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The Covenantal Community

By: Rabbi Joshua Rapps

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Rav Soloveitchik on Chumash

The articles in this column are transcriptions and adaptations of shiurim by Rav Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, zt"l. The Rav's unique perspective on Chumash permeated many of the shiurim and lectures he presented at various venues over a 40-plus-year period. His words add an important perspective that makes the Chumash in particular, and our tradition in general, vibrant and relevant to our generation.

Dedicated in honor of the engagement of Benjy Kreitman and Aliza Friedman.

Parshas Chayei Sarah is a biography of the Sarah's life and a paradigm for Jewish history and destiny. There were 2 covenants between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. The first was the Patriarchal Covenant between Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Hashem. The second was the Sinaitic Covenant between Hashem and Moshe and Bnei Yisrael. The focus of the Sinaitic covenant is the contractual commitment to observe 613 mitzvos. What is the nature of the enigmatic Patriarchal Covenant? What does it demand from the Jew? What is its relevance to us today?

The Torah refers to the Patriarchal Covenant within the Sinaitic Covenant, Bris Rishonim. Apparently, they are complementary. The former is prerequisite for the latter. The Sinaitic Covenant relates to human deed and performance, how to act as a member of the Covenantal Community. The Patriarchal Covenant addresses human personality and character as a whole, the essence of the I-awareness, teaching man who he should be. The Patriarchal Covenant tells the Jew how to appreciate the great experience of being a Jew, a member of the community.

The covenant was reached with two people: man and woman. From their first rendezvous, Hashem addressed Himself to both man and woman. Both were created together, only together were they called Adam and endowed with the greatest of gifts, their humanity within Tzelem Elokim. This dual human

reality transcended the physiological sex differentiation and extended into the metaphysical level. The Biblical story of joint creation of man and woman in the image of Hashem, contradicts the perverse notion that Judaism ascribes an inferior status to women. At the same time, it also cuts away the false notion that there is no metaphysical distinction between man and woman. Man and woman differ existentially, but they do not differ in terms of values (axiological existence), as both share the image of God, their humanity. Hashem created a dual existence, man and woman, who complement each other. These two existential beings together represent one perfect destiny.

This complementary nature and unified destiny is the basis of the Covenantal Community. We observe this through the relationship of Abraham and Sarah. Both were equal parties to the covenant with Hashem. Indeed, at times we might be tempted to think that Sarah was the central figure. The end of Lech Lecha demonstrated that the Covenantal Community required both Sarah and Abraham, man and woman. Abraham asks that Hashem pass the covenant on to Ishmael, resigning himself to remaining childless with Sarah. Hashem answers that Sarah, his wife, will bear him a child to be called Isaac, and this child, the product of both Sarah and Abraham, will be the recipient of the covenant. Ishmael cannot be the recipient of the covenant, because he represented only one side of the Covenantal Community, Abraham, but not Sarah.

Hashem notified Avram that effective immediately, his name is changed to Avraham. However, Hashem simply informed Abraham that Sarah's name was already changed. Since the Covenantal Community required both Abraham and Sarah, it was impossible to change the name of one without automatically affecting the name of the other. Hashem simply informed Abraham that her name changed coincidentally with his. They were selected together, and only together could they achieve covenantal sanctity. The Torah says Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and cry for her. Human nature dictates to cry first and then eulogize. Crying is not mourning, rather it is the spontaneous release of tension due to a (usually destructive) surprise. On the other hand, a eulogy is a rational, intellectual performance that requires clarity of mind to evaluate and appraise the loss, and to painfully discover how reality has changed.

Abraham suffered a double loss with the death of Sarah. The first was the loss of his wife and partner, his consistent comrade in arms, with whom he faced life's challenges. No one understands the bleak loneliness and destructive nostalgia felt by a surviving mate. With the death of Sarah, Abraham felt that his whole world had been dislocated. The second sense of loss was the uncertainty of the fate of the Covenantal Community. Abraham knew that the covenant was entrusted to both a man and a woman. Now that the mother of the Covenantal Community had died, would Hashem trust him to continue? Perhaps he had sinned and was no longer worthy to be the father of the Covenantal Community?

Upon her death, the first thing Abraham did was to appraise Sarah's contributions to the growth of the Covenantal Community, and to put in place a plan for how to continue without her. After all, Abraham was not alone in this loss. Rambam writes that they attracted tens of thousands of followers into the covenant. These people also felt the loss of the mother of their community. First Abraham had to orient himself to the loss of Sarah in terms of the community. Only afterwards could he break down and cry over his personal loss.

Abraham realized that with Sarah's death, the mother of the Covenantal Community, his mission as its father was drawing to a close. He needed to prepare to walk off the historical stage, to yield, so others could pick up the mantle of father and mother of the Covenantal Community.

Abraham survived Sarah by 38 years. Yet the Torah tells us just two stories involving Abraham in his role of father of the Covenantal Community: the purchase of the burial plot for Sarah, and finding a wife for Isaac. Indeed, the latter story is more important in the context of the continuity of the

Covenantal Community, which required the strong relationship between Rebecca and Isaac, like that of Abraham and Sarah.

The Torah says that Isaac brought Rebecca into his mother's tent, and she filled the gap left by the death of the mother of the Covenantal Community. Once again, it would have a father and mother. Abraham now moved off the center stage for the remaining 38 years of his life, after entrusting the destiny of the Covenantal Community to Isaac and Rebecca.

The Torah repeats the word Shana with each component of Sarah's age of 127 years, culminating with the words Shnei Chayei Sarah. The repetition teaches us that Sarah had the purity and inquisitiveness of a seven-year-old, the beauty and maturity of a 20-year-old and the wisdom of a 100-year-old. There was no contradiction or conflict within Sarah. Sarah did not suffer from a stymied, under developed personality. She was a bold, daring and responsible person who, miraculously, did not allow the maturity of the adult in her to squash her inherent enthusiasm of an innocent child. She grew older and wiser with the passage of time, yet in times of need or crisis the young girl in her came to the fore.

The study of Torah requires skepticism and willingness to be challenged. Rabbi Yochanan rejected Rabbi Elazar Ben Pdas because he always agreed with him and did not challenge him as Resh Lakish, his former study partner, did. On the other hand, prayer requires the Jew to suspend his intellect and pour his heart out to Hashem as a young child to his mother. Abraham and Sarah, the founders of the Covenantal Community, exhibited maturity and child-like behavior when required. The Torah expects a member of the Covenantal Community to fight as a young man for his ideals, like Abraham did when called upon to save his nephew. Abraham was at least 75 years old at that time, yet he acted as a young warrior, without hesitation. When Abraham studied the skies of Mesopotamia in search of Hashem he acted as a wise old man. When he prayed, he did so with the complete love and faith of a young child.

Sarah, and Abraham, demonstrated that in addition to fulfilling the contractual obligation (mitzvos) of the Sinaitic Covenant, the Covenantal Community Jew must exercise the attributes of inquisitiveness, submission, and wisdom when it comes to the four basic mitzvos in the life of the Jew: Study of Torah, Faith in Hashem, Prayer and the Love of Hashem. The Patriarchal Covenant is our blueprint to follow.

About the Author: Rabbi Joshua Rapps attended the Rav's shiur at RIETS from 1977 through 1981 and is a musmach of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan. He and his wife Tzipporah live in Edison, N.J. Rabbi Rapps can be contacted at ravtorah1@gmail.com

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Aveilut for Parents

Halakhic Positions of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik

by R. Aharon Ziegler

Many people have wondered why aveilut for a parent is twelve months while for a child is only thirty days. After all, the loss of a dear and loving parent is a natural phenomenon of life, and it is anticipated, yet here the Halacha requires twelve months of mourning. But one who is subjected to the loss of a child, which is unnatural and extremely traumatic for the surviving parents, is told by Chazal that one month of aveilut is enough. How do we justify it? Rav Pinchus Teitz from Elizabeth, New Jersey suggested that a parental loss is in a category of its own. Parents are unique. More children and siblings may be acquired. But there is only one mother and one father. The added mourning is to manifest this uniqueness.

