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ON CHAYEI SARAH - 5778

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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

CHAYEI SARAH

Avraham and Sarah have a loyal and devoted trustworthy servant named Eliezer. His abilities and nobility of character enable him to be entrusted with the most personal and sensitive of assignments and missions. His name has been used by Jewish families for thousands of years as an honorable name for their sons.

In fact, our great teacher Moshe named his younger son Eliezer as a remembrance of God's saving him from the vengeance of Pharaoh. Yet this original Eliezer who occupies such a significant role in this week's Torah reading somehow disappears into the mist of history.

What was the future of this great disciple of Avraham? What of his family and progeny? Is he part of our continuing story or is he like Lot and Lavan, side characters who eventually depart the scene of Jewish eternity?

Neither Torah nor tradition informs us as to these matters. Eliezer's end like his beginning remains a complete mystery to us. But his name is preserved in the Jewish world regularly and eternally and that is no small matter of importance.

It is interesting to note that this is the way of the Torah regarding many great personalities in Jewish history who are mentioned in Scripture but remain basically unknown. Their names are remembered and referenced throughout the generations but their lives and experiences remain hidden to us. To a certain extent they are like the "unknown soldier," the one who sacrifices all for the cause but whose own story remains a mystery to later generations.

In a comment to a later narrative that appears in the Torah, Ramban points out that God, so speak, uses unknown or "ordinary" people to propel forward great historical and spiritual processes. Eliezer is no ordinary person but his personal story, whatever it truly was, is not essential to the message of continuity of the generations that created the Jewish people.

He, like all humans, had a purpose and mission in life. He was to further and spread the faith and ideas of Abraham in a disinterested pagan world. He did

his part by loyally fulfilling the instructions of Abraham in finding the proper mate for Isaac. He may not have realized how eternally important that mission and task really was, but the Torah devotes much space and detail to the matter, proving its importance.

He accomplished the goal set before him by history and circumstance. His name was and is preserved throughout all later Jewish generations though his personal biography itself remains shrouded in silence and secrecy. The Torah, like life itself, is often enigmatic, concentrating on the forest and not dwelling on the individual trees. Appreciating this basic fact will go a long way in allowing us to have a proper understanding of Torah and its message to us in all times and ages.

The Torah, which is very detailed at times, nevertheless presents us with the broad and timeless view of people and events. We should always remember this for we are all participants in the drama of the Jewish people and its wondrous story.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
The World's Oldest Man (Chayei Sarah 5778)
Covenant & Conversation

On 11 August 2017, the world's oldest man passed away, just a month short of his 114th birthday – making him one of the ten longest-lived men since modern record-keeping began. If you knew nothing else about him than this, you would be justified in thinking that he had led a peaceful life, spared of fear, grief and danger.

The actual truth is the opposite. The man in question was Yisrael Kristal, Holocaust survivor. Born in Poland in 1903, he survived four years in the Lodz ghetto, and was then transported to Auschwitz. In the ghetto, his two children died. In Auschwitz, his wife was killed. When Auschwitz was liberated, he was a walking skeleton weighing a mere 37 kilos. He was the only member of his family to survive.

He was raised as a religious Jew and stayed so all his life. When the war was over and his entire world destroyed, he married again, this time to another Holocaust survivor. They had children. They made aliyah to Haifa. There he began again in the confectionery business, as he had done in Poland before the war. He made sweets and chocolate. He became an innovator. If you have ever had Israeli orange peel covered in chocolate, or liqueur chocolates shaped like little bottles and covered with silver foil, you are enjoying one of the products he originated. Those who knew him said he was a man with no bitterness in his soul. He wanted people to taste sweetness.

In 2016, at the age of 113, he finally celebrated his bar mitzvah. A hundred years earlier, this had proved impossible. By then, his mother was dead and his father was fighting in the First World War. With an almost poetic sense of fittingness, Yisrael died on erev Shabbat Ekev, the parsha that includes the second paragraph of the Shema with its commands to wear tefillin and teach Torah to your children, "so that you and your children may live long in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors."

