SARAH - 5766**

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EMES LIYAAKOV

Weekly Insights from

MOREINU HORAV YAAKOV KAMENETZKY zt"l

[Translated by Ephraim Weiss <Easykgh@aol.com>]

Ulai Loh Telech Ha'isha Acharai (24; 39)

When Eliezer the servant of Avraham went to find a wife for Yitzchak, he recounted to Rivka's family the specific requirements that Avraham had insisted on for Yitzchak's wife. Avraham had instructed Eliezer that he not marry off Yitzchak to a Canaani woman, but rather to seek a wife for Yitzchak from the land of Avraham's birthplace. Eliezer asked Avraham what to do if the woman refused to accompany him back to Eretz Yisroel. When recounting Eliezer's conversation, the Torah spells the word "Ulai" "perhaps" as "Eili" without the "Vav" literally meaning "on me." Rashi explains that Eliezer was hinting to the fact that Avraham should not seek a wife for Yitzchak from outside the country, but rather should marry him off to Eliezer's own daughter. Avraham answered that Eliezer was a Canaani, who had been cursed by Noach. As Avraham was blessed by Hashem, it would be inappropriate for him to attach himself to someone who was cursed.

HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zt"l asks a question on this Rashi. Why did Avraham say that Yitzchak could not marry Eliezer's daughter due to the fact that it is unfitting for someone who is blessed to attach themselves to someone who is cursed? There would have been a much bigger problem with Yitzchak marrying Eliezer's daughter. A member of Bnei Yisroel is forbidden from marrying a shifcha Cnaanis, a non-Jewish maidservant, based on the pasuk of "Loh Yihiyeh Kadesh Bivnei Yisrael" (Devarim 23:18) Why did Avraham have to get into the details of who is cursed and who is blessed? It was assur for Yitzchak to marry Eliezer's daughter altogether.

Rav Yaakov solves this problem based on a Rambam in Hilchos Ishus (1:4). The Rambam writes that before matan Torah, there was no issue of marrying a kedaisha. If a man saw a woman that he wanted to marry, he could pay her, marry her, and then continue on with his life. It was only after matan Torah that the issur of Loh Yihiyeh Kadesh Bivnei Yisrael came into effect. As such, Avraham could not push off Eliezer's suggestion that Yitzchak marry his daughter based on this pasuk. However, the idea that there is an attachment when a man and woman marry dates back to the time of creation. After describing the fact that Chavah was created from one of Adam's limbs, the Torah writes that for this reason, a man will leave his parents house and cling to his wife, at which point they are likened to one unit. Avraham explained to Eliezer

that as Yitzchak was blessed, for him to marry someone who was cursed would be to leave behind the blessings of his father's house, and instead cling to a cursed woman. Avraham would not allow Yitzchak to forfeit the brachos that he would inherit from Avraham, and as such, he was adamant that Yitzchak not be allowed to marry a Canaani woman.

We are all descendants of Avraham Avinu, and as such we all are recipients of Hashem's bracha. We must cling steadfastly to the heritage that we have inherited from our avos, so that we may be zocheh to carry these brachos with us forever.

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago 5764]

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Chaye Sarah

One scene in this week's sedra has left a mark on Jewish law. Abraham has sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac. He does so, and brings back Rebekah with him. The first glimpse she has of her future husband is significant. Isaac had "gone out into the field towards evening to meditate." It is a fitting image.

Isaac is the quiet figure among the heroes of Tenakh. Jacob and Moses meet their future wives at a well, where they perform acts of courage and kindness. In the case of Isaac, it is Rebekah who does the act of kindness at the well - and Isaac himself is not even there. Instead it is his father's servant who has been sent to find her.

Isaac is withdrawn, introspective. In their marriage it is more often Rebekah who is the active partner. Meditating in a field - that is Isaac's characteristic gesture. He is a man of complex psychology. How could he not be? Bound and almost killed as a child, one can only guess at the mark that moment left on his soul. The result (since the Torah usually gives us only oblique hints about people's inner feelings) is that he is curiously opaque. We know less about him than almost any other personality in Bereishith.

The Talmud, more concerned with halakhah than psychology, draws its own inference from the verse. Isaac's 'meditation' was a prayer. 'Towards evening' means afternoon. If Isaac's behaviour had normative implications, it meant that he instituted Mincha, the afternoon prayer. What is the connection between the patriarchs and prayer?

The Talmud records a famous disagreement among the sages as to the origin of the three daily prayers. Were they a substitute for the sacrifices that once took place in the Temple? Or did their origins go further back into Israel's past?

It has been stated: Rabbi Jose son of Rabbi Hanina said, The prayers were instituted by the patriarchs. Rabbi Joshua son of Levi said: the prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices.

It has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Jose son of Rabbi Hanina, and it has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Joshua son of Levi.

It has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Jose son of Rabbi Hanina: Abraham instituted the morning prayer, as it says And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood, and 'standing' means prayer, as it says then Pinchas stood up and prayed.

Isaac instituted the afternoon prayer, as it says, and Isaac went out to meditate in the field towards evening, and 'meditation' means prayer, as it says, A prayer of the afflicted when he faints and pours out his meditation before the Lord.

Jacob instituted the evening prayer, as it says And he encountered [vayifga] a place, and pegia means prayer as says, Therefore do not pray for this people nor lift up prayer or cry for them, nor make intercession

[tifga] to Me.

It has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Joshua son of Levi: why did they say that the morning prayer could be said until midday? Because the regular morning sacrifice could be brought until midday. Rabbi Judah, however, says that it may be said up to the fourth hour because the regular morning sacrifice may be brought until the fourth hour.

And why did they say that the afternoon prayer can be said until the evening? Because the regular afternoon offering could be brought until the evening. Rabbi Judah however says that it can be said only up to the middle of the afternoon, because the afternoon offering could only be brought up to the middle of the afternoon.

And why did they say that for the evening prayer there is no limit? Because the limbs and fat that were not consumed on the altar by the evening could be brought during the whole of the night.

More is at stake in this disagreement than halakhah and history. At issue is the very nature of prayer itself.

There were two distinct spiritual traditions in biblical Judaism. On the one hand were the patriarchs and prophets. They were, if one can put it this way, ordinary people with extraordinary gifts - the gift above all of being able to speak and listen to the voice of G-d. The patriarchs were shepherds. So too was Moses. They wore no robes of office. They lived far from the cities of their time. Alone - away from the noise of urban civilization - they heard and heeded G-d's word. They prayed as the situation demanded. No two prayers were the same. They spoke from the depths of their being to the One who is the depth of all Being. That is patriarchal and prophetic prayer.

There was another type of religious personality: the priest. He did have special robes of office. He was a 'holy man,' set apart from others (this is the root meaning of *kadosh*, 'holy,' in Judaism). For him, *avodah*, divine 'service,' primarily meant the offering of a sacrifice. Everything about the sacrifices was subject to detailed prescriptive rules. The *temidim* or regular sacrifices had their own time (morning and afternoon), their own place (the sanctuary, later the Temple), and their own precisely defined ritual, never varying, always the same.

Spontaneity, essential to the prophet, is disastrous for the priest. Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, seized by the mood of the moment, made their own offering at the inauguration of the sanctuary, and died as a result. If the prophet represents the 'now' of the religious life, the priest represents eternity. They speak to different aspects of the soul, and different needs of society. Without spontaneity, the spirit withers; without structure, it lapses into chaos. Without prophets, the faith of Israel would have grown old; without priests, it would never have been able to become the code of a nation.

The question at issue between Rabbi Jose son of Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Joshua son of Levi was therefore: to which of these traditions did prayer belong? To the patriarchs or the priests? To supplication or sacrifice? To the personal dialogue of the soul or the collective worship of the nation?

One of the most remarkable and little noted facts about Judaism is that to this day we maintain both practices - because we say each *amidah* (standing prayer) twice: once privately and silently as individuals, and then a second time publicly and collectively as a community (the 'reader's repetition'). The silent prayer belongs to the world of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Rachel and Hannah - it is private, personal and can include (within certain halakhic parameters) individualized requests. The reader's repetition follows the logic of the sacrifices (which is why there is no repetition in the case of *maariv*, the evening service, because there was no night-time sacrifice in the Temple). We thus preserve both the patriarchal and priestly traditions.

Equally significant is the different character of the prayers - due to the different personalities and histories of the patriarchs.

My predecessor, the late Lord Jacobovits of blessed memory, used to point out that the position of the sun at the various stages of the day

mirrored that of the patriarchs themselves. In the morning, the sun is in the east - and Abraham began his life in the east, in Ur of the Chaldees, namely Mesopotamia. In the early afternoon, the sun is overhead in the middle of the sky - reminding us of Isaac who spent his entire life within the land of Canaan, later to become Israel. In the evening the sun is in the west, as was Jacob who ended his life in the west, in exile in Egypt. The characteristic mood of the different times of the day is also reflected in the lives of the three fathers. Abraham is morning: the dawn of a new faith. It was he who broke his father's idols, recognizing the inner contradictions of polytheism and paganism. His religious career began with a journey away from home, birthplace and his father's house to a new and unknown destination. Abraham represents beginning - a new chapter in the religious history of mankind.