According to Rav Soloveitchik, when parents become old a role reversal takes place. The parent, who cared for and sustained the child, is no longer physically capable of doing so. The parent now needs a support system. The child takes on the parental role of caring, sustaining and protecting the parent. In the latter stages of illness the parent is cared for almost like a

child. Chazal imposed a longer mourning process to overcome the image of the child-like invalid parent in order to remember and vividly recall the parent not as viewed in the end of life but rather, as he/she appeared as a strong, vigorous caring parent. This process requires a considerable longer period of time.

On a simpler level, the Rav commented, the aveilut for parents is longer than for children because for parents it's a mitzvah of Kibbud Av and Kibbud Eim.

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Ag-ing- not so bad after all

Rabbi Shimon Kerner

"And Avraham was old, advanced in age..." (24, 1) On this verse the Midrash comments that until Avraham there was no such concept as physical signs of aging.

We live in a time when there is much emphasis on youth. Many TV commercials, in both subtle and obvious ways, convey the message that to look young is wonderful, and conversely, aging is to be avoided at all cost. For people whose lives revolve around gashmius (materialism), youth is indeed a virtue. It gives greater opportunity to derive pleasure from this world. This possuk teaches us that Avraham introduced the concept of living a spiritual life, where zikna becomes a virtue.

There is a famous story told about Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky ZT"l. He was once traveling on an airplane with his grandson, who tended to his needs in a very devoted and loving manner. The fellow sitting next to them observed the interaction of grandfather and grandson throughout the flight. At the end of the flight he asked Rav Yaakov how he merited having such a dedicated grandson. He remarked that he couldn't even dream that a child or grandchild of his own would respect him as much. Rav Yaakov responded by explaining that when one believes in the theory that man evolved from apes, then by definition the later generations are superior to those of earlier generations. It follows that the youth won't respect their elders. However, we, the Jewish people, believe that one who lived closer to the Sinai experience is holier and more in touch with Hashem. It is therefore perfectly understandable for youth to respect their elders.

When Avraham aged, the possuk says he was "ba bayomim". Many commentators explain this phrase to mean that he came to his old age having taken advantage of all his days and having lived life to its fullest. Avraham Avinu teaches us that it isn't sufficient to achieve old age physically, but to live life to its fullest in the spiritual sense. May we all merit to come to old age armed with days lived to their fullest- days filled with kindness, Torah study, prayer, and productivity.

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Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Cats

Like all of the wondrous creatures that the Lord has populated our natural world with, the cat family is most interesting and unique. The big cats such as the lion, leopard and the tiger are marvelous machines of prey, grace and beauty. Their smaller relatives, equally dangerous and equipped with speed and cunning, such as the jaguar and the cheetah are, in their own right, breathtaking in appearance and ability. Then there are the domesticated cats, which many human beings love to own and raise as pets. In this latter category of domesticated cats there is a special breed - a sub-species - the Jerusalem cat.

All of us who are privileged to live in the Holy City are well aware of the presence of these cats that we interact every day. These cats are wild, in the sense that they have no particular human owner and are forced to fend for themselves for their daily food and sustenance. They are certainly a hardy and adaptable breed, apparently afraid of no one and instinctively attuned to the dangers of urban life, traffic, curious children and open garbage cans.

The Jerusalem cat has a personality all its own. It is brazen beyond belief, agile beyond description and indestructible as a group, having weathered any attempts to control or even eradicate its presence here in Jerusalem. Some of these wild Jerusalem cats have great poise and beauty to them. Others are more of the mongrel and ordinary type. However, all of them have one thing in common – they are ubiquitous and apparently intend to remain so till the end of time.

The parking lot and garden of the building where I reside here in Jerusalem is patrolled constantly by a number of cats. I have been unable to determine whether they are a family or just close friends. I meet them every morning on my way to the synagogue and they are usually there in the evening and night as well.

They show me no respect, are clearly unafraid of my presence and one of them constantly meows at me when it spies my presence. I have never fed them because I feel that somehow that will only increase the number of cats that constantly visit. Nevertheless I am well aware of the iconic picture of the great righteous Jew of Jerusalem, Rabbi Aryeh Levin, placing a bowl of milk on the ground to feed the cats that are always around him.

There is something within me that says that I should perhaps emulate that great man in feeding the cats that are encamped on our premises. However, I am well aware that no good deed goes unpunished. I know that my act of compassion could lead to all sorts of complications - with neighbors, other cats, and with the street cleaners, all of whom may take a dimmer view of the cats than I do.

Because of this I do nothing but I do feel guilty – especially with regard to the main cat that keeps on meowing at me on a regular basis. I doubt that feeding this cat will stop it from meowing at me, so I remain passive in responding to its voice.

There are many urban legends as to how this extraordinary number of cats came to Jerusalem. The most popular legend is that they were brought here at the beginning of the British mandate over the country in the early 1920s. The story goes that there was a plague of mice that was overrunning Jerusalem and the British imported cats to stem the plague.

The cats dutifully performed their function and have since remained as part of the landscape and population of the city. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this legend but there are many things of ambivalent value here in Israel that were left to us by the British, so cats may be one of those things.

There are very kind people in our neighborhood who feed these cats daily. I notice that they are always surrounded by cats even when it is not feeding time. Some of them have even purchased dogs that they walk with in order to discourage the congregation of cats around them. But the Jerusalem cat is not afraid of a dog.

Here in Jerusalem many of the accepted laws of nature are somehow suspended and never enforced. I marvel at the sight of a human being simply walking along with a dog, surrounded by cats, both species of animals blissfully ignoring the commands of the human who is allegedly the master of the situation. In any event, I find cats to be intriguing creatures and doubly so when they live and thrive in the ever fascinating city of Jerusalem. Shabbat shalom

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reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein
Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein
Chayei Sarah

The loss of one's beloved spouse, especially after many years and decades of marriage and shared life, is always a traumatic and shattering blow. Those of us, who unfortunately have also experienced this in our own lives, can testify as to the emotional damage and even physical harm that this sad experience can occasion.

We see from the life of our father Jacob that even decades later he reminds his children and himself of the pain and suffering caused by the death of his beloved wife, Rachel. In essence, it seems that Jacob never again was the same person after the death of Rachel.

Avraham apparently dealt with the death of Sarah in a more stoic fashion. The Torah itself indicates this by inference. In reference to Avraham's reaction to the tragedy, a small letter kaf is used to describe the grief and weeping of Avraham over the death of Sarah. It is not that Avraham is less grieved at the loss of Sarah than Jacob was at the death of Rachel. It is rather that after all of the challenges and trials that Avraham had endured his attitude towards life and its vicissitudes was affected – he now always looked forward and never dwelt on the past.

Those who live exclusively in the past are doomed to self-pity and great emotional angst. This only causes a sense of victimhood and hopelessness. It reflects itself in every aspect of later life and stunts any further spiritual, social, personal or societal growth.

The greatness of Avraham, as taught us by the Mishnah, was his resilience and continued spiritual and personal growth. Avraham constantly looked forward, ahead – never dwelling on past misfortune.