Yisrael Kristal faithfully did both. On his bar mitzvah he joked that he was the world's oldest tefillin-wearer. He gathered his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren under his tallit and said, "Here's one person, and look how many people he brought to life. As we're all standing here under my tallit, I'm thinking: six million people. Imagine the world they could have built." This was an extraordinary man.

His life sheds light on one of the most tantalising verses in the Torah. Describing the death of Abraham, our parsha says that he "breathed his last and died in good old age, old and satisfied" (Gen. 25:8). His is the most

serene death in the Torah. Yet consider his life, fraught as it was with trial after trial.

To pursue the call of God, he had to say goodbye to his land, his birthplace and his father's house and travel to an unknown destination. Twice, famine forced him into exile, where his life was in danger. Promised countless children – as many as the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky – he remained childless until old age. Then God told him to send away his son by Sarah's handmaid Hagar. And if that trial were not heartbreaking enough, God then told him to sacrifice his only son with Sarah, Isaac, the one whom God had told him would be his spiritual heir and bearer of the covenant into the future.

Seven times promised a land, when Sarah died, he owned not a single square inch of territory in which to bury her, and had to entreat the Hittites to let him buy a field and burial cave. This was a life of disappointed hopes and delayed fulfillments. What kind of man was this that the Torah can say that he died “in good old age, old and satisfied”?

I learned the answer to this question through a series of life-changing encounters with Holocaust survivors. They were among the strongest, most life-affirming people I have ever met. For years I wondered how they were able to survive at all, having seen what they saw and known what they knew. They had lived through the deepest darkness ever to have descended on a civilisation.

Eventually I realised what they had done. Almost without exception, when the war was over, they focused with single-minded intensity on the future. Strangers in a strange land, they built homes and careers, married and had children and brought new life into the world.

Often they did not talk about their experiences during the Shoah, even to their spouses, their children and their closest friends. This silence lasted, in many cases, for as long as fifty years. Only then, when the future they had built was secure, did they allow themselves to look back and bear witness to what they had suffered and seen. Some of them wrote books. Many of them went around schools, telling their story so that the Holocaust could not be denied.[1] First they built a future. Only then did they allow themselves to remember the past.

That is what Abraham did in this week's parsha. He had received three promises from God: children, a land, and the assurance that he would be the father, not of one nation but of many nations (Gen. 17:4-5). At the age of 137, he had one unmarried son, no land, and had fathered no nations. He uttered not a single word of complaint. It seems that he realised that God wanted him to act, not to wait for God to do the work for him.

So, when Sarah died, he bought the first plot in what would become the Holy Land, the field and cave of Machpelah. Then he instructed his servant to find a wife for Isaac, his son, so that he might live to see the first Jewish grandchildren. Lastly, in his old age, he married again and had six sons, who would eventually become progenitors of many nations. He did not, except briefly, sit and mourn the past. Instead he took the first steps toward building the future.

That, in his own way, is what Yisrael Kristal did – and that is how a survivor of Auschwitz lived to become the world's oldest man. He too died “in good old age, old and satisfied.”

That is what the Jewish people did collectively when, a mere three years after standing eyeball-to-eyeball with the angel of death at Auschwitz, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the Jewish State in our people's ancient homeland, the land of Israel. Had world Jewry sat passively and wept from then till now for the murdered generations of European Jewry, it would have been an understandable reaction. But it did not. It was as if the Jewish people had said collectively, in the words of King David, “I will not die but live” (Ps. 118:17), thereby giving testimony to the God of life. That is why the West's oldest nation is still young, a world leader in life-saving medicine, disaster relief, and life-enhancing technology.

This is a transformative idea. To survive tragedy and trauma, first build the future. Only then, remember the past.

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Rabbi Yissochar Frand

"They Were All Equally Good"

The parsha begins with the pasuk, “Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah's life.” [Bereshis 23:1].

Rashi comments on the strange construction of this pasuk, and in particular on the seemingly redundant phrase, “the years of Sarah's life” at the end of the pasuk. Rashi explains, “They were all equal for goodness.” In other words, she lived a life that was good from beginning to end.