Isaac is afternoon. There is nothing spectacular about the afternoon; there is no qualitative change from dark to light or day to night. Instead there is a slow transition, an almost imperceptible shift. Isaac is the bridge between day and night, between Abraham and Jacob, two lives fraught with drama. His own life is relatively uneventful and passive. He is not the prime mover of events. Yet without a bridge we cannot cross from one domain to another. If Abraham is the iconoclast, Isaac represents the quiet courage of continuity, without which the entire project of the covenant would die.

Jacob is night. He sees his great vision of the ladder and angels at night. He struggles with an unknown adversary at night. He ends his days in exile, at the beginning of the long, dark night of slavery. Jacob's great strength is that he does not let go. He is born holding his brother's heel. He refuses to let go of the stranger wrestling with him. If Abraham is originality and Isaac continuity, then Jacob represents tenacity.

The verbs associated with each are also different. Abraham 'rises early in the morning' and 'stands.' When it comes to prayer, he is the initiator. Acknowledging that he is "but dust and ashes" he none the less utters the most audacious prayer of all time: "Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?" That is prayer as *amidah*.

Jacob, by contrast, 'encounters.' It is not he who seeks G-d on his flight from home but G-d who seeks him. The phrase the Torah uses just before Jacob has his vision of the angelic ladder is *vayifga ba-makom*, which in rabbinic Hebrew could be read to mean, 'He bumped into G-d.' There are spiritual experiences we have when we are least expecting them - when we are alone, afraid, thinking of something else altogether. That was Jacob's vision of prayer. Not everything in the life of the spirit is under our control. The great transformative experiences - love, a sudden sense of beauty, an upsurge of happiness - happen unpredictably and leave us, in Wordsworth's famous phrase 'surprised by joy.' The glory of Jacob's epiphany is that it happened at night, in the midst of fear and flight. That is prayer as *pegiah*.

There is a third kind of prayer. Isaac is 'meditating' in the field - but the word *sichah* in modern Hebrew means not only meditation but also, and primarily, conversation. When the Talmud says, in the context of Isaac, *ein sichah ela tefillah*, we could translate this phrase as "conversation is a form of prayer" - and in a profound sense it is so. Prayer is a conversation (between heaven and earth). But conversation is also a prayer - for in true conversation, I open myself up to the reality of another person. I enter his or her world. I begin to see things from a perspective not my own. In the touch of two selves, both are changed. A genuine human conversation is therefore a preparation for, and a microcosmic version of, the act of prayer. For in prayer I attend to the presence of G-d, listening as well as speaking, opening myself up to a reality other and infinitely vaster than my own, and I become a different person as a result. Prayer is not monologue but dialogue. Before every *amidah* we say, "O G-d open my lips, and my mouth shall declare your praise." In a real sense, therefore, in prayer we do not simply speak; we are also spoken. G-d - and the traditions of Jewish faith - speak through us. The very words we use are not our own but those of thousands of

years of our people's history as they encountered G-d and articulated their response. Prayer is like an electrical connection and while it lasts we become a channel through which the energy of the universe (creation) and Jewish history (redemption) flows, and which we make our own. That is prayer as sichah.

Thus there are three modes of spirituality and we experience each in the course of a single day. There is the human quest (Abraham, morning prayer), the divine encounter (Jacob, evening prayer), and the dialogue (Isaac, afternoon). That is how three events in the life of the patriarchs - Abraham's early rise, Isaac's meditation in a field, and Jacob's vision at night - became not just events in the past but permanent possibilities for us who follow in their footsteps, guided by their precedent, lifted by their example, enlarged by their spirit, summoned to their heights.

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INNERNET MAGAZINE

<http://innernet.org.il>

July 2005

"Sarah: Finding Spirituality in the Mundane"
by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

A superficial glance at the Torah might suggest that Abraham was the central figure in early Judaism and that Sarah was his sidekick. Yet Jewish sources (see Rashi and other commentaries on Genesis 16:2; Bereishit Rabbah 39:15, 41:2, 60:15; and many other references in the Talmud, Midrash, and later texts) reveal that she was in fact a full partner and a woman of great insight and influence who developed a particularly close and deep relationship with God.

The matriarchs and patriarchs are compared to the roots of a tree; they established the foundation for us. In fact, tradition tells us that everything that happened to them has a parallel within our history. Just as everything the tree becomes has its source in the roots, so everything the Jewish nation becomes and is has its source in the lives of our matriarchs and patriarchs.

Therefore, when faced with a challenge, we are able to examine how they handled adversity and try to emulate their ways. Their examples remain a source of strength for all generations.

In examining the life of Sarah, one must (as always) keep in mind that the Torah is not a history book; rather, it is a guide for life and therefore shares only those events that are important for our spiritual growth.

Interestingly, the longest discourse about Sarah concerns her death and burial. Such detailed treatment of this subject is unique in Jewish text; it is even surprising in this case because there is a great deal to tell about Sarah's life (for example, the fact that she brought tens of thousands to monotheism) that the written Torah doesn't tell us about. However, it is this passage that unlocks the essence of her greatness.

Jewish law is explicit about proper burial practices. These rituals emphasize respect for the body, because the body is the tool we use in our lifetimes to accomplish our missions in the world. Sarah mastered the use of her body as an instrument of spirituality. That the Torah goes to great lengths in recounting Abraham's negotiation and purchase of the site where her body would rest signifies its perfect utilization in her lifetime.

This accomplishment is also apparent from another incident written about Sarah's life: her experience in Egypt. Taken captive by Pharaoh, her test was overwhelming. She found herself at Pharaoh's side, with access to what was then the world's most advanced, alluring, and cultured civilization, yet at the same time paganistic and immoral.

Throughout this test, Sarah remained unaffected in body, mind, and

spirit. She did not let the surrounding materialism dominate her; rather, she had pity for the individuals who had access to such an array of resources but didn't utilize them for the right purpose.

Sarah's unwavering commitment to sanctifying every aspect of life remains a Jew's central purpose to this day, and Sarah is the role model for fulfilling this goal. She did not differentiate between mundane and holy. She elevated the mundane and made it holy. Sarah utilized everything and every action in life to enhance her relationship with God, even in the midst of the most challenging circumstances.

In recognition of her ability to transform the earthly realm into a dwelling place for the Divine, God bestowed Sarah's home with three miracles. Her Shabbat candles burned all week long, her challah (bread) was blessed with a Divine satiating quality, and the Presence of God hung over her tent in the form of a cloud. Each of these physical manifestations had its counterpart in later Jewish history and has a spiritual significance that remains a force in our lives today.

Our Shabbat candles burn for only a few hours, leaving us without their unique light for the rest of the week. Six days a week we are busy working and providing for our basic needs. The Shabbat candles mark a departure from this routine, ushering in a singular day of focused connection to God.

For Sarah, there was no such separation between holy and mundane. Her clarity did not ebb and flow with the coming and going of Shabbat, and so symbolically her candles burned from one Shabbat to the next. In much the same way, one of the lamps on the Menorah in the Temple never burned out. This suspension of natural law indicated that God had deemed the Temple fitting for His Presence. Sarah was the first to usher God into the physical world in this fashion.

Sarah's challah also expressed how she redefined the boundaries of the physical world by infusing it with spirituality. God embedded a blessing in her challah, which caused it to be completely satisfying no matter how little a guest ate. This bypassed the laws of nature and gave way to a more expansive sense of the physical realm's ultimate, unlimited source. By giving the challah spiritual characteristics, God acknowledged Sarah's ability to use material existence as a pipeline to the Divine. Later in Jewish history, the bread baked in the Temple remained miraculously fresh throughout the week. This was God's indication that the legacy of spirituality established by Sarah had endured.

The third miracle in Sarah's midst - the cloud of the Divine Presence that hovered over her home - was a clear visual link between Heaven and earth. Regardless of time of day or change in weather, it persisted as proof of a spiritual domain beyond the five senses. This Divine cloud was present because Sarah sanctified every aspect of physical life, a concept also symbolized by (among other things) Sarah's observance of the laws of mikveh, thus infusing her physical body with spirituality. A symbol of God's Presence, the cloud reappeared at key points in the development of the Jewish nation as a protective force for the generation in the desert and as a sign of the Divine Presence at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

We no longer live in an era of open miracles such as those fostered by Sarah or those that were present at the Temple. Yet the mitzvot of candle lighting, taking challah (which entails separating a small piece from a certain amount of bread dough and destroying it to symbolize the challah gift that was required to be given to the priest in the Temple era), and mikveh indicate our desire to elevate the physical world and make it spiritual.

Furthermore, each time we use the physical for a higher purpose, we create in ourselves a dwelling place for God. In this way, physicality never becomes an end unto itself. Rather, for the Jew, this world remains a place where the mundane and routine present opportunities to connect to our Source. This task is a challenge, especially when taken on in the midst of a consumer society that overwhelms us with materialistic messages. As Jewish women, we have the potential to walk the path of

Sarah, transforming and infusing meaning into every physical aspect of our existence, each in our own way, on our own time, step by step.

Excerpted with permission from "JEWISH WOMEN SPEAK ABOUT JEWISH MATTERS" - <http://www.jewishmatters.com>. Published by: Targum Press, Inc. - <http://www.targum.com>.