I heard an outstanding speech delivered by George Deek, who is a Christian Arab and member of the Israeli Foreign Office. In telling the story of his life, he describes how his family lived in Jaffa for many generations and how they fled to Lebanon during the 1948 War of Independence.

Sensing the squalor and political manipulation of the refugees by the Arab powers, whose sole goal was the destruction of Israel and not saving and resettling the refugees, his grandfather escaped Lebanon and somehow brought the family back to Jaffa and Israel. He regained his job with the Israel Electric Company and raised generations of successful professionals, all citizens of Israel.

He said that the Jewish refugees from Europe and the Moslem world attempted to forget their past and build a new future for themselves and their descendants when they arrived in Israel. The Palestinian Arab refugees, under the misguided leadership of their spiritual and temporal heads, reveled instead in their past defeats and in their legend of nakba.

In the main, they have devoted themselves to attempting to destroy Israel instead of rehabilitating themselves. This attitude and mindset has served them badly and cost them dearly. The past needs to be remembered and recalled, treasured and instructive to us. However, it is the future and what we make of it that ultimately determines our worth and our fate. That is one of the great lessons to be derived from the story of the life of our father Avraham.

Shabbat shalom

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Chayei Sara
For the week ending 15 November 2014 / 22 Heshvan 5775
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

Cover Up

“...she then took the veil and covered herself.” (24:65)

Not too long ago, in Victorian times, no lady would be seen on the street with a centimeter of flesh visible lower than her chin. Victorian women were covered quite literally from "head to toe."

Not that secular society in Victorian times was demonstrably any more moral than it is today. Just there was some kind of a concept of discretion. You

may call it hypocrisy; others might call it guilt. At any rate, even secular society had some kind of an idea of what is called in Hebrew: tzniut. Tzniut is often mistranslated as "modesty." But really it means inwardness. As the verse says, "All the honor of the daughter of the king is inwardness" (Tehillim 45:14). Every Jewish girl is a "daughter of the king" (not a 'Jewish Princess') and her greatest glory is her inner world.

One of the greatest challenges to Jewish life in our generation is tzniut. A woman's nature is to want to look attractive. When this desire is to be beautiful in her husband's eyes, a woman in the total privacy of her home may go to great lengths.

However, if this instinct does not find its intended home in family life and wanders out onto the street, it becomes a highly destructive force. Especially as the current standards of what is called 'decently dressed' would more correctly befit the animals in a zoo.

"...she then took the veil and covered herself."

Rashi comments that the phrase "...and (she) covered herself," is grammatically passive rather than reflexive and literally translated would read, "and she was covered." He goes on to cite two examples of this syntax: as in, "and she was buried, and "...and it was broken."

Of all the grammatical examples that Rashi could have given, why did he chose burial and breakage?

'Being buried' and 'breaking' are two things that a person can never do to himself. They are two of the most involuntary things that can happen to you. When Rivka covered herself, it was with such immediacy and so automatic and with such control of herself that it was as though someone else was covering her.

"...and she was covered."

Source: In the name of the Mirrer Mashgiach as seen in Lekach Tov

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to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Chayei Soroh

Now Avraham was old, well on in years. (24:1)

Did Avraham Avinu suddenly become old? The Midrash Tanchuma teaches that when Sarah Imeinu died, Avraham began to age. Horav Mordechai Eliyahu, zl, explains that as long as Sarah stood by the Patriarch's side, he did not sense that he had aged. She encouraged and spurred him to continue his holy work. When his life's companion, his major source of inspiration, was taken from him, Avraham no longer had by his side that spiritual force that motivated him to maintain his youthful endeavors.

The Rishon L'Tzion adds that this unique ability to galvanize the individual to aspire for greater success and achievement is one of the character traits that Sarah imbued in her descendants - both male and female. The inspiration to achieve greater heights, to climb the mountain of success, is ingrained in the Jewish psyche from our Matriarch. While it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to aspire to Sarah's personal greatness, nothing prevents us from being "like" Sarah.

Horav Aryeh Levine, zl, was known as the Tzaddik of Yerushalayim. When one reads his biography, he gets a true glimpse into the "power behind the throne," the woman who was his Rebbetzin, the individual who took the least credit, but probably was the single most factor in catalyzing his incredible achievements. Indeed, whenever people would recall good deeds that he had carried out, he immediately would respond, "But what am I, considering the things she did? She was a great soul." Rav Aryeh was wont to say that all of his good qualities came to him from her strength: "If not for her, I could not possibly have withstood the days of hunger during the First World War. Her bitachon, trust in the Almighty, was greater than mine."

Perhaps the best description of this holy woman and her devotion to her husband are presented by Rav Aryeh himself in a letter of tribute he wrote following her passing: "My heart grieves, and my spirit mourns. For how shall I find consolation for my great misfortune, when my greatest treasure, my crowning glory, was taken from me?"

"My anguish is great, and my woe is awesome. Who could ever describe her devotion and goodness? Another like her is hardly to be found - so pure of spirit, with a heart as wide in generosity as the entrance to a palace, with a sensitivity of kindness and compassion that strove to give and help every step of the way. She had a cheerful smile for everyone, and spread out her compassion to reach each and every living being.

"She was all kindness and compassion, all holiness. Her entire life was an unbroken, uninterrupted song of praise and service to G-d, the life-giver of the world. Every moment of her life was another stanza, another bar of melody in her song of eternity. But, above all, she watched her tongue, to a most extraordinary degree. Her pure, precious spirit returned to its place of origin on High, as clean and spotless as on the day it descended into the world, but more shining, sparkling and radiant, more grace-filled and pure. "Old age brought her no cause for shame or disgrace. She never saw sin or evil in any man; she never brought pain to any heart. The spirit of G-d and the spirit of human beings were both pleased with her. Never did she grow haughty or raise her eyes in arrogance - not to the slightest extent. The downtrodden and the wretched were the friends she made. Let them always relate her deeds, chart her ways and make her qualities their own. She ever turned to those left forsaken in the corner, embittered in spirit, impoverished by need; and the poor and the needy turned to her for comfort - to that spirit as pure as the very essence of Heaven. To all those who sought and needed her, she did not leave anyone like her in the world."

The servant ran towards her. (24:17)

Rashi explains that Eliezer ran towards Rivkah Imeinu when he saw the water rising towards her. Clearly, this was an outstanding display of the supernatural. Rivkah must have been an impressive young woman to have merited such "reverence." If this is the case, why did Eliezer feel the need to test her to see how she would react when he asked for water for his camels? What greater indication of her suitability for Yitzchak Avinu did he need than seeing nature altered for her? The well-known explanation, attributed to Horav Yechezkel, zl, m'Kozmir, is that a person is judged according to his middos tovos, positive character traits, not his ability to perform miracles. Delving in the supernatural is not an accurate measure of a man, since it says nothing about his middos.

This explains why Eliezer sought a girl who embodied the middah of chesed, kindness. What about emunah, faith, in Hashem? Surely, this must play a critical role in developing one's spiritual character. Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, teaches us a compelling lesson concerning the middah of chesed. Someone who instinctively performs chesed also recognizes when he is the beneficiary of someone else's kindness. Such a person feels a sense of hakoras hatov, gratitude; thus, he will have a desire to repay the kindness that he has received. Eliezer understood that a girl who possesses such a powerful middah of chesed would ostensibly appreciate everything that Hashem does for her and would naturally gravitate to serving the Almighty.