Let us ask ourselves, what is the meaning of the statement that all her years were equally good? Sarah was childless for ninety years. In addition, the Medrash calculates that her cousins all gave birth when they were eight years old. It must have been very painful for Sarah to desire children and not be able to conceive for all those years — the bulk of her life.

Furthermore, she brought Hagar into her home as a co-wife. In Hebrew, a co-wife is called a “tzarah” (which also means trouble) because that is what it is! The tension between co-wives is much stronger than that of sibling rivalry. Ultimately, the situation with Yishmael became intolerable. She sees Yishmael trying to influence Yitzchak towards foreign cultures. She experiences a touch of tzaar gidul banim [the pain of raising children]. On top of all that, she partnered with Avraham in many of his nisyonos [trials]. She accompanied him on the journey away from her birthplace and homeland. She followed him down to Egypt and was kidnapped there into Pharaoh's palace. Later she had a similar traumatic experience with Avimelech.

Where does the realization of “they were all equal for goodness” come into play? Perhaps the final years of her life were tranquil, but overall she had a very bitter and traumatic life. What is Rashi talking about?

I heard a beautiful Torah insight on this question from the current Tolner Rebbe of Jerusalem. He cites a Medrash in Parshas Emor. The Torah says “And you shall take for yourselves the fruit of a beautiful tree (pri etz hadar)...” [Vayikra 23:40]. The Medrash says the word hadar [beautiful] refers to Sarah as it says “and Avraham and Sarah were elderly” [Bereshis 18:11] for HaKadosh Baruch Hu made her beautiful with elderly beauty (seivah tova).

The Maharzu, a commentary on the Medrash, notes that this pasuk in Vayera seems to be a very inappropriate link to the pasuk regarding the Esrog. After all, the entirety of the pasuk reads, “Now Avraham and Sarah were old, well on in years; the course of women had ceased to be with Sarah.” Out of all the pesukim in the Torah, why is this pasuk used to marshal proof that Sarah was beautiful, comparable to a lovely Esrog? This pasuk itself alludes to the fact that Sarah had a very tough life. (She had already gone through natural menopause while she was still childless.) Furthermore, how is Sarah like an Esrog?

The Tolner Rebbe offers the following insight, based on a teaching of the former Slonimer Rebbe.

The Talmud [Brochos 54a] teaches that just as it is appropriate to make a blessing over good happenings, so too it is appropriate to make a blessing over bad happenings. This is one of the most difficult things in life — accepting the bad along with the good. Not only must we accept bad happenings, we must actually be prepared to recite a blessing over them. This is a very hard spiritual level to reach — to accept the good and accept the bad and make a bracha over both!

The source of this idea that we must make blessings over both the good and bad is from a combination of pesukim in Tehillim: “How can I repay

Hashem for all His kindness to me? I will raise the cup of salvations and the Name of Hashem I will invoke.” [Tehillim 116:12] and, just a few pesukim earlier, “The pains of death encircled me; the confines of the grave have found me; trouble and sorrow I would find. Then I would invoke the Name of Hashem...” [Tehillim 116:2-3] We see from this that Shem Hashem Ekra [we must invoke the Name of G-d] whether we are raising the cup of salvation or finding trouble and sorrow.

However, the Tolner Rebbe says — quoting the former Slonimer Rebbe — we can observe something interesting when we read this chapter in Tehillim. The pasuk regarding raising the cup of salvation and invoking the Name of Hashem is all one pasuk. When a person has witnessed salvation, he must immediately make a l’Chaim! However, the pasuk regarding bad occurrences in life ends with the words “troubles and sorrow I will find.” The words “And I will invoke the Name of Hashem” do not appear until the next pasuk. This implies that there is not total equality between the requirement to bless G-d for the good and the requirement to bless Him for the bad. When good occurs, it is easy to say “Baruch Hashem”; when times are bad, indeed we must try to say “Baruch Hashem”, but it is not in the same pasuk, because that is a very difficult thing to demand from a person. However, there are people who reach such a spiritual level that even in the troubles that befall them, they see the Hand of G-d and they see the good therein. In Chapter 11, Yeshaya speaks of the coming of Mashiach (“A staff will emerge from the stump of Yishai and a shoot will sprout from his roots...” At the beginning of the very next chapter (Chapter 12, the shortest chapter in all of Yeshaya — only 6 pasukim), the pasuk says, “You will say on that day, ‘I thank You, Hashem, for You were angry with me...’” To what does “on that day” refer? It refers to the time after the coming of Moshiach. The redemption will finally arrive and we will look back on 2000 years of exile and persecution, from the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash to the Spanish Inquisition, to the decrees of 5408 and 5409, to Chmielnicki to the pogroms in Europe, to the Cossacks, and to the Holocaust. Klal Yisrael will look back and will be able to say on that day — after the arrival of the Moshiach — “I thank you, Hashem, for you were angry with me.” Such a spiritual level is possible. Somehow, even within the tzara [trouble] one sees the tova [good].