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InnerNet Magazine is published monthly as an on-line digest of fascinating articles from the Jewish world. Topics include relationships, spirituality, personal growth, philosophy, incredible true stories, and special editions for the Jewish holidays.

Archives of past articles are accessible on-line at <http://www.innernet.org.il>
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REST OF SHEET WAS PREPARED BY EFRAIM GOLDSTEIN

[From Efraim Goldstein efraimq@aol.com]
Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

Jerusalem Post Nov 25 2005

FAMILY FAULTS AND FEUDS

Rabbi Berel Wein

Jewish tradition is rife with details of sibling rivalries, family feuds and enormous disappointments with children and descendants. The Bible itself provides us with sufficient examples of these sad but all too common characteristics of human life. Lot, Yishmael and Eisav are the prime examples of this problem in the lives of our forefathers. The story of Yosef and his conflict with his brothers is the continuing source of all major rifts in the Jewish world, according to the Chasidic masters. Shlomo's wisdom was not inherited by his son Rechavam who needlessly split the kingdom he inherited from his father and grandfather. The litany of the failures of the kings of Judah and Israel forms one of the more depressing narratives in the Bible. Righteous fathers somehow fathered evil children, kings who became idolaters and traitors to the Jewish mission. The children of Moshe, Eli, and Shmuel all proved themselves to be disappointments to their great fathers. Perhaps the very greatness of their fathers was one of the causes for the children's failings. It is not easy to be a child of a great leader, of a holy person, of someone who demands perfection from one's self as well as from others. King David's family is redeemed only by Shlomo, and even he is no match for his father in terms of reputation, leadership qualities and the acclaim of Jewish tradition and destiny. Family disappointments are regular fare in the narratives of the Bible.

In later generations, we find that this type of depressing pattern repeats itself all too often. The Karaite movement that began in the eighth century was caused by a bitter family feud between Anan, the founder of that movement, and his brother, as to the position of becoming the Exilarch for Jewish Babylonia. We all know of "breakaway" groups who leave the established congregation to create their own synagogue and community. This is almost the norm in Jewish life, both yesterday and today. However, Anan took the "breakaway" idea one step further when he lost the contest to his brother and then declared to the Caliph that he and his faith of Karaism was a new and different religion than rabbinic Judaism. Families whose children fail to follow in the footsteps and beliefs of their ancestors are often very sad groups. We find this phenomenon present in our own Israeli society where there are children from religious families who forsake observance and children from

secular families who become observant Jews. It is obvious that the children may choose whatever path in life they wish. However, this in no way diminishes the angst of the parents and the family over these choices. All of the various movements and splits in Jewish life over the past few centuries have caused great pain to many Jewish families, but that is what life is about, and the story of Israel throughout its long history is testimony to this continuing situation.

There are many stories – some may even be true – regarding family feuds within the Chasidic world, the yeshiva world, the secular Zionist society, and various other groupings within the Jewish world. There is the story regarding the great Rebbe of Sanz, Rabbi Chaim Halberstam, who engaged in a strong disagreement with his son, who later was known as the Shinover rebbe. Rabbi Chaim forbade his son from crossing the threshold of his house. The son nevertheless persisted in visiting his father, but in obedience to his father's wishes, never crossed the threshold of the house but rather entered and exited through one of the windows of the house. The son of Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant became a noted mathematics professor at the University of St. Petersburg in the nineteenth century and no longer followed a Jewishly observant way of life. In response to this appointment, some of the leading maskilim - so-called "enlightened" ones – placed a congratulatory advertisement in one of the Hebrew newspapers of the time. It blessed Rabbi Yisrael for the nachat that his son's appointment to the college faculty must have brought to him. Rabbi Yisrael then placed his own advertisement in the next issue of that paper and stated that he had no nachat whatsoever from his son because of the latter's forsaking Jewish life and practice. And he further stated that he would be grateful in this world and in the next world as well to anyone who could help bring his son to return to a life of Jewish tradition and observance. As noted before, the greatest of people are not immune from the pains of having children who refuse for whatever reason to follow in their way of life and behavior. Families are a delicate and highly volatile grouping. Therefore, the rabbis of the Talmud declared that after all efforts and education, success in this matter is a matter of mazal – good fortune.

Weekly Parsha CHAYEI SARAH Rabbi Berel Wein

After the death of Sarah, Avraham remarries to a woman named Keturah. Rashi, following Midrash, states that she was Hagar, the woman whom he had married earlier at the behest of Sarah herself and who became the mother of Yishmael. The Torah records for us that Avraham fathered further children with Ketura and that these children left the house of Avraham to found families and clans of their own in the Middle East. There is discussion in halacha regarding these bnei Ketura and their status vis a vis the Jewish people and Avraham's mission in the world. The bnei Ketura adopted many of Avraham's ways including hospitality to strangers and circumcision of males. However, the Torah makes it very clear that in no way are they the true heirs of Avraham in spiritual terms. It is Yitzchak and Yitzchak alone who inherits the blessings of Avraham and the responsibilities of the covenant entered into between Avraham and God, so to speak. Even in his lifetime, Avraham sends the bnei Ketura away from him and from Yitzchak. The bnei Ketura melt into the general milieu of the different tribes that populated the Middle East of that time. They never challenge Yitzchak nor assert any claim to the heritage of their father Avraham. It is almost as if they are satisfied at being ignored in the whole millennia-long struggle, regarding the advancement of Avraham's ideas and ways against idolatry and cruelty. Thereby they are assigned to the very anonymity that they seemingly craved.

I think that the lesson here is an obvious historical one. Many are delighted to claim great pedigree for themselves. But since in Jewish life pedigree comes with great responsibilities, with a binding covenant whose terms are inescapable and immutable, people are willing to

renounce their pedigree rather than bear its responsibilities and obligations. The unwillingness or inability of the bnei Ketura to respond to the challenge of being the descendants of Avraham is what brings them to even lose that distinction of their illustrious pedigree. Throughout the Bible, the Jewish people are constantly reminded that they are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. This is not a matter of pride and hubris – look how great my family is – but rather a call to spiritual arms – look at the great mission and responsibility that has been thrust upon us precisely because of who our ancestors were. This is what the rabbis meant when they stated that a Jew must always ask one's self: "When will my actions be of the same caliber of holiness and spirit as those of my forbearers?" Pride in ancestry is necessary and commendable. But if it only remains a matter of pride without advancing the covenant, commitments and goals of those who went before us, then that pride of ancestry is almost worthless. It leads only to the fate of the bnei Ketura, assimilation, anonymity and eventually the disappearance of the knowledge of one's own ancestry itself. All of Jewish history testifies to this truism of Jewish life, both in individual and communal terms. Shabat shalom.

TORAH WEEKLY—Parshat Chayei Sara
For the week ending 26 November 2005 / 24 Heshvan 5766
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

INSIGHTS

Lens On Life "...the life of Sara..." (23:1)

We are fragile people living in a fragile world. Our greatest joy can be shattered in an instant.

In this week's Torah portion, Avraham returns to his beloved wife Sara, elated with the news that their son Yitzchak had been saved from death, only to find that Sara had passed away.

How can we relate to situations that mix such extremes of feeling? How can we make sense of such unbearable contradictions?

Once, a noble from the town of Kabul invited the Sages to his son's wedding feast. As the meal progressed, the king noticed that there was no wine left on the tables. He despatched his son the bridegroom to bring a new barrel from the upper chamber. The son climbed the stairway and entered the chamber. At that moment, a snake slithered out from between the barrels and bit him. The bridegroom fell to the floor, dead. When his son failed to re-appear, the king himself made his way up to the wine store. There, he found his beloved son lying lifeless between the barrels. He returned to the meal quietly. He said nothing. Such was the composure of the king that nobody guessed that anything untoward had happened.

The banquet came to its end and the guests wanted to say the blessings after the meal. The king stood up and said, "You have not come here to recite the blessing for the bridegroom; you have come to recite with me the blessing for mourners. You have not come here to celebrate my son's marriage but to accompany him to his grave."

If the king had such control over his emotions that he was able to return to his son's wedding banquet and act as though nothing had happened, if he was able to contain his grief to such an extent, why didn't he control his grief further and let the guests go home unaware of the tragedy?

In truth, it was not a lack of control that made the king speak out. As long as there was no halachic necessity for him to reveal his grief, the king kept silent. However, when the time came for the blessings after the meal to be recited it would have been incorrect to recite the version that refers to the bridegroom. At that point, the correct version of the blessings after the meal was the one that seeks to comfort the mourner and his loss.

The halacha is our lens on existence, our point of interface between ourselves and the world. It is the point where our feelings and objective reality coincide. The Torah gives us the matrix of response to both the greatest joy and the uttermost sadness. There is no situation in life that the Torah ignores or bypasses. The Torah empowers us to relate to situations that extend from the everyday and the prosaic to the extraordinary and the unheard of, and by fulfilling its precepts we find order, tranquility and meaning in our lives.

The Torah is our lens on life.