And it was, when the camels finished drinking, that the man took a nose ring whose weight was a beka, and two bracelets for her hands, whose weight was ten measures. (24:22)

The Torah goes to great lengths in describing Eliezer's journey to Aram Naharayim in search of a suitable wife for Yitzchak Avinu. When Eliezer saw the outstanding display of chesed, loving kindness, manifested by Rivkah Imeinu, he realized that she had the refined character traits that were necessary for the next Matriarch of the Jewish Nation. Eliezer gave her gifts, a nose ring and two bracelets. The Torah underscores the weight of these pieces of jewelry, due to their allusion to the half-shekel collected from the

people for the building of the Mishkan, and the ten measures, which allude to the Ten Commandments that were engraved on the two Luchos, Tablets. The Shem MiShmuel explains the significance of these gifts. He cites the Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 6:7 which states that Hashem gave three gifts of middos tovos to Yisrael; they are: baishanim, bashful; rachamanim, merciful; gomlei chassadim, performers of acts of loving kindness. These three qualities are of special importance, because of their corresponding to the three basic aspects of our existence. A human being is comprised of three primary components: the guf, the physical body; nefesh, emotional ingredient; seichel, intellect. It can be posited that all human experience, in one way or another, can be characterized by one or more of those categories. This means that everything in life is either an intellectual, emotional or physical experience. In some experiences, more than one of these categories may come into play.

The three above-mentioned gifts of bashfulness, compassion and performance of acts of kindness correspond directly to the three components of human endeavor. The ability to be bashful is a function of the seichel, intellect. One who lacks intellect, such as a baby, has no bushah, is not ashamed. A baby will walk around without a diaper, without shame. The child has no concept of shame, because it lacks intelligence. This same idea applies to adults whose level of shame and embarrassment coincides with their level of intellect. A person who loses his ability to intellectually cogitate, such as through illness or narcotics, will, likewise, lower his standard of embarrassment. In the spiritual dimension, the more we sense G-d's Presence, the greater will be our sense of modesty and constraint. The feeling of mercy is the consequence of emotion, which corresponds with the nefesh. Last is gomel chesed, carrying out acts of kindness, which clearly is a product of our guf, physical being.

In this light, the Shem MiShmuel establishes a connection between Eliezer's gifts to Rivkah and the gifts with which the Jewish People are endowed.

Apparently, Eliezer saw in Rivkah a unique personality, a tremendous power, a latent potential that defined her as the perfect mate for Yitzchak Avinu, and, hence, the ideal Matriarch of the Jewish People. He alluded to this covert message by means of the gifts that he gave her.

The nose ring is a piece of jewelry that is attached to the head, the repository of the seichel, the intellect. As the head is sort of detached from the rest of the body, indicating a separation between the intellect and the emotional and physical aspects of a person - so, too, the nose ring was separate from the other two gifts.

The set of two bracelets corresponds to the other two human components which work together - the nefesh and the guf. The bracelets were identical, symbolizing a very close relationship between the emotion of mercy and the act of carrying out one's feeling of compassion with acts of kindness. The emotion behind the mercy and the performance of the act are closely linked to one another.

Perhaps we may add that the intellect must also play a role in the emotion/mercy - physical/carrying out act of kindness experience. One must apply his intellect to draw boundaries on his emotion. Otherwise, the mercy will run wild, with a person acting with unreserved compassion to anyone in need - regardless of the circumstances or nature of the individual. To take pity on a cruel person is wrong. Indeed one who misplaces his mercy can similarly misplace his sense of cruelty. One who is good to bad people can end up being bad to good people. Compassion must be tempered with circumspection and limited to situations that warrant such positive emotion. The Shem MiShmuel takes the gift of the two bracelets to the next level.

When one observes another person in trouble, his natural emotion of mercy is aroused and a feeling of pity fills his heart. This is considered a received feeling derived externally, stimulated by an outside experience. The next stage is acting upon the internal feeling of mercy that strives to alleviate the other person's predicament. This may be referred to as a giving encounter, since it begins within the person and flows from his internal mercy to

another person. These two closely related experiences are natural outgrowths of the two hands. The right hand is symbolically viewed as the stronger hand, the hand that motivates and compels mercy for another person. The left hand carries out the act of mercy, actualizing the emotion of mercy flowing to "it" from the right hand.

Eliezer observed Rivkah's behavior in giving him water, then watering the camels. She indicated by her actions that she embodied the fine character traits which exemplify the Jewish People. Who could be more suitable to become the next Matriarch than a young woman who personified the finest qualities of Judaism? The trusted servant indicated his intentions by presenting Rivkah with gifts that underscored her manifestation of the Abrahamitic ideals, thus indicating her suitability to become Avraham's daughter-in-law.

I am the servant of Avraham. (24:34)

Eliezer was entrusted with a mission of the most crucial importance: finding the next Matriarch, the woman who, together with Yitzchak Avinu, would be charged with forming and maintaining the next link in Klal Yisrael. It was no easy task, and, clearly, without Divine manipulation, the success of this mission would not have been realized. Obviously, the selection of Eliezer to execute this mission is indicative of his virtue and sanctity. Avraham Avinu was acutely aware that nothing is achieved without Divine interplay, and Hashem would not interact with a person of base character. Chazal, however, teach us that there was another aspect to Eliezer's personality that played a pivotal role in his success: his wisdom. The Midrash Rabbah states: "It is written, 'The wise servant shall rule over a son who brings shame, and in the midst of brothers divide inheritance.'" This eved maskil, wise servant, is Eliezer. Wherein is Eliezer's wisdom manifest?

The Sefas Emes posits that Eliezer's wisdom was in understanding that the curse which Noah placed on the offspring of Canaan (as a result of his participation with Cham in debasing Noah) had doomed him to a life of servitude. He was a scion of this unholy family lineage. He had before himself two reactions: either rebel, or work with the situation and make every attempt at repairing the damage, perhaps emerging from the muck of his destiny. He understood (as the Midrash indicates) that he could become a slave to pagans, which would permit him to live a base life of indecency and immoral character. He said, "I am better off in the house of Avraham." If he was destined to be a slave, he may as well be a slave to Avraham Avinu, the preeminent spiritual leader of the generation, a man from whom he could learn to better himself.

Eliezer recognized his limitations; thus, by attempting to better himself, he was able to realize his full potential. Therefore, when asked to identify himself, he proudly replied, "I am the servant of Avraham!" As the Mesillas Yescharim says: "A person is obligated to know what his duty is in his (individual) world." One's goal in life must be to perfect himself according to his own level - and not search for areas that are foreign and unsuited to him. This is the reason that Eliezer is considered a wise man.

Judaism asserts that every soul enters this world with its own unique, positive purpose in life. Indeed, the Arizal writes that no two people have the same mission. The light that "Reuven" is meant to shine belongs to him alone, and "Shimon" cannot infringe upon it. It is very much like a biometric fingerprint; each of us has his own. Two people might have similar goals but each one has his own unique approach which is unlike any other.

When one understands his life's purpose and he executes it, he feels a unique sense of vibrancy and excitement, "I am doing my thing!" To know, realize, acknowledge and carry out one's mission in life is the most satisfying and energizing aspect of life. Otherwise, we go through life "doing," and "acting," but true happiness is achieved only when I am "doing my thing," "acting out my purpose."

When one is clear about his personal mission in life, he has no regrets concerning anything else that he should have done - and did not. Even if his mission is quite simple and, perhaps by some measure, boring, it is his and,

through it, he validates his life. This is what Eliezer taught us. I may be a slave, but this is what Hashem wants me to be, so I will be the best! Yet, despite his wisdom, Chazal say that Eliezer had a vested interest in Yitzchak's shidduch, matrimonial match. He had a daughter whom he had hoped would marry Yitzchak. He alluded to this in his conversation with Avraham - just in case Yitzchak did not find his intended in Aram Naharayim, perhaps they would keep it in the "family." Regardless of his own interests, however, Eliezer knew that, without Avraham's z'chus, merit, he would not succeed in finding the suitable mate for Yitzchak. He understood that acting in his own self-interest would be self-defeating for his mission. Therefore, he continually introspected to determine that he was acting in good faith, rejecting any personal bias that might have crept in. Eliezer serves as a lesson for all of us to acknowledge that success is based upon the realization that one is acutely aware that he is Hashem's agent and that he is on a holy mission to execute the command of the Almighty. He must constantly make certain that no personal desires meander into the equation.