The Slonimer Rebbe says that now we understand why the Medrash compares Sarah to the Pri Etz Hadar (Esrog). Sarah had a life “that was all equally good.” This means that despite the fact that she was barren for 90 years, despite the fact that she had aggravation with Hagar and Yishmael, despite her experiences in Egypt (with Pharaoh) and in Gerar (with Avimelech), etc., etc., despite all this, in her mind, they were all equally good years. She had such a high spiritual level of faith (Emunah and Bitachon) that in her mind, they were kulan shavim l’tova.

The Yalkut Shimoni says that the pasuk in Mishlei [31:10], “A woman of valor who can find? Far beyond pearls is her value,” is the eulogy Avraham gave for Sarah. What did Avraham mean by the expression “Far beyond pearls is her value”? The Medrash explains that she waited for 90 years to have a baby. Avraham eulogized, “this is the type of woman my wife was”. She had no complaints against the Almighty. She waited 90 years for a child but never complained. She saw her entire life experience as one blessed by G-d.

We might consider what Sarah experienced and say, “That’s a horrible life.” However, Sarah did not see it that way. She had the capacity to see the “tova” in the “ra’ah”. The Slonimer Rebbe says this is why she is like an Esrog. The Gemara says that the Esrog is the only fruit wherein the taste of the tree and that of its fruit are the same. The bark of an Esrog tree tastes like and Esrog itself!

The Slonimer Rebbe says that certainly, if a person tries taking a bite out of the bark of an Esrog tree, it will not taste as good as a ripe Esrog. Nonetheless, in the “tree”, a person can already taste the flavor of an Esrog. Even though the wood is hard and brittle, it contains within itself a flavor reminiscent of the Esrog that will grow from it. Sara was like an Esrog

because she too could sense the connection between the “tree” (i.e., – the process) and the “fruit” (i.e., – the result). Sarah saw the connection between all her trials and tribulations in her life (i.e., – the process) and the good that befell her (i.e., – the result).

This is what Chazal are trying to teach us by saying, “They were all equally good.” There are people who are capable of looking at that which is a bitter life and saying, “No. It’s all for the good.”

We might think that such people do not exist in our day and age, but they do exist. Recently, I made a phone call that I anticipated being a very difficult call to make. I know someone who I have had dealings with five or six times over the last 10 years or so. He is a very nice fellow. Last week, he married off a son. On the third day of Sheva Brochos, the son died. This is a mind-boggling tragedy. The Seven Days of Marriage Feasting (Shivas Yemei HaMishteh) turned into Seven Days of Mourning (Shivas Yemei Aveilus). I am not that close to the father, but I do know him. We have had a pleasant relationship, so I called him. This type of phone call makes a person wonder, “What can I possibly say?” I began “Reb Shmuel, what can I say? There are no words to utter. It has just been on my mind the whole week...”

He is not a Rav or a Rosh Yeshiva. He is just an ordinary businessman. (Obviously, he is not really so “ordinary.”) He told me “Reb Yissocher, this is all part of the puzzle. When Moshiach will come, we are going to understand all of this. I accept this as part of the Divine Plan, even though I do not yet understand exactly what it is all about.”

I told him “You have strengthened me, more than I could have possibly hoped to strengthen you.”