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH

Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years. (23:1)

Rashi explains that the apparent redundancy of "years" divides Sarah's life into three distinct periods, each with its own uniqueness, yet each sharing the particular characteristics of its neighbor. In other words, at one hundred she was as sinless as a twenty year old who does not receive Heavenly punishment. At the age of twenty, she still had the wholesome beauty of a seven year old. Indeed, man's lifespan is divided into three eras: child, teenager, and adult. The Torah is teaching us that throughout every stage of her life, Sara Imeinu lived life with tochen, purpose, value and meaning.

Life has supreme value but, unfortunately, to some it holds little meaning. Everybody wants to live, but not everyone is able to live with purpose. Horav Yechiel Michel Tikuchinsky, z.l., the author of the Geshar HaChaim, tells the story of the condemned man who was taking his last walk to the gallows. The noose was placed over his head, and, just as he was about to say his last words, a large beam loosened and fell in his proximity. Instinctively, he jerked his head sideways to protect himself. Why? Was he not about to die momentarily anyway? This shows us that regardless of the situation, no one is prepared to die. As futile and lost as the situation seems, one still maintains that last hope that he will survive. Nobody really believes that he will die.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, z.l., relates the incredible story of a man on death row who was scheduled to die on a designated day, at a specific time. Apparently, they did not take into consideration the change of clocks that occurs in the spring. Hence, when they said six o'clock, the prisoner was prepared to die in the sixth hour. Due to the time change, he would instead be executed in the fifth hour past noon. He complained bitterly until the state deferred to his motion and granted him one more hour to live.

Imagine, this man refused to leave this world one minute earlier than necessary, even though that extra hour would only be filled with anxiety as he waited for his appointment with death. No one wants to die, but many of us do not learn how to live.

Adam HaRishon was originally destined to live one thousand years. When Hashem showed him a panorama of the future with all of its distinguished leaders, he was distressed that David HaMelech was to be allotted only three hours of life. Adam then “contributed” seventy years of his life to David. At the last minute, shortly before his death, he regretted his actions and wanted to continue living. Hashem told him to keep his word. Nine hundred and thirty years is considerable longevity, but as a person confronts his mortality, every minute is a lifetime that no one wants to give up.

The value of time is immeasurable, since we never know how much we might be able to accomplish in that extra minute. Indeed, a minute wasted is a minute lost forever. A wise man once attended the funeral of a ninety-year old man, who, regrettably, had wasted much of his life. His accomplishments were self-serving; his relationships were similarly egocentric. His children and grandchildren were walking behind the funeral cortege and weeping. The wise man asked, “Why is today different than the day before? Why are they weeping for him today? Considering the way he lived, they could have already mourned him yesterday. Yesterday, ninety years minus one day of his life had died. Today - only one more day has died.” It sounds a bit callous, but, when we think about it rationally, it is regrettably true of so many people.

When the sea surrounding the ship carrying Yonah HaNavi was storming, he suggested that the sailors “lift him up and throw him overboard.” Was it necessary to lift him up in the air? Could he not have simply jumped into the water? Horav Yehuda Leib Chasman, zl, explains that Yonah wanted to savor every possible moment of life. During the precious moments that it would take to lift him and throw him over, he could introspect and confess whatever “misdeeds” he might have done in his life. The value of a moment!

The story is told that when Horav Naftali Trop, zl, became ill, the students of the Yeshiva in Radin, where he was Rosh Yeshiva, sought every avenue to secure his recovery. They decided to “donate” days, weeks, and even months of their own lives as a merit for his recovery. They even went to the Chofetz Chaim, zl, and asked how many hours he would contribute. The venerable sage thought back and forth for a few moments and said, “I will give up one minute of my life.”

When the students heard their rebbe’s reply, they developed an acute appreciation of the value of time, of every single minute of time. Indeed, the hasmadah, diligence, in Torah study in Radin became so intense as a result of the Chofetz Chaim’s remark, that it was noted that the yeshivah had never had such hasmadah from its inception.

Horav Shmuel Pinchasi, Shlita, cites a meaningful analogy from the Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, to underscore this idea. A man goes out to purchase a calendar. He has two choices: either he buys the kind that has each day on a separate page which he tears off at the end of that day; or he can pick a desktop planner on which he can write notes on a daily basis. Both calendars are functional. There is one difference between the two, however: the former is thrown away empty at the end of the year, while the latter can be reviewed and even studied.

Every day that we live is the first day of the rest of our lives. We are born into this world and, with the passing of every day, we get one day closer to our last day on earth. What we do with our life is in our hands. When we take positive action, we can make a difference. Shlomo HaMelech says in Koheles, 12:1, “So remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come.” In the Talmud Shabbos 151A, Chazal interpret the “evil days” as a reference to old age when a person’s physical capabilities are curtailed. When a person seeks to repent when he is aged, his overtures are not as readily accepted. This is compared to a number of soldiers of a certain country who went AWOL and, due to fear of retribution, escaped to another country. A number of years later, a new king ascended to the throne, and he was prepared to offer amnesty to all those who would return immediately to active duty. One old man also came forth and requested amnesty. The officers listened to his offer

to return, but upon looking at his weakened body, he was told that it was too late: he was of very little use to the military.

It was this parable that Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl, otherwise known as Rav Itzele Peterburger, the famous disciple of Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, related to the students of Yeshivas Slabodka during the High Holy Days. He looked at the students and cried, “You are so fortunate to be young! You have the opportunity to grow spiritually and excel. Do not waste your time!” He then burst out into bitter weeping as he screamed, “My brothers! Take pity on an old man who has wasted his time worthlessly! Pray with me the words of the Psalmist (71:9), *Al tashlicheini l’eis zikna*, ‘Do not cast me off in time of old age.’” That is how the saintly Rav Itzele viewed life. What should we say? Perhaps it would serve us well to remember the famous words of Rav Yisrael Salanter, “As long as the candle still burns, it is possible to fix something.” It is all in our hands, as the Chovos HaLevavos writes, “The days (of one’s life) are as long sheets of paper. Write on them how you want to be remembered.”

Sarah’s lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years...Sarah died in Kiryas Arba...And Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her. (23:1,2,3)

The narrative concerning Sarah Imeinu’s passing is enigmatic. First, why does the Torah present the redundancy of the “years” of Sarah’s life? In fact, the ages of the other Imahos, Matriarchs, is not mentioned when the Torah records their deaths. The “chaf” of the word *u’livkosah*, and to bewail her, is written in miniature. The Baal HaTurim explains that since Sarah was very old, the weeping over her passing was diminished. Is this necessary for the Torah to note? Regarding Avraham’s eulogizing Sarah, Rashi explains the juxtaposition of Sarah’s death upon the Akeidas Yitzchak. He cites Chazal who explain that this is done to indicate that she died as a result of that event. The Satan told her that Avraham had actually slaughtered her precious Yitzchak. She cried out in grief and died. We wonder why Rashi does not cite this exegesis on the pasuk that records Sarah’s death. Rather, he mentions it concerning Avraham’s eulogy and mourning for her. Last, Sarah Imeinu was a woman of impeccable spiritual ascendancy. How is it that the Akeidah catalyzed her death? How could such a *nisayon*, test, that became the benchmark of Avraham Avinu’s distinction, be the ruin of Sarah, who was even greater than he in the area of *nevius*, prophecy?

The Nesivos Shalom offers a novel interpretation of the proceedings of Sarah’s death which elucidates and illuminates the entire narrative. We entreat Hashem daily to *v’haseir Satan milfaneinu u’meiachareinu*, “Please remove the Satan from before us and from behind us.” This indicates that there is a Satan that challenges us in front as we are about to perform a *mitzvah*. There is also another Satan, one who attempts to undermine the success and inspiration that we derive upon successfully carrying out a *mitzvah*. The *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, does everything within its power to sabotage whatever inspiration we might derive from our *mitzvah* observance. If it does not succeed in preventing us from performing the *mitzvah*, then it will go to all lengths to frustrate and disenchant us after we have discharged our duty.

The Satan employed every gambit to ensnare Avraham and thwart the successful completion of his mission. When he saw that Avraham had withstood the test, that he had stood there prepared to sanctify Hashem’s Name until he was halted by the Angel, he decided to change courses and become the Satan *mei’achareinu*, the Satan from behind us. How did he do it? The Satan knew that Sarah was destined to die that day. The Heavenly decree from before her birth was that her lifespan would end on the day that happened to coincide with the Akeidah. With this information in his bag of tricks, the Satan told Sarah about what happened to her only son. She immediately died, but not as a result of the shock as the Satan would have everyone believe, but because it was her time. When Avraham heard about the tragedy that had befallen him, and the part that he played in “shortening” Sarah’s life, he regretted the Akeidah. That was exactly what the Satan planned. If he could not

influence Avraham prior to the Akeidah, he would attempt a subterfuge afterwards.

Of course, the Satan failed in his ruse. We now understand why the Torah repeats Sarah's years. This underscores the fact that she lived precisely how long she was destined to live. She did not die "accidentally." Also, we now understand the juxtaposition of Sarah's death upon the Akeidah. The Satan wanted everyone to think that she died as a result of Avraham's mission. This is why Rashi emphasizes this exegesis on the pasuk that relates that there was decreased mourning for Sarah. She died an old woman. She did not die prematurely. Her time had come, and the mourning was commensurate with this type of loss. It was all maaseh Satan, the work of the Satan, who was once again foiled in his attempt to impede Avraham Avinu's spiritual progress.