We derive from the story of Eliezer and Avraham that even a lowly servant, who was not connected to us by birth, made a monumental contribution to the building of Klal Yisrael. The Midrash refers to Yitzchak Avinu as, ben meivish, "the son who brings shame." This is Yitzchak, for he embarrassed the pagan nations when he offered his life on the altar of the Akeidah; yet, Eliezer ruled over Yitzchak, the son who shamed nations. In what way did Eliezer rule over Yitzchak?

Eliezer was as astute as he was righteous. He understood that Yitzchak and Avraham had distinct approaches to serving Hashem. Yitzchak served Hashem through the Middas HaDin, Attribute of Strict Justice, and through intense Yiraas HaRomemus, fear and awe of Hashem. Thus, Yitzchak is referred to as Pachad Yitzchak, the fear of Yitzchak.

Pachad, fear, extreme justice, are wonderful and sublime attributes, but how many people can really aspire to achieve them? The average person would be blown away if he lived under the intense scrutiny involved in Middas HaDin. Eliezer understood that, while the world needed Middas HaDin, it must be tempered with the middah, attribute, of chesed, kindness, personified by Avraham. Thus, he had to create a partnership of chesed and din in order to balance the relationship. He prayed for a woman who exemplified chesed, so that she could "sweeten" Yitzchak's din, for the ultimate good of their offspring - Klal Yisrael. We now understand the rationale for Eliezer's actions: by combining Yitzchak's din with Rivkah's chesed, Eliezer ruled over Yitzchak, thus meriting a share in Klal Yisrael's future.

In Memory of our beloved parents, grandparents, and great grandparents: Rabbi Justin Hofmann Harav Yekusiel ben Yosef z"l niftar 25 Cheshcan 5770 and Sofie Hofmann Tzipora bas Hachaver Avraham Yosef Simcha Hachohen a"n niftara 13 Kislev 5773 From the Elzas, Greenfeld and Levine families

from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org
reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org
subject: Parsha - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The Kindness of Strangers

In 1966 an eleven-year-old black boy moved with his parents and family to a white neighbourhood in Washington.[1] 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 cream-cheese and jelly 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*. 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 "hessed – 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 hessed: 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."

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 Naharayim, 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 [hessed] to my master." (Gen. 24: 12-14?)

His use of the word hessed 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 Rivka.

It is the theme, also, of the book of Ruth. It is Ruth's kindness to Naomi, and Boaz's to Ruth that Tenakh seeks to emphasize 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.[2] Hessed, what I have defined elsewhere as "love as deed,"[3] is central to the Jewish value system. 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," and it ends with Him caring for the dead: "And He [God] buried [Moses] in the Valley." [4]

Hessed – 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 hevrot, “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 Hanukkah lights, and candles for the Sabbath.[5]

Hessed, said the sages, is in some respects higher even than tzedakah: Our masters taught: loving-kindness [hessed] 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.[6]

Hessed 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. Yohanan was walking out of Jerusalem, R. Joshua followed him. Seeing the Temple in ruins, he cried, “Woe to us that this place is in ruins, the place where atonement was made for Israel’s iniquities.” R. Yohanan 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).[7]

Through hessed, Jews humanised fate as, they believed, God’s hessed humanises the world.

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 hessed 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.”[8]

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

[2] *Bamidbar Rabbah* 8: 4.

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

[4] B. T. Sotah 14a

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

[6] B. T. Sukkah 49b.

[7] *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, 4.

[8] From his poem, ‘Tintern Abbey.’

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st

September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

reply-to: ryfrand@torah.org,

to: ravfrand@torah.org

subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Chayei Sarah

One May Live Many Years Without Having The Days Add Up

A Medrash in this week’s Parsha relates the following story: Rabbi Akiva was once delivering a lesson to his students and noticed that his audience was dozing off. He wanted to wake them up (with a seemingly far-out teaching) and expounded as follows: How was it -- (i.e. in what merit was it) that Esther was able to rule over 127 provinces [Esther 9:30]? It was because she was a direct descendant of the matriarch Sarah, who lived to be 127 years old. The great grand-daughter therefore ruled over 127 provinces!

The Chiddushei HaRim explains the connection. Sarah’s accomplishments in each year of her life were so magnificent that for each year she lived, Esther ruled over one additional province. Carrying this analogy one-step further, we can say that if each year of Sarah’s life brought another province into Esther’s empire, logically, it would follow (since each province contained dozens of cities) that each week of Sarah’s life brought another city into her empire. Likewise, it can be said that what Sarah did each day of her life brought another village to her great granddaughter and what she did each hour brought another neighborhood to her great granddaughter.

This Medrash teaches us what a person can accomplish with each day of his life.

A different Medrash teaches a similar thought. The Medrash (on the pasuk “And Abraham was old, coming in days” [Bereshis 24:1]) teaches that some people reach “old age” and some people reach “many days”. There are people who are “old” but are not “coming in days” and conversely there are people who are not “old” but they are “coming in days”. In the case of Avraham, he was both old (zaken) and coming in days (bah, b’yamim).

The Ostrofer Rebbe comments that a person can live 80 years, but out of those 80 years, how many days did he waste? A person who wastes most of his days may in fact be old but he is not one who has “come in days”. A person could live to a ripe old age but if we add up only the productive days that he lived, he unfortunately may have lived a very short life!

I tell this to my students in Yeshiva. Boys study in Yeshiva for a limited number of years. Students come to the Yeshiva when they are 14 or 15 years old. They think they will be there forever. The typical “Yeshiva career” – even for someone who will learn later in Kollel is not forever. What is it? Five years? Ten years? Twelve years? It is not open ended. It is finite. I encourage them to make the most of their time. If one is going to spend ten years in Yeshiva, maybe not every single day can be productive, but at least 80% of the days should be days when we accomplish something towards the goal we set out for ourselves to accomplish in this limited period.

This applies to all of us. Man’s life is but 70 years in length [Tehillim 90:10], but how many days do we REALLY live? This is what the Medrash means. There can be people who are old but have not “piled up” many days of accomplishment.

In Europe, there was a rather common custom that when a noteworthy person was ill, others might “donate” years of their life for the merit of his recovery. Communities actually would hold appeals – not for money but appeals which asked people to “donate years from their life” to the life of the person who now appeared to be on the verge of death.

There was a young single fellow who was very sick in the Yeshiva of Radin. The Yeshiva made an appeal among the other students that they should donate years of their life to this young man who was deathly ill. Different

students pledged various numbers of years to the student. The Chofetz Chaim was asked how many of his years he was willing to donate to the cause. He thought awhile and responded that he would "donate a minute". The Chofetz Chaim knew what a minute could do. He knew what he could accomplish with a minute of his own life. He felt he could not give up a year of his life based on the principle of charitable distribution: "The poor of your own city take precedence" (aniyay ircha kodmin).

I recently saw that the Chofetz Chaim did not wear shoes with laces. He made the calculation that it would take him approximately one minute a day to tie his shoes. In a year, that would come out to 360 minutes – 6 hours! In the course of a lifetime that would be 420 hours. The thought of wasting 420 hours of his life tying his shoes, prompted him to wear shoes without laces. He was not willing to give up 420 hours of his life on a "non-productive" activity. He had an appreciation of what one can do with a small amount of time.