This is what Rashi is saying. “The years of Sarah were all equally good” means that Sarah was on such a high spiritual level that she viewed them as such. Chazal say that a person should always ask himself, “When will my deeds be equal to the deeds of my ancestors?” We need to strive for such a level. For most of us, this represents a seemingly unattainable spiritual goal. We will understand this, hopefully, in the Days of the Messiah. However, there were people — and apparently, there are still people — who can look at life — even a life full of suffering and misfortune — and say, “they were all equally good.”

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Rav Shlomo Aviner

Forgiving Someone who was Disrespectful to a Rabbi

Question: In the community where I live, there is someone who was disrespectful to the Rabbi, and I can't even talk to him. He does not seem to regret what he did, and I don't think that he will accept my rebuke. Do I have to or am I permitted to forgive him?

Answer: This is not your honor, it is the Torah's honor. We are not obligated to forgive someone who has not requested forgiveness. You are allowed to forgive someone who has done something to you. If you have a good heart, you can forgive him. This is an act of piety. Here, he was not disrespectful to you, he was disrespectful to the Rabbi, and you therefore cannot forgive him in place of the Rabbi. If you are angry with him in your heart, you have to tell him that you are upset for this or that reason. This is like what Rashi says about Yosef's brothers. The Torah says that they could not speak to him peacefully, and Rashi explains that out of their shame, you learn their praise:

They did not speak to him one way, but feel differently in their heart (Bereshit 37:4). It is even worse for someone who shames a Torah scholar. There is no cure for his ailment. In the Gemara in Baba Metzia (84b), Rabbi Elezar the son of the Rashbi died, and they laid him on a slab in the attic for many years. One day, they saw a worm came out of his ear, and they were surprised. He came to them in a dream and said that it was because he once heard a Torah scholar shamed and did not protest. On such things, we need to protest. We need to protest everything which is against the Torah, but this in particular. Shaming a Torah scholar is not only his shame, but the shame of the Torah. Disputes and disagreements are acceptable, but not shaming. It is written in the books that Torah scholars do not want to discuss this subject, because then people will say that they are saying it for their own benefit. Torah scholars therefore do not talk about this, but it is very severe. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (99b) says that a heretic is one who shames a Torah scholar. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 10:1) compares this to a structure of stones: If one stone is shaken, the entire structure is shaken (Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 10:1). That is to say, one who scorns any Torah scholar, knocks over the entire building of the Oral Torah in Israel. The Radvaz (vol. 4 #187) writes that even a Torah scholar who errs should not be shamed. His proof is from the Gemara in Sanhedrin (99a) that a Torah scholar named Rabbi Hillel – not Hillel the Elder – said that the Messiah will not come. Rav Yosef said: May Hashem forgive his sin and he brought proofs. Rav Yosef spoke to him in the third person with honor, and said that he erred and should be forgiven, because the damage done by shaming him would be much worse than the damage done by him saying that the Messiah will not come!

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Insights Parshas Chayei Sarah

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim / Talmudic University

Parshas Chayei Sarah - Cheshvan 5778

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Mark Mendel.

Mazel tov on the birth of a grandson!

A Universal Loss

Sarah died in Kiryat Arbah, which is in Chevron in the land of Canaan. Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her (23:2).

This week's parsha opens with the death of our matriarch Sarah and the details surrounding her burial. The Torah recounts that Avraham came to eulogize and weep for her. The word "weep" is written with a small letter "ו" ("kaf") and Chazal tell us that this hints to the fact that Avraham curtailed his crying (see Bal Haturim ad loc). Why did Avraham lessen his crying Furthermore, the commentaries (see Riva, Ohr Hachaim, Klei Yakar, and others on this verse) are troubled with three other issues in the construct of the possuk: 1) The beginning of the verse informs us that Sarah died and yet the Torah, which budgets its words and letters so carefully, repeats her name again at the end of the possuk. Why? 2) Why does the Torah place her name in between Avraham eulogizing for her and his crying? 3) Finally, doesn't crying usually come before the eulogizing? In other words, why didn't the Torah simply write, "Avraham came to weep and eulogize her"?