There is a powerful lesson to be derived herein. We recognize the Satan that confronts us as we are about to do a mitzvah. We often ignore him, however, when he comes up from behind. The Chazon Ish, zl, was wont to say that there is a special yetzer hora that challenges us following a miracle. This is the Satan mei'achareinu. We now have a new "perception" of the meaning of the term, "hindsight."

Now these are the days of Avraham's life which he lived. (25:7)

Avraham Avinu died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five, which certainly seems to be a ripe old age. He lived a productive and successful life. He was supposed to live longer, however, but his life was cut short. In his commentary to Parashas Toldos (25:30), Rashi cites the Talmud in Bava Basra 16b that relates that Avraham Avinu died five years earlier than he had originally been designated to die, so that he would not see his grandson, Eisav, go out l'tarbus raah, bad ways. In citing this Rashi, the Chafetz Chaim, zl, added that everything that occurs is in some way alluded to in the Torah. Even the fact that Avraham dies prematurely is hinted at in the Torah. Upon relating Avraham's passing, the Torah writes, "These are the days of Avraham's life which he lived." The last few words - asher chai, "which he lived," are not used to describe Yitzchak Avinu's or Yaakov Avinu's passing. Why? This teaches us that, in reality, Avraham was supposed to have lived longer. His life was cut short, so this is all "which he lived." Likewise, concerning the passing of Adam HaRishon, the Torah writes "which he lived." Adam was supposed to live seventy more years, but he chose to contribute those seventy years to David HaMelech. Thus, this is the years "which he lived."

I think the lesson to be derived from Rashi is compelling. Let me first cite an intriguing Midrash, Lekach Tov at the beginning of this parsha. Concerning Sarah Imeinu's passing, the Midrash states that "all righteous women precede their husbands in death, so that their dignity not be impugned in the new unfortunate circumstances of widowhood. Incredible! Chazal open up before us a new vista of understanding concerning death and dying. What we think is a tragedy would conceivably be a favor. We cannot make this determination, but Hashem can - and does.

Avraham Avinu died before his time. One would lament this great loss - both to Avraham and to the world, but Hashem viewed this from a totally different perspective. He was acutely aware of the pain Avraham would sustain knowing that his grandson was to adopt a lifestyle of immorality and murder. Hashem is aware of the pain and loss of status associated with widowhood. He understands and weighs the emotions and heartbreak, the humiliation and travail, of being alone. We do not understand His decision, but we now have a glimpse into the factors behind that decision.

Bearing the above in mind, perhaps we can take the Midrash's lesson to heart and do something to ease the plight of those who are alone. At one time, each of them walked with pride, their heads held high - together with a spouse. Now each is alone, having lost not only a partner in life, but also in many ways access to recognition and tribute. Hashem takes their emotions into consideration. Should we not emulate this attribute?

I had occasion to write the following story a number of years ago, which is so powerful that I find it worthy of repeating. The story was originally told by Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, and later related by Rabbi Paysach Krohn in "Around the Maggid's Table." It was the early twentieth century and a certain Reb Nachum was the baal tefillah, leader of the services, for the Mussaf prayer on the High Holy Days in the shul where Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was the rav. Obviously a shul which had such a venerable rav was filled to capacity during these special days when prayer is so important and effective. The baal tefillah has an awesome function, one that goes beyond the mere ability to chant the service in a melodious voice. He must inspire the congregation with impassioned service. Needless to say, Reb Nachum lived up to his position.

One year, shortly before Rosh Hashanah, Reb Nachum took ill and suddenly passed away. After mourning a dear friend, the shul's leadership prepared for the task of filling the void and finding a baal tefillah for the upcoming holidays. When they approached Rav Yosef Chaim, he told them not to be concerned. He would see to it that a worthy replacement would be present in time. The weeks went by quickly, and soon it was a few days before Rosh Hashanah. There was still no baal tefillah in sight. When the members again approached the rav, the answer was the same: Do not worry.

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the members were beginning to become nervous, since there still was no baal tefillah. When they once again turned to Rav Yosef Chaim, he assured them that he had the situation in hand and there would be a baal tefillah at the podium for Mussaf.

The next day, there was a sense of anxious expectation in the air. The Shacharis service was completed. The Shofar was blown. It was now "crunch" time. Where was the baal mussaf? All eyes were on Rav Yosef Chaim, as he arose from his seat, walked over to Reb Nachum's son, and said, "You are to be the baal mussaf. Go up and pray just as your late father did."

The young man was taken aback. He never imagined himself as the one to fill his father's shoes. He began to protest, "I cannot. I am not prepared. I did not look over the prayers before Yom Tov."

Rav Yosef Chaim was not taking no for an answer. In his calm voice, he assured the young man that he could and would be successful in leading the prayers, "Go up there and do your best. You will be fine."

Understandably, one does not argue with Rav Yosef Chaim. The young man acquiesced and led the service. After Mussaf, a group of the members respectfully approached the rav and questioned his choice for baal tefillah. "After all," they reminded him, "the halachah clearly states that a mourner may not lead the congregation in prayer during the High Holy Days."

Rav Yosef Chaim looked at the group with loving eyes and responded softly, "Do you know who was sitting and praying in the women's section of the shul? Reb Nochum's widow. Surely you can imagine the grief and sorrow that she is feeling, especially on the very day that she would have listened to her husband leading the service. Now, imagine the pain she would have felt if just anybody had ascended the podium to lead the service. She would have surely broken apart, and her sorrowful weeping would have been heard and felt by us all.

"In order to minimize her pain, I sent her son up there. The Torah admonishes us a number of times to be sensitive to the needs of a widow. Halachah dictates that if there is no one else available, a mourner may lead the services. I felt that in this case, for the sake of the widow, there was no one else."

This was the benchmark of a gadol b'Yisrael, Torah leader. He carried the pain and concerns of all Klal Yisrael - both collectively and individually - on his shoulders.

Sponsored in loving memory of our Mother and Grandmother Celia Schlesinger Tzirel bas Mendel a"h niftara 21 Cheshvan 5765 You are forever missed. Richard and Barbara Schlesinger and Family

Rabbi Yonasan Sacks
The TorahWeb Foundation

Nichum Aveilim and Bikur Cholim

Parshas Vayera and Chayey Sara contain exemplary acts of chessed which serve as models for all generations. Parshas Vayera begins as Hakadosh Baruch Hu appears to Avraham Avinu who is recuperating from his bris milah, Rav Chama b'rabi Chanina explains (Sotah 14).

“Hakadosh Baruch Hu bi-ker cholim...af atah ba-ker cholim - Hashem visited the sick, you too should visit the sick.” Parshas Chayey Sara concludes as Hakadosh Baruch Hu appears to Yitzchak after the death of Avraham Avinu. Similarly, Rav Chama b'rabi Chanina comments “Hakadosh Baruch Hu nicheim aveilim...af atah nacheim aveilim - Hashem comforts mourners, you too should comfort mourners.”

The Rambam explains (Hilchos Aveil 14:7) that nichum aveilim takes precedence over bikur cholim, for whereas through bikur cholim one services the needs of the living, nichum aveilim is a chessed for the living and the dead. The Ohr Sameach questions this view based on the Gemara (Succah 41) which describes the practice of anshei Yerushalayim who would hold the daled minim throughout Succos: “ho-lach l'vaker cholim u'l'nachem aveilim, lulavo b'yado”. It seems from the order of the Gemara that the anshei Yerushalayim would first be mevaker cholim and only later be menachem aveilim. Interestingly, the Rosh cites the practice of anshei Yerushalayim in the reverse order - first nichum aveilim followed by bikur cholim. Yet the Rambam himself (Hilchos Lulav 7:24) cites our version of the Gemara. How can we reconcile the Rambam's view with the minhag of anshei Yerushalayim? The Rambam and the Rosh disagree regarding the focus of an aveil on yom tov. According to the Rambam (Aveil 10:7) “ain davar midivrei aveilus noheig b'yom tov - no aspect of aveilus applies on yom tov.” The Rosh however maintains that principle elements of aveilus are observed even during yom tov. The mishna (Moed Kattan 27a) which states that the mitzvah of nichum aveilim can be fulfilled on yom tov seems, at first glance, to support the view of the Rosh, for according to the Rambam how can there be a mitzvah of nichum aveilim if aveilus has not yet begun! Rav Betzalel Zolte explains that nichum aveilim on yom tov must be understood based on the dual nature of this mitzvah. Although aveilus only begins at the conclusion of yom tov, the element of nichum aveilim as chessed im hameis can be expressed even on yom tov. According to the Rambam, because nichum aveilim on yom tov is only a chessed im hameis, bikur cholim, which is a chessed im hachai, would take precedence over nichum aveilim on yom tov. This was the practice of anshei Yerushalayim. Generally, however, as the Rambam asserts, nichum aveilim kodem l'bikur cholim.