That is why – among all his other accomplishments – he was such a prolific writer. The Mishna Berurah (written just over 100 years ago) is quoted countless times throughout Klal Yisrael every single day. Add to that the Sefer Shmiras HaLashon and all the other Seforim that the Chofetz Chaim wrote. He was a Rosh Yeshiva, he had children, he spoke for communities. When did the man do it all? The answer is that when one calculates how many minutes one would be "wasting" tying one's shoes, one finds time in the day to accomplish a lot more than the average person does.

What Remains Is Not My Teacher's Torah, It Is How He Acted

The story of Eliezer finding a shidduch [marriage partner] for Yitzchak is one of the longest narratives in the entire Torah. Rashi cites a Rabbinic teaching: Despite the fact the Torah is normally very 'stingy' in its language and we often derive new laws from just the inclusion of an extra letter vov in a pasuk, here the Torah elaborates in great, repetitious, detail the events surrounding Eliezer's mission because "the conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs is dearer even than the Torah of the children." In other words, we can learn more about the manners and personalities of the founders of our religion – the "Avos" – by contemplating the actions and conversational nuance of their servants than we can even from delving into the Torah of their descendants.

Rav Aharon Kotler, zt"l, once commented about this teaching of Chazal: "Torah may be expounded, but personality traits must be learned". (Torah ken mir darshenen, ober midos tovos daf men oys lernen.) It is much more difficult to inculcate someone with proper behavior (middos tovos) than it is to teach them a piece of Talmud.

The reason the Torah goes to such lengths describing this narrative is because Eliezer was a reflection of Avraham Avinu. When we want to know what proper behavior and integrity is -- this is our paradigm. This is what the Book of Bereishis is all about! It is called the Book of the Upright (Sefer haYashar) because it teaches us the ways of the upright (Yashrus).

Many Gedolei Yisrael [great men of Israel] are such geniuses that we can never aspire to their level of Torah study. We have neither the talents nor the perseverance to reach their level of intellectual accomplishment and mastery of Torah knowledge. But something we can aspire to is to try to learn from their "menshlichkeit" and their "midos" [their pristinely ethical personalities].

I would venture to say that for most people who learned in Yeshivos and who we re exposed to great Torah personalities, they do not remember so much of the "Torah" of their teachers but they certainly remember how their teachers acted. That is what remains. What remains is not the "Torah"; what remains is "how my Rebbe used to act".

Someone recently told me that Rav Pam, zt"l, was walking down the street and an obviously non-religious person came over to him. The person recognized Rav Pam but Rav Pam did not recognize him. He told Rav Pam, "You were my Rebbe in fifth grade."

The fellow is today not observant. He told Rav Pam "Do you know what I remember about you? When I was in fifth grade, I was taking a test and you caught me cheating." Anyone who knew Rav Pam knows that cheating and falsehood were an anathema to him. The student went on, "Do you know what you told me? You told me 'If you need any help, I can help you.'" This fellow probably does not remember even one interpretation or insight that Rav Pam ever said, but that is how he remembered him. He remembered that Rav Pam told him "I can help you."

This past Shabbos, I happened to be at a retreat and I was sitting at the Shabbos table together with Rav Dovid Feinstein. Another Rabbi brought over a fellow (who again was not religious) and introduced him to Rav Dovid Feinstein. While he was talking with Rav Dovid I asked the Rabbi who brought him over, who the fellow was. He told me that he used to live on the Lower East Side in the same neighborhood as the Feinstein family. I asked him, "Does this guy remember anything about Rav Moshe Feinstein?" He told me, "Yes. He remembers one thing about Rav Moshe Feinstein. When they used to play hop scotch on the street of the Lower East Side and Rav Moshe would walk down the street, Rav Moshe would wait until the kids finished hopping before he would walk through."

This made a tremendous impression on him. Forty or fifty years later, he still remembers the hop scotch that Rav Moshe refused to interrupt. Picture the scene: Rav Moshe Feinstein, the Posek of the Jewish people, the Gadol Hador, waiting on the street for these kids to finish jumping before he continues walking to his apartment building.

This is what people remember. This is the idea that "superior is the casual conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs to the intensive Torah study of their children." That is why the Torah spends so many pasukim retelling the story because "Torah can be expounded, but good manners have to be learned."

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com>
to: Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com>
subject: [Rav Kook List]
mailing list: rav-kook-list.googlegroups.com

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Chayei Sarah : The Torah of the Patriarchs

Chayei Sarah: The Torah of the Patriarchs

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

Due to this textual anomaly, the Sages made a bold claim: "The conversation of the Patriarch's servants is superior to the Torah of their descendants" (Breishit Rabbah 60). What does this mean? Is their everyday discourse really more important than the Torah and its laws?

The Lofty Torah of the Patriarchs

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

A conversation is natural, unaffected speech. The Torah of the Avot was like a conversation, flowing naturally from the inner sanctity of their goals and aspirations. Holy ideals permeated the day-to-day lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to such a degree that these ideals were manifest even in the everyday discourse of their servants. The Torah of their descendants, on the other hand, lacks this natural spontaneity. It is a thought-out religion based on willed-holiness, a compendium of detailed rules and regulations calculated to govern all aspects of life. This is especially true for the development of Torah law during the long years of exile, when Torah was limited to governing the religious life of the individual.
Torah of Redemption

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

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

"[God] remembers the Patriarchs' acts of kindness, and lovingly brings the redeemer to their descendants." It is the "Patriarchs' acts of kindness" and their vibrant, natural Torah that will redeem their descendants in the final generation. The Messianic light will shine forth, and out of the darkness of heresy and denial, a supernal light will emanate from the lofty Torah of the Avot, a Torah of authenticity and greatness which will redeem the generation.

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

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

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

from: Yeshiva.org.il <subscribe@yeshiva.org.il>

reply-to: subscribe@yeshiva.org.il

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Fasting and Feasting on a Yahrzeit

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In memory of Sarah Imeinu, I bring you:

Question #1: "My father's *yahrzeit* falls during the week of *sheva brachos* for my grandson. May I attend the *sheva brachos*?"

Question #2: "My *yahrzeit* falls on *Shabbos* this year. Do I fast on Friday or Sunday instead?"

Question #3: "I usually fast on my father's *yahrzeit*, but someone is honoring me with *sandaka*'us on that day. Do I fast, and do I need to be *matir neder* in the event that it is permitted to eat?"

Answer:

We are all aware that one commemorates a *yahrzeit* by kindling a 24-hour candle, by visiting the gravesite (if possible), and that men recite *kaddish* and lead the services in *shul*. The questions asked above center on observances that were at one time very common on a *yahrzeit*, but have fallen into disuse. Specifically, they refer to the practices of commemorating a *yahrzeit* by fasting from morning until nightfall and by refraining from celebrating weddings and similar *smachos*.

The earliest source I discovered that records the custom of fasting on one's *yahrzeit* is the *Sefer Chassidim* (#231, 232). He bases himself on the fast that, throughout Jewish history, people have fasted upon the passing of a great individual. For example, we find that *Dovid Hamelech* fasted upon hearing that Shaul fell in battle, and also when he heard of Avner's assassination (*Shmuel II*, 1, 12; 3:35). Similarly, the *Yerushalmi* (*Moed Katan* 3:7) reports that Rabbi Avahu fasted on the day that he saw a *talmid chacham* die, and that when Rabbi Yonah heard of the passing of the son of Rabbi Eliezer, he fasted the rest of the day. The *Shulchan Aruch* records these practices in *Yoreh Deah* 378:4.