The name Sarah has its root in the Hebrew word "sar," meaning "prince." Initially, her name was Sarai, but Hashem changed her name to Sarah when she was ninety. The Talmud (Brachos 13a) explains why Hashem changed her name from Sarai to Sarah; "originally, she was a princess only to her own nation (i.e. Aram), and in the end she became a princess for the entire world." Clearly, Sarah had gone from being a locally respected personality to one who's impact was felt the world over.

This public persona was what Avraham was coming to eulogize. Sarah wasn't merely his wife, she was an important person in her own right. Sarah's death left a void in the world. This is why the Torah repeats her name again;

Avraham wasn't coming to eulogize his wife, he was coming to articulate a communal loss. He was explaining who "Sarah" was and what she meant to the world. He wanted people to understand what they had lost. There is an important lesson in this story. Funerals are a meaningful time to reflect on the value of the deceased's life accomplishments. Yet often eulogies mostly reflect personal memories of the deceased (e.g. Bubby's "amazing" cookie recipe). This causes those in attendance to be saddened not by the loss of the deceased, but rather by the grief and loss of the bereaved. Eulogies should ideally extol virtues of the deceased, thereby making the loss relevant to all.

This is the lesson that the Torah is conveying about what Avraham was trying to accomplish. His personal loss wasn't the focus at this time and therefore he lessened his own weeping. There is always time for personal grieving, but Avraham's goal at that moment was to explain to those in attendance what they had lost by the death of a princess of the world. *In tribute to the tenth Yahrzeit of Binyamin (Barry) Ross OBM, and as continuing Zechus for R' Binyomin Yitzchak Ben Meir Z'L, the Ross family is sponsoring a free class every week for the entire year.*

Efron Memorial Gardens?

And Efron's field that was in Machpeilah, which was opposite Mamre, the field and the cave contained therein and all the trees in the boundary around it, was acquired by Avraham as a purchase... (23:17-18)

Avraham Avinu goes to great lengths to acquire a suitable property to bury his deceased wife Sarah. The Torah gives us an unusually detailed account of the negotiation between Avraham and Efron who was the owner of the cave that Avraham wished to buy.

Initially, Efron offers to give it to Avraham for free. In fact, Efron goes a step further; he offers not only the cave but the entire field surrounding the cave as well. Avraham graciously appreciates his offer, but insists on paying for the land. Efron then changes gears and asks for an exorbitant sum (see Ramban ad loc) because he understood that Avraham had his heart set on this piece of property. What made Efron suddenly change from being a benevolent individual to a shrewd businessman?

Additionally, when Avraham dies thirty-eight years later, the Torah makes a remarkable statement: "His sons Yitzchak and Yishmael buried him in the cave of Machpeilah, in the field of Efron" (25:9). In other words, thirty-eight years later the field was still known as once belonging to Efron. Stranger still, 170 years later, when Yaakov Avinu is buried in the cave of Machpeilah by his sons, the Torah once again refers to it as the field which Avraham bought from Efron. What is special about Efron's role here that entitles him to continuously be associated with the cave and its surrounding field?

Sarah's passing wasn't just a loss to Avraham and his nuclear family; it was a communal and national loss (see previous article, "A Universal Loss").

Efron, the consummate businessman, recognized this and had a brilliant insight. He realized that her death was a loss felt by many and therefore her burial site would be significant forevermore. He convinces Avraham Avinu that merely acquiring the Machpeilah cave wouldn't be sufficient to properly pay homage to Sarah. He insists that Avraham needs the entire surrounding area to create a memorial park in her memory.*

Efron genuinely offers to give the entire area to Avraham as a memorial park. Why? Efron wants the honor of donating the land and being eternally remembered in this way, i.e. Sarah being buried in "Efron's Memorial Gardens." But Avraham insists on buying the land because he wants to have her buried in "his" land - i.e. Eretz Yisroel. Once Efron feels that this is solely a business transaction and that Sarah wasn't going to be buried in "Efron's Memorial Gardens," he charges Avraham an exorbitant sum (see accompanying Did You Know column) to remove his name from the deed. However, Efron still gets credit for the idea of creating a historical site where many people can come and visit forevermore, which is why his name continues to be associated with the transaction throughout the Torah.