According to the Rosh, however, private aveilus is observed even on yom tov, allowing for both elements of nichum aveilim to be expressed. Thus, even on yom tov, nichum aveilim would precede bikur cholim, consistent with the Rosh's citation of the minhag of anshei Yerushalayim.

h a a r e t z

Portion of the Week / Putting Abraham to the test

By Haim Sabato

After Abraham had committed himself to calling “upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 12:8?) and commanding “his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19?), God draws up a covenant with him. According to it, a nation of God will be built by Abraham's descendants, who will be given a land of God, where they will fulfill the function of proclaiming the name of the Lord. That is why God grants two blessings: for Abraham to have descendants and for them to inherit the Land of Canaan.

From this point onward, the actions of the patriarchs as seen in Genesis teach us a two-fold story: on the one hand, the events resulting from God's choice of the family that will establish the House of Israel and, on the other, the fulfillment of the promise to give the Land of Canaan to the Children of Israel. These two elements entail an entire series of grueling trials. The belief of the three patriarchs in the two blessings granted them - regarding descendants and the Promised Land - is thus put to the test.

God is testing the strength of their loyalty. The blessings seem to be images appearing at some distant horizon. The matriarchs are barren. The choice of wives and sons is accompanied by bitter struggles: For example, there is the story of Ishmael, the birth of Isaac after so many years, the binding of Isaac, the battle between Jacob and Esau, and the conflict between Joseph and his brothers. Even the soil of the Promised Land seems to treat the patriarchs rather harshly. Confronted with famine in the Land of Canaan, Abraham is forced to travel to Egypt. Isaac is also confronted with famine in this same land and must wage a war with the Philistines over the wells. Jacob finds himself in a situation that necessitates fleeing the Promised Land to seek asylum in Haran. After returning to the Land of Canaan from a long exile, he is once more forced to leave and go to Egypt, where he will remain for the rest of his life and where his descendants will have to endure many years of hardship in exile.

That is why this week's Torah reading first provides us with a long depiction of the negotiations Abraham conducts to purchase land for Sarah's grave, and then focuses at length on the story of the search for a wife for Isaac. The story of the purchase of the cave and field in Hebron where Sarah will be buried teaches us about the first stages in the patriarchs' settlement of the Land of Canaan, while the story of Isaac's marriage teaches us how the family from which God's nation is to be built, was chosen. Our sages have taught us that God is testing Abraham's belief in the divine promise that the Land of Canaan has been granted to him and his descendants. Although all of that land has been promised to him, Abraham is still forced to purchase the burial plot for “four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant” (Gen. 23:16?). Just as he passed all the previous tests, Abraham passes this one and makes strenuous efforts to settle the land and make a home for himself there.

From the words of the patriarchs' servants, we can learn a great deal about the choice of the family that will build the House of Israel. For his son Isaac, Abraham seeks a woman who comes from a blessed family and he is determined to attach himself to the descendants of Shem. When Noah becomes intoxicated and exposes himself in his tent, Shem acts with scrupulous modesty and treats him with the utmost respect. Thus Abraham knows that the House of God will be built from Shem's descendants.

No woman living in the Land of Canaan could ever be a fit wife for Isaac. The Torah relates: “And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without” (Gen. 9:22?). In our midrashic literature we read that the words “told his two brethren without” mean that he announces his father's disgrace in public. Ham shows no respect whatsoever for his father's dignity and humiliates him publicly. Ham rules out the possibility that the divine blessing will be given to his descendants. Noah curses him - by cursing his son, Canaan - and his descendants do not deserve the honor of having Abraham associate himself with them. It is only the tent of modesty and purity that is blessed. Only where children have compassion for their parents can parents show compassion for their children and teach them the ways of God. The family that will build the House of God must be chosen from among holy descendants, that is, the descendants of Shem, who displays modest behavior and shows such great respect for his father Noah's dignity.

Good and bad choices

The women of the Canaanites and Hittites are immoral. When the Children of Israel are warned that they must be a holy nation, God cautions them not to follow the ways of the Canaanites, who are licentious and are therefore not worthy of dwelling in the Promised Land, which naturally spews them out. When we consider the above warning, we are surprised when we hear what Abraham says to his servant Eliezer of Damascus. Eliezer asks his master, “Per adventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?” (Gen. 24:5?); perhaps he is thus hinting that a wife from Abraham’s birthplace would not be such a bad choice since his master was born there himself. In response, Abraham commands him, “Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again” (Gen. 24:6?) and, to drive home the point, repeats this instruction, “only bring not my son thither again” (Gen. 24:8?). Abraham knows that only a woman from his own birthplace can ever be a suitable wife for Isaac. Nonetheless, Abraham is adamant that Isaac remain in the Land of Canaan and not elsewhere to find a wife. Even when famine strikes the Promised Land, God commands Isaac, “Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of” (Gen. 26:2?). God orders Isaac not to follow the example of his father, who went to Egypt because of a famine in the Land of Canaan. Abraham journeys from Haran to dwell in the Holy Land. Before settling there, he had tasted life in foreign lands; even after settling there, he leaves when circumstances force him to do so. His grandson Jacob will be destined by divine command to exile himself from the Holy Land, as will his children. However, Isaac never leaves the land. Of the three patriarchs, he is the most attached to it. The Torah tells us that, when Rebecca approaches, Isaac is in the field where he has gone to engage in a conversation. Rashi explains that he wants to pray and, according to Jewish tradition, Isaac institutes a daily afternoon service there; in the view of Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir?), however, the verse alludes to the bushes in the field (the word *siah* in Hebrew means both “conversation” and “bush”). When he goes off into the field, he plants seeds in the soil. It is also Isaac who digs wells and finds water, who plants seeds even when the Holy Land is experiencing famine and who, despite that situation, receives God’s blessing: “Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him” (Gen. 26:12?). It is Isaac whose wife is sent to him. When her mother and her brother Laban ask Rebecca, “Wilt thou go with this man?” she replies, “I will go” (Gen. 24:58?). According to Rashi, she is actually saying, “I will go by myself even if the two of you are opposed to the idea.” In journeying from Haran to the Holy Land, Rebecca leaves her home, birthplace and native land, thus following in the footsteps of Abraham, whom God commanded, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Gen. 12:1?). Isaac symbolizes to his children total devotion to the Holy Land. As the Torah tells us, “And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac” (Gen. 25:5?). Abraham gives to Isaac all his possessions and all his hopes. Isaac receives from his father not only all the blessings of God and promises that he has bestowed upon Abraham; he also receives from him Abraham’s qualities of compassion and abundant love (in the view of the Sefat Emet, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger?). Although generations of Jewish preachers have told us that the most prominent of Isaac’s qualities are justice and fear of God, his very name, whose root in Hebrew is “laughter,” attests to the laughter and joy that were so characteristic of him. We thus learn that, when we truly fear God, we experience not sadness but happiness. Moreover, inner fear of God leads us to joy. Genuine fear of God stems from love and leads us in turn to experience love.

Parshas Chayei Sarah - Life After Death

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Avraham came to elozize Sarah and to cry for her. (Bereishis 23:2)

Having done that, he then turned to the B’nei Chais in order to purchase the land in order to bury his beloved wife. And, not only did Avraham have to purchase land that was destined to be his in the future, but he did so at top dollar. However, the exercise was not all that futile, for the Talmud says that it won much favor in the eyes of G-d, as the following discussion between G-d and Moshe Rabbenu reveals: “What a shame about the ones who are lost and are not to be found. Many times I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov as El Shaddai, and they never questioned Me, nor did they ask, ‘What is Your Name?’ I told Avraham, ‘Arise, and walk the length and width of the land that I am giving to you.’ (Bereishis 13:17). Yet, when he wanted a place to bury Sarah, he couldn’t find anything until he purchased land for four hundred shekels!” (Sanhedrin 111a)

In the Torah, the word “to cry” is written, *v’livkosah* - Vav-Lamed-Bais- Chof-Tav-Heh. However, of all the letters, the Chof is written smaller than the rest making it stand out. For this reason, the rabbis use it to teach various different lessons, one of the main ones being that Avraham contained his mourning for his beloved wife and did not cry for her excessively:

My uncle, the elderly GR”A from Vilna, said that the reason why the Chof is written small in *v’livkosah*, is because Avraham knew that she had perfected herself as much as she needed to, and therefore he didn’t cry for her soul, just her body . . . (Penimim M’Shulchan HaGR”A, p. 49)

Why the Chof? Why is “that” letter the most suitable letter to teach this lesson? After last week’s parshah, we no longer need to ask this question, if you recall the conclusion:

“Rav Kahana said: Rav Nachman bar Munyumi elucidated in the name of Rebi Tanchum: A Chanukah light placed higher than 20 amos (30-40 feet) is unfit . . . (Shabbos 22a). The eye does not see higher than 20 amos, and therefore, there is no *pirumei nissa* (proclamation of the miracle) (Rashi). Another way of saying “to proclaim the miracle” is to “acknowledge the Hashgochah Pratis (the Divine Providence).” And, as I have written before, the number twenty, a number represented by the letter Chof, not only represents a physical blindness, but a spiritual one as well. Thus, the veil that covered the entrance to the Courtyard of the Mishkan, in which the hand of G-d was openly revealed, was twenty amos wide, indicating how difficult it is to see the hand of G-d in the world beyond the curtain, such as in the natural world of everyday life.