Although these sources reflect fasting only on the actual day of the death only, the *Sefer Chassidim* cites Scriptural basis that there is *halachic* reason to be sad when the date of a sad event recurs in a future year. We see from the *Rishonim* and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 568:1, 7) that fasting on a *yahrzeit* became a widely practiced custom. The words of the *Rama* are: *It is a mitzvah to fast on the day that his father or mother died* (*Yoreh Deah* 376:5; 402:12), meaning that although not technically required, it is a strongly recommended practice.

What is the reason for fasting on a *yahrzeit*?

The *Sefer Chassidim* presents two reasons for fasting on a parent's *yahrzeit*:

(1) As a sign of respect. An extension of this idea is that fasting on the *yahrzeit* provides atonement (*kapparah*) for the parent (*Shu't Mahari Mintz* #9 at e; *Shu't Chasam Sofer*, *Orach Chayim* 161).

(2) The *Sefer Chassidim* explains that a person's soul is linked to that of his parents and that the son, himself, suffers on this day.

Later authorities explain that on the *yahrzeit* day, the child's *mazel* is not good, and that he should fast as a protection against danger (*Shu't Mahari Mintz* #9 at end; *Shu't Maharshah* #9; *Levush* 402:12; *Shach* 402:10).

Some later authorities understand that these reasons are not complementary, but are conflicting reasons for the fast, and that there are resultant differences in *halachah*

(*Shu't Chasam Sofer*, *Orach Chayim* 161). For example, if the reason is to protect oneself because one's *mazel* is not good, one need fast only if he is concerned about this problem. One who is unconcerned does not need to fast (*Shu't Chasam Sofer*, *Orach Chayim* 161).

Fasting on the *yahrzeit* of one's *rebbe muvhak*

Here is another situation in which the decision as to whether to fast or not is dependent upon the reason for the fast. The *Mishnah Berurah* (568:46), quoting the *Shlah Hakadosh*, says that one should fast also on the *yahrzeit* of one's *rebbe muvhak*, the person from whom he learned most of the Torah that he knows. The *Shlah* explains that one fasts on this day because he owes more honor to his *rebbe muvhak* than to his parent, as is expressed in several places in *halachah*. However, this reason requires one to fast only if we assume that fasting on a *yahrzeit* is because of honor or as a *kapparah* for the departed. If the observance is to protect the one fasting, the requirement to show respect to one's teacher does not affect his *mazel*, and there is no reason for a disciple to fast on the *yahrzeit* of his *rebbe* (*Elyah Rabbah*, *Orach Chayim* 288:18 and 568:15).

Celebrations on a *yahrzeit*

The *Rama* also cites a law that prohibits eating at a celebration on the evening of one's *yahrzeit* (*Darkei Moshe*, *Yoreh Deah* 391:3, quoting *Maharyo*; notes to *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah*, end of Chapter 391 and end of Chapter 402). The assumption is that the *Rama* specifically forbids celebrating on the eve of the *yahrzeit*, because the commemorator was presumably fasting on the day of the *yahrzeit* itself.

The *Levush* (391) disagrees that there is a prohibition to eat at a *simcha* on one's *yahrzeit*, noting that he never saw such a custom. The *Shach* retorts that since this is a relatively infrequent occurrence, the fact that the *Levush* never saw this practice does not demonstrate that such a prohibition does not exist.

Other authorities quote, in the name of the *Ari*, that the prohibition against eating at a wedding applies only on the first *yahrzeit*, not in later years. However, both the *Shach* (391:8 and 395:3) and the *Taz* (395:3) agree with the *Rama*'s view that this prohibition exists at later *yahrzeits*, as well.

What types of celebrations are prohibited?

The prohibition includes eating at weddings, *sheva brachos* and other celebrations where music usually accompanies the occasion; but one is permitted to participate in a *seudah* celebrating a *bris milah*, *pidyon haben* or *siyum mesechta* (*Pischei Teshuvah*, *Yoreh Deah* 391:8, quoting *Shu't Makom Shemuel* #80; see also *Elyah Rabbah*, *Orach Chayim* 288:18). However, the *Chachmas Adam* (171:11) has a compromise position, prohibiting eating at a *bris milah seudah*, yet permitting eating at a *siyum*.

What type of participation is prohibited?

The *Rama* discusses this proscription in three different places, and in all three places he records simply that it is forbidden to eat at the celebration, and not that there is a prohibition to attend, if one does not eat. This is different from the laws that a mourner must observe, which forbid him from attending a *simcha*. Thus, it appears that the reason for these *yahrzeit* observances is not because there is a requirement to mourn, but for other reasons, which I will explain shortly.

It is interesting to note that the *Rama* prohibits eating at a *simcha* on the *yahrzeit*, whereas his description of the daytime fast implies that although it is a recommended observance, it is not required. The presumed explanation for the different status is that since everyone is physically able to refrain from attending or participating in a celebration, this custom was accepted by *Klal Yisroel*, whereas fasting, which depends on an individual's health and stamina, was never accepted as a requirement, but only as a recommendation.

How strict is this fast?

We see from several authorities that observing the fast on a *yahrzeit* was viewed very seriously. For example, the *Taz* (568:5) treats the fast on a *yahrzeit* more strictly than the fasts that were, traditionally, universally observed on *Behab*, the first Monday, Thursday and Monday following *Rosh Chodesh* Cheshvan and *Rosh Chodesh* Iyar. The *Hagahos Maimoniyos* and the *Rama* rule that one who attends a *bris seudah* on *Behab* is not required to fast, even though the entire community is, otherwise, expected to fast. The *Taz* rules that someone making a *bris* on the day that he has *yahrzeit* does not fast, but that someone attending this *bris* who has a *yahrzeit* on that day should fast. Thus, he treats the *yahrzeit* fast stricter than the fast of *Behab*.

The *Pri Megadim* (*Orach Chayim*, *Mishbetzos Zahav* 444:9) notes that, based on the comments of the *Taz*, the fast observed on a *yahrzeit* is stricter than that which the firstborn observe on *Erev Pesach*, which we customarily set aside after attending a *siyum*, *bris* or other *seudas mitzvah*. However, someone fasting because of a *yahrzeit* should not break his fast to join a *siyum*, *bris* or other *seudas mitzvah*.

Furthermore, the *Pri Megadim* (*Mishbetzos Zahav* 568:5) rules that the *yahrzeit* fast is stricter than the fast of *Tisha B'av nidcheh*, that is, when the Ninth of Av falls on *Shabbos* and is postponed to Sunday. In the event of a *bris*, the *Tur* and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 559:9) rule that the parents of the baby, the *mohel*, and the *sandak daven Mincha* as early as one can, make *havdalah* and then eat in honor of the

fact that this day is a *Yom Tov* for them. However, the *Pri Megadim* rules that only the father has this leniency on his *yahrzeit*, but should someone be honored with being *sandek* or *mohel* on their *yahrzeit*, they are required to observe the fast that they would usually keep. The *Pri Megadim* suggests that someone who is the only *mohel* in town can consider this his personal *Yom Tov* and eat, although he is inconclusive about it.

Accept the day before

Several distinctions result from the fact that fasting on a *yahrzeit* is recommended and not required. Whenever someone decides in advance to keep a fast that *halachah* does not require, he must accept the fast during *Mincha* of the day before. This “acceptance” is usually done at the conclusion of the *Elokai Netzor* requests by using a standard text that is printed in many *siddurim*. Therefore, since fasting on a *yahrzeit* is not required, the individual must accept it from the day before.