Thus, the Chof is alluding to the conclusion of the Talmudic account. By being small, the Chof indicates that the death of Sarah Imeinu did not throw Avraham for a hashkofic loop, neither by the loss of his dear wife nor by the need to get involved in the technical details of buying a burial spot in a land that G-d had already given to him as an inheritance.

Okay. But why do we have to know about this? And, what does it have to do with Moshe Rabbeinu’s complaint about Pharaoh’s reluctance to release the enslaved Jewish people upon G-d’s request, a request which increased the slavery beyond reason? What *ma’aseh avos siman l’banim* does this present to the generations of Jews to follow? Just this:

He told him, “No longer will you be called ‘Ya’akov,’ but ‘Yisroel,’ because you have struggled with [an angel of] G-d and with men and have prevailed.” (Bereishis 32:25-29)

SHABBOS DAY:

Ya’akov heard that Dinah his daughter had been defiled, but while his sons were with his herds in the field, he said nothing until they returned. (Bereishis 34:5)

One would think that fighting with an angel is more difficult than fighting with another person. Angels work directly for G-d and have all kinds of supernatural skills; humans can be outsmarted and outgunned. Yet, the *posuk* implies that overcoming men (Eisav and Lavan) was a greater accomplishment for Ya’akov Avinu than fighting with an angel, for that is mentioned second.

The answer is that it has more to do with what one is fighting for. If it is only an issue of physically overpowering one’s enemy, then fighting with an angel is certainly more difficult. However, for Ya’akov Avinu who was setting the spiritual stage for millennia for Jews to come, physical battles were not his central focus. He was far more interested in laying the groundwork for spiritual survival in a world that is far more dangerous spiritually than it is physically.

The beauty of fighting with an angel is that it is difficult to confuse the battle for a purely physical one. Being Heaven-sent, a person who fights with an angel can only see it as a test from G-d, and respond accordingly. However, the problem with fighting a person is that it is so easy to forget that, he too is only a messenger from G-d, sent to interact with us in order to test.

However, since the other person behaves as if he can act so independently of the will of G-d, we often respond to the person as if he is independent of G-d. Even

losing one's temper as a response to conflict is unnecessary since it is like, in a sense, getting angry at G-d. Rather, we're really supposed to take a step back and ask ourselves, "Who sent this to me? What does this situation demand of me that can be considered acting according to the will of G-d?"

Right! Well, for most of the world's population over history, if this is true, it is true only in theory. However, for Ya'akov Avinu such an outlook towards life was his actual way of life, which he had to prove. This is why his name was not officially changed to Yisroel until after the episode with Dinah in Shechem. It was then that he had to descend to the spiritual lowest of mankind, to a level of impurity so intense that one could easily get the impression that G-d is not always here, G-d forbid.

I mean, how could G-d have even allowed such an impure person approach such a holy young lady as the daughter of Ya'akov and Leah, let alone have his way with her? For something like that to happen to a Jewish woman today, G-d forbid, during such a time of intense Hester Panim, would prompt all kinds of questioning of Hashgochah Pratis; how much more so in Ya'akov's time when man was talking directly to G-d! And, this occurred just after his having defeated the angel and having his name changed, a sign of high praise from Heaven.

Yet, like his grandfather before him who had to bargain with the lowly Efron while the pure body of his holy wife lay awaiting burial, Ya'akov did not allow the connection between G-d and himself to break, not even temporarily. Even though Shimon and Levi totally lost it, taking revenge against all the males of the city, Ya'akov remained even-keeled and pronounced the phrase that, perhaps, best sums up the essence of the Jew: "This too is for the good" - in spite of the fact it was VERY hard to see how at the time.

However, after having survived the test in Beit El, G-d confirmed what the angel had spoken about before arriving at Shechem: Ya'akov was a true Yisroel. His belief in the future had allowed him to persevere against the problems of the present, to outlast the evil that seems all-pervasive in Olam HaZeh (this world). It is one thing to fight the "Angel of Eisav" when he presents himself as such, but it is something altogether different to fight him when he wears human clothing. In both cases, he works for G-d to test a person, but you have to be a Yisroel to see that in order to act accordingly in the case of the latter.

That was Ya'akov in his time, and that was Avraham when he bought the cave in which to bury his beloved Sarah.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Pharaoh called Yosef "Tzafnas Paneach." He gave to him Osnas, the daughter of Potiphera, the Priest of On, as a wife. (Bereishis 41:45)

It is unlikely that Yisroel knew back in Shechem that the daughter of the union between Shechem and Dinah would end up becoming the wife of Yosef when he went down to Egypt, and from whom Ephraim and Menashe would later be born. As to how their daughter ended up in Egypt, and then adopted by Potiphar, the master of Yosef, there is a midrash. (Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer, Ch. 32)

As to why Yosef's wife had to come down to Egypt this way, there is an Arizal:

As a result of the sin of Adam HaRishon, the [Holy] Sparks became intermingled, and some fell into the depths of the Klipos. Therefore, since Shechem had a spark of Adam HaRishon, he was drawn to Dinah. He was killed after his rectification of performing Bris Milah. Know that Chanina ben Teradyon was the reincarnation of the good aspect of Shechem ben Chamor. . . . Therefore, rachavas-Raish-Ches-Bais-Tav- is the roshei teivos of Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon. (Likutei Torah, Vayishlach, 34:8, 21)

The posuk to which the Arizal refers is this:

Chamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the people of the city and said, "These men are at peace with us; let them settle in the land and deal in it. The land as you can see, is large enough (rachavas-yadayim) for them." (Bereishis 34:20-21)

Thus, right in the posuk is an allusion to the great Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon, who would later die as one of the Ten Martyrs during Roman times (Avodah Zarah 18a). Had it not been for the Arizal, it would never have occurred to us that the story has any connection to the great rabbi from the future, revealing the profundity of a tikun that seems to have come as a result of such a base and illicit action.

And, had it not been for the Midrash, we would not have known the somewhat immediate positive result of the episode in Shechem. The violation of Dinah, compelled Shechem to do Bris Milah. And, because he did Bris Milah, the wayward Holy Spark from Adam HaRishon finally had its tikun, at least enough to become the soul of the great Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon, whose own death probably completed the tikun process for that particular spark.

In the meantime, the wife of Yosef HaTzaddik had been brought into the world, possessing her own Holy Sparks necessary to give birth to Ephraim and Menashe. Once again, the Sitra Achra was duped: Avraham from Terach, Rus from Lot and his daughter, Peretz from Yehudah and Tamar, etc., proving once again that G-d's

inherent goodness guarantees that everything - absolutely everything, must also end up being for the good as well.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Thus the field of Efron in Makpelah adjoining Mamre, the field and the cave which is in it, and all the trees within its borders became Avraham's uncontested possession, witnessed by all of the sons of Ches who came to the gate of his city. (Bereishis 23:17)

What good came of Avraham's forbearance and deep emunah? In the short term, he had bought the cave he had desired ever since finding out it was the burial place of Adam and Chava (Zohar Chadash, Rus). But in the long term, what was the inherent good that the entire episode sealed for his descendants?

In this case, the answer to the question may be coming up, b"H, as the final stage of the battle for Chevron begins to take shape. As we have learned first hand, it does not matter to the world what Rashi wrote at the very beginning of his commentary on the Torah, that the Torah began with the account of Creation to remind the world that Eretz Yisroel is the eternal inheritance of the Jewish people, given to us by G-d. The Arabs are demanding, and the world is complying, including our own people.

When Moshiach finally arrives and restores Torah-order, that first Rashi will kick in for good. In the meantime, we need additional spiritual energy to keep ourselves attached to the land, even if, G-d forbid, it is taken from us temporarily. Very little creates as deep a bond in this world as actually purchasing something, an idea we see emphasized in the actual process of getting married (Kiddushin 2a).

The Leshem adds to this by explaining what happens spiritually to the purchaser and the purchasee. He says that the actual process of buying something creates a spiritual bond between the purchaser and that which is being bought, even if he wasn't so attracted to it in the first place. Paying money out of our own pocket for something is like surrendering a part of us for which we receive the object in return, on a spiritual level as well as a physical one.

Thus, by purchasing Chevron, Shechem, and Yerushalayim, created another level of bond between the Jewish people and these specific holy spots in their land, bonds that will keep us attached no matter how many try to steal the land away from us. In this respect, Avraham understood that what he was going through was Hashgochah Pratis, a Divine set-up to lay the groundwork for a future and more eternal bond with the land. The death of his wife became the source of another level of life in the relationship between the Jewish people and their land.

Have a great Shabbos,

PW

Meaning in Mitzvot

The OU/NCSY Israel Center - TORAH tidbits

Each week we discuss one familiar halakhic practice and try to show its beauty and meaning. The columns are based on Rabbi Meir's Meaning in Mitzvot on Kitzur Shulchan Arukh by Rabbi Asher Meir

Song of the Day

Each day in the Temple the Leviyim used to sing a particular chapter of T'hilim at the time of the wine libation in the morning and late afternoon.

These songs are recorded in the mishna at the very end of tractate Tamid (7:4). The gemara (Rosh HaShana 31a) explains the choice of chapters by relating each day's song to the events of the corresponding day of creation. (A similar explanation is found in Avot d'Rebbe Natan 1:8.)

Rambam (Order of Prayers) mentions that some communities had a custom of saying each day's song after morning prayers, and today this custom is universal.

Actually, there is a dispute in the Yerushalmi if it is appropriate to recite these songs outside the time of the wine libation, at least in the Temple. Rebbe Yochanan asserts that it is permissible. His proof is that at the time of the destruction of the Temple, which tradition teaches was on a Sunday, the Leviyim sang the verse "And He shall return them according to their sin, and cut them off in their wickedness". This verse, which belongs to psalm 94 recited on Wednesdays, was used in this case as a lamentation over the tragedy of the destruction. But Resh Lakish asserts that the Leviyim merely sang "yesterday's song". (Yerushalmi Taanit 4:5. According to one explanation this means they made a mistake.)

Tractate Sofrim (18:1) presents us with Resh Lakish accepting Rebbe Yochanan's proof; the ruling continues: "Therefore, the people are accustomed to reciting these songs in their [respective] times."

This inference from Rebbe Yochanan is not obvious. It is true that Rebbe Yochanan asserts that we may recite the song of the day even without the wine libation. But Rebbe Yochanan also maintains that when we do so, we don't necessarily have to say the song customary for that day; rather, we may say a psalm appropriate to "current events", just as the Leviyim at the time of the destruction

recited mournful verses appropriate to the tragic events. It seems that the message is that the particular commemoration of the stages of creation are suited to the days of the week inherently, and not only because this was the custom in the time of the Temple. The stages of the creation of the world, culminating in the Shabbat, are also stages in our every-day existence: First, recognizing G'd's primacy (the message of chapter 24); then recognizing his involvement in the creation (the message of chapter 48); afterwards, recognizing that the basis of creation is justice among human beings (chapter 82); the recognition that only He is worthy of worship (chapter 94); that His sovereignty is beneficent for all creatures (chapter 81); and that man is the pinnacle of creation (chapter 93). Finally, we recognize that the world is subject to perfection and is destined to be perfected in the Shabbat of the World to Come (chapter 92).

While the passage from Sofrim explains the "song of the day" as a commemoration of the Temple service, the inference from Rebbe Yochanan, who makes a point of stating that the song is not inherently connected to the libations, seems to make the point that our recitation of the songs today is related especially to the ongoing unfolding of the stages of creation and the weekly cycle. This understanding is strengthened by the special introduction we say to each chapter: "Today is such-and- such a day of the week, on which the Levijim used to say...". The commentators explain that this introduction is meant to remind us of Shabbat each day, so that we recall that each day stands in a particular relation towards the ultimate completion and perfection of the world.

The Weekly Halacha Overview, by Rabbi Josh Flug

Avoiding Life Threatening Situations on Shabbat

The previous two issues discussed the source for performing melacha in a life threatening situation and the question of hutrah vs. dechuyah. This week's issue will discuss the permissibility of creating situations that would require violation of Shabbat for pikuach nefesh purposes and what measures must be taken to avoid life threatening situations that require violation of Shabbat.

Setting Out on a Voyage Prior to Shabbat

A Beraita (quoted the Gemara, Shabbat 19b) states that it is prohibited to set out on a sea voyage within three days of Shabbat unless the voyage is for the purposes of fulfillment of a mitzvah. There are many interpretations among the Rishonim as to why it is prohibited to do so. One of the explanations is that of R. Zerachia HaLevi, Ba'al HaMaor, Shabbat 7a, who suggests that the reason why it is prohibited to set out on a voyage is because the passengers may be required to perform melacha on Shabbat in order that the ship does not capsize. Although those melachot will be performed for the purpose of pikuach nefesh, one should not create a pikuach nefesh situation that requires violation of Shabbat unless it is for the purpose of performing a mitzvah.

Ba'al HaMaor's interpretation is not necessarily considered the accepted interpretation of the Beraita (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 248:2). Nevertheless, the principle that Ba'al HaMaor derives from the Beraita – that one should not create a pikuach nefesh situation that requires violation of Shabbat - is accepted by Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 248:4.

Ba'al HaMaor's principle seems to be contradicted by his ruling in Ba'al HaMaor, Shabbat 53a. In the times of Gemara it was considered dangerous to perform a brit milah without washing the infant in warm water before and after the milah. The Gemara, Eiruvim 67b, implies that if there is no hot water available for a milah on Shabbat, the milah is postponed until Sunday. Ba'al HaMaor discusses a case where there is sufficient water to wash the infant prior to the milah but not enough water to wash the infant subsequent to the milah. Ba'al HaMaor states that if the milah was already performed, one would certainly be required to heat water on Shabbat, as neglect to wash the infant in warm water poses a danger to the infant's life. However, if the milah was not yet performed, one may not perform the milah knowing in advance that water would have to be heated in order to wash the infant.

It is clear from this ruling that one cannot perform a milah on Shabbat knowing in advance that one would have to violate Shabbat for pikuach nefesh purposes. However, this ruling is questionable. Based on Ba'al HaMaor's principle, one may create a pikuach nefesh situation that requires violation of Shabbat if it is for the purpose of fulfilling a mitzvah. Milah should be considered no less a mitzvah than any other mitzvah. If so, why can't one perform the milah knowing that hot water will be required for pikuach nefesh purposes?

Three answers are given in order to resolve Ba'al HaMaor's opinion. First, Magen Avraham 248:14, implies that it is only permissible to set out on a sea voyage for mitzvah purposes if there is question as to whether a pikuach nefesh situation will arise. If it is known that one must violate Shabbat for pikuach nefesh purposes, one may not enter such a situation. In Ba'al HaMaor's case of milah, it is known that if the milah is performed, Shabbat must be violated in order to heat water for the

purpose of pikuach nefesh. Therefore, the leniency that allows one to enter a pikuach nefesh situation for mitzvah purposes does not apply.

Second, R. Ya'akov Y. Kanievsky, Kehillat Ya'akov, Shabbat no. 15, distinguishes between entering into a situation of pikuach nefesh before Shabbat and entering into such a situation on Shabbat. One who enters such a situation prior to Shabbat (as in the case of the sea voyage) violates a rabbinic prohibition. Since it is only a rabbinic prohibition, Chazal allowed entering into this situation for mitzvah purposes. However, to enter such a situation on Shabbat (as in the case of the milah) constitutes a biblical prohibition. Therefore, there is no room for leniency when the cause of the situation is a d'var mitzvah.

Third, R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik (in Mesorah 6) distinguishes between milah and other mitzvot. Regarding milah, the machshirei milah (preparatory items for the milah) are specifically excluded from permissible milah activities on Shabbat. Therefore, the heating of water - which should have been prepared beforehand - is considered machshirei milah and one cannot perform a milah on Shabbat if one will have to violate Shabbat for machshirei milah. According to R. Soloveitchik, one may enter into a situation that will require violation of Shabbat for pikuach nefesh purposes even if it is known that the pikuach nefesh situation will definitely arise, and even if one enters into the situation on Shabbat. Milah is the one exception to the rule because of the special exclusion of machshirei milah.

Avoiding a Violation of Shabbat in a Pikuach Nefesh Situation

There are numerous rulings of R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach relating to pikuach nefesh (all are recorded in Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata) that received criticism from R. Auerbach's colleagues. First, if an ill person in a life threatening situation requires a candle, and the only available lit candle is at a neighbor's home, one may light a new candle for the ill person if removal of the candle from the neighbor's home will cause the neighbor distress (Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 32:65). Second, if an ill person in a life threatening situation requires hot food or a hot drink, and the only available food of this kind belongs to a neighbor, one may cook food on Shabbat if taking the food from the neighbor will leave him without any food for Shabbat (Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 32:74). Third, if electrical wires fall on Shabbat and are situated in a place that is accessible to the public, one may call the electric company, and there is no requirement to remain there the entire Shabbat and warn passersby of the danger (Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 41:22).

The first two rulings were criticized because the neighbor also has an obligation to save the life of the ill individual. If there is no option to light a different candle or cook food on Shabbat, the neighbor would certainly be required to provide for the ill individual. Why then is it permissible to violate Shabbat in a situation where the neighbor is inconvenienced by providing for the ill individual; if he provides the necessary item, violation of Shabbat can be avoided? Regarding the third ruling, R. Auerbach was asked: isn't it preferable for someone to stand next to the electrical wires the entire Shabbat rather than violate Shabbat?

R. Auerbach, Minchat Shlomo 1:7, answers all of these objections with an important principle regarding pikuach nefesh. Regardless of whether pikuach nefesh on Shabbat is hutrah or dechuyah, any melacha performed to save the life of an individual constitutes absolutely no violation. Therefore, if an ill person requires a specific item that requires performance of a melacha on Shabbat and that melacha can be avoided by alternative means, one is not required to employ those alternative means if doing so comes at the expense of something else. Although a neighbor is obligated to save the life of another individual, he is not required to provide his light or his food when one can equally provide light or food to the ill individual by performance of melacha for pikuach nefesh purposes. Similarly, one who spots downed electrical wires is not required to forgo his oneg Shabbat when he can just as easily call the electric company which would constitute performance of melacha for pikuach nefesh purposes.

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