However, someone who usually fasts on his parent’s *yahrzeit* is required to fast that day whether or not he remembered to accept the fast at *Mincha* the day before, unless he specified in the first year that he does not intend to fast every year (*Chachmas Adam* 171:11). Should he decide one year that he does not want to fast, he must perform *hataras nedarim* to release himself from the custom he has accepted. We will soon discuss what someone should do if his *yahrzeit* falls on *Shabbos*.

The authorities dispute whether someone who took ill on his *yahrzeit* requires *hataras nedarim* before he breaks his fast. The *Mishnah Berurah* (581:19) notes that the *Magen Avraham* (581:12) does not require *hataras*, explaining that we can assume that he never accepted that he would fast on *yahrzeits* when ill. However, the *Shach* (*Yoreh Deah*, 214:2) rules that he is required to perform *hataras nedarim* as does the *Chachmas Adam* (171:11).

Why not feast?

Although I did not find any authorities who explain why one may not eat at a celebration on a *yahrzeit*, it would seem that it is considered disrespectful to one’s parent to celebrate on the *yahrzeit*. Alternatively, since one’s *mazel* is not good on the day of one’s parent’s *yahrzeit*, it is inappropriate to join a celebration that day.

Reciting Aneinu

Someone who fasts on his *yahrzeit* should recite *Aneinu* in his private *Shemoneh Esrei*, but not in the repetition of *Shemoneh Esrei*, unless coincidentally there is a *minyán* of people fasting.

When does one not fast?

Notwithstanding the importance attached to the fast on a *yahrzeit*, there are many days that *halachah* prohibits fasting, because this would desecrate the sanctity of the day. For example, the *Levush* says that one should not fast if one’s *yahrzeit* falls on a day that we omit *tachanun*. As we will soon see, there is a dispute among authorities whether one should fast in this instance on the day or two before or after the *yahrzeit* (assuming that this is a day when it is permitted to fast), or whether once one cannot fast on the day of the *yahrzeit* itself, there is no reason to fast at all.

What happens if the *yahrzeit* falls on *Shabbos*?

When a *yahrzeit* falls on *Shabbos*, the *Maharik* rules that one should fast on a different day instead. The *Shulchan Aruch* (568:9) follows this approach and rules that one should fast on Sunday; and if the *yahrzeit* falls on *Rosh Chodesh*, that one should fast on the second of the month. When the second of the month falls on *Shabbos*, some authorities contend that one should fast on Sunday, the third of the month (*Kaf Hachayim* 568:93, 96, quoting *Shlah* and *Elyah Rabbah* 568:15).

Others follow the approach of the *Maharik*, but disagree with the *Shulchan Aruch*’s decision to postpone the fast, contending, instead, that the fast must be **before** the *yahrzeit*. They contend that the fast should be on *Erev Shabbos* or *Erev Rosh Chodesh* (*Kaf Hachayim* 568:94, quoting *Kavod Chachamim* and *Pnei Aharon*).

On the other hand, other authorities (*Shu’t Maharshal* #9) dispute the *Maharik*’s conclusion, ruling that when a *yahrzeit* falls on a day that one cannot fast, the custom is not to fast at all. The *Rama* follows this ruling. Some *Sefardic poskim* also follow this ruling, unlike the conclusion of the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Kaf Hachayim* 568:94, quoting *Leket Hakemach*.)

The authorities dispute whether one whose *yahrzeit* falls either on *Rosh Chodesh Nisan* or on *Rosh Chodesh Av* should fast on those days, even though they are days when we recite *Musaf* and do not say *tachanun* (*Kaf Hachayim* 568:97). The reason that these two days are exceptions is because they are mentioned as days when it is permitted to fast. The *Chachmas Adam* (171:11), however, rules that the accepted custom is to refrain from fasting on any *Rosh Chodesh*, and this is the prevalent practice among *Ashkenazim*.

If the fast falls on Friday, the *Maharshal* rules that if it is the first year, he should not complete the day’s fast, so that he does not end up fasting on *Shabbos*. However, if he already fasted in a previous year, he must complete the fast, since this has already become his practice.

Those who do not fast

In the last centuries, we find many sources that do not encourage fasting when it might cause someone to study Torah with less diligence. Instead, one should dedicate all his strength to the study of Torah on the *yahrzeit*. For this reason, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his *tzavaah*, instructed his descendants to study Torah assiduously on his *yahrzeit* and not fast, and this is recorded to have been the practice of the *Chasam Sofer*, the *Kesav Sofer*, the *Chazon Ish* and the *Steipler*. Rabbi Akiva Eiger instructed his descendants not to sleep at all on his *yahrzeit*, but to study Torah through the night.

I have seen it recorded that the *Chasam Sofer* made a *siyum* on his *yahrzeit*, but served a *milchig* meal, so that it not appear that he was observing a celebration on the day. This also accomplished the *seudas mitzvah*’s preempting the requirement to fast (according to those who ruled this way, see above), and fulfilled *chesed* by providing a meal to the poor.

In most Chassidic circles, a practice developed of performing *chesed* on a *yahrzeit* – specifically to make sure that the poor people in town had a proper meal on the day of the *yahrzeit*. The *brochos* recited thereby created a *tikun* for the departed soul, and therefore, this practice became known as *tikun*. This developed into a custom of serving schnapps and *mezonos* on the *yahrzeit*.

With time, some had concerns about this practice, particularly the *kashrus* of the foods and beverages served. Rav Avraham Meir Israel, a *rosh yeshiva* in *Yeshivas Chasan Sofer* in Brooklyn, wrote to Dayan Yitzchak Weiss, saying that he would like to stop the custom of *tikun* that had developed, primarily because of concern that the whiskey was often *chometz she’avar alav hapesach*; that is, it had been owned by Jewish storekeepers, distributors or manufacturers on Pesach and had not been sold, thus rendering it prohibited. In his response, Dayan Weiss agrees with Rabbi Israel’s concerns, particularly since this custom of *tikun* has extremely weak *halachic* foundations. Nevertheless, Dayan Weiss quotes numerous Chassidic sources that support this custom. In conclusion, he feels that one should not change the custom where it is practiced. However, where there are *kashrus* concerns, he suggests providing very detailed instructions as to where one may purchase the products being served. (This author is aware that many *kashrus* concerns have been raised recently on liquor. We will need to leave that topic for a different time.)

The *Sedei Chemed* (Volume 5 page 241 #40) voices strong opposition to the *minhag* of *tikun* for a different reason: that people celebrate the *tikun* in the *shul* or *Beis Medrash*, and it is prohibited to eat or drink in *shul*, except for *talmidei chachamim* who are permitted to eat in a *Beis Medrash* while they are in the middle of their studying. This problem can be avoided by celebrating the *tikun* in a room adjacent to the *shul* that is not used regularly for prayer. In a later edition, included now in the current editions of *Sedei Chemed* (Volume 5, page 335 #4), he quotes subsequent correspondence from the Brezhaner Rav, Rav Shalom Mordechai Schvadron (the grandfather of the late Rav Shalom Schvadron, the *magid* of *Yerushalayim*), who wrote him that it is permitted to conduct any *seudas mitzvah* in a *shul*, and therefore it is permitted to have *tikun* there. The *Sedei Chemed* further quotes the Spinker Rebbe, who wrote him that all the *admorim* conduct their *tishin* in the *Beis Medrash* on the basis that our *shullen* are built with the understanding that these activities may and will be conducted there.

Conclusion

However one observes a *yahrzeit*, one should always remember that the day be used for reflection, introspection and *teshuvah*. Ultimately, this is the best tool to use, both as a *tikun neshamah* for the departed and as a protection for the person commemorating the *yahrzeit*.