*We find the same sentiment regarding the burial site of Lady Diana, a woman who was an internationally beloved icon.

Did You Know...

In this week's parsha, Avraham purchases the Machpeilah Cave (the "double" cave). He bought the cave from Efron the Hittite for 400 silver shekel so that he could bury Sarah in a proper and respectful manner. Adam, Chava, the patriarchs, and matriarchs (aside from Rochel) were also buried in Machpeilah, as well as Eisav's head (Sotah 13a). Here are a few facts we thought you might find of interest regarding the Machpeilah Cave:

Adam found this place after he and Chava were kicked out of Gan Eden. After searching in vain for a way back into Gan Eden, they came across this cave. It smelled just like Gan Eden, but when they tried digging further, a heavenly voice told them to stop. Adam therefore chose this place to bury Chava, and their son Shes buried Adam there (Zohar Chadash, quoted by Me'em Lo'ez Chayei Sarah 1).

According to the Midrash (Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer 36), Avraham approached the Jebusites (Hittites) and requested to purchase the cave from them. They answered Avraham, "We know that your future offspring will try to conquer our home city (Jerusalem). If you agree to prevent them from taking Jerusalem without our permission, we will sell you the cave." Avraham agreed and signed a contract, which was hung on statues outside the gates of Jerusalem. There are commentators who hold that Joshua did not conquer Jerusalem when he entered Israel due to Avraham's agreement (seen in Judges 1:21). Centuries later, King David purchased the Temple Mount from the Jebusites.

Currently, this double cave is located beneath a Saladin-era mosque, which had been converted from a large rectangular Herodian-era Judean structure. Dating back over 2,000 years, the monumental Herodian compound is believed to be the oldest continuously used, and intact, prayer structure in the world, which makes it the oldest major building in the world that is still used and also fulfills its original function.

While we know that Avraham paid 400 silver shekel for the cave of Machpeilah, what would that equate to in today's dollars? Here is our attempt to figure it out: Rashi (Bava Metzia 87a) explains that these were not normal shekalim, they were equivalent to 2,500 biblical shekalim. The Me'em Lo'ez elaborates on this and states it was 46,875 oz. of silver, or \$803,437 at today's prices. However, silver was significantly more rare back then (81% of all mined silver was mined only since the 1900's according to the US Bureau of mines in "1930 Summarized Silver Production Data"). We also know from transactions recorded that a sheep in the times of ancient Babylon was only roughly 10 g, or about \$5 by today's cost of silver (Commodities investing: "The Historical Value Of Silver"). Compare that to the average cost of a sheep nowadays of \$200, we find a ratio of 1:40 of the value of silver in those days. If our estimates are correct, we then multiply \$803,437 by 40, which equals \$32,137,480 in today's currency. That's a lot of shekels.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Chayei Sara
For the week ending 11 November 2017 / 22 Heshvan 5778
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

Wasted on the Young

"The years of the life of Sarah" (23:1)

Those of us who are old enough to have trouble recalling large areas of our youth will at least have no trouble remembering some standout moments of total irresponsibility: Like speeding down a German autobahn at 100 miles

an hour on the back of a BMW 900 in the dead of night in driving rain on a hitchhike.

"Youth is wasted on the young" runs the old adage. As our hair thins and our waistlines thicken we try to shed the immaturity of youth and improve our characters and our actions.

It comes out then that what we really can call our "life" — our arriving at some kind of perfection in this world — happens pretty close to our departure from this world. Viewed in this way, our "lives" are even shorter than we thought, even without the help of lunatic escapades and motorcycle madness.

All the above is true of the average person. However, there are those special people whose entire lives are unspoiled. Such were "the years of the life of Sarah." As Rashi says, "all of them were equal in their goodness." None of them were wasted or misspent. And even though, of course, Sarah's stature grew in old age, this was the dividend of a holy life spent in doing mitzvot and good deeds, rather than the necessity to forsake the foolishness of youth for "all of them were equal in their goodness".

Source: based on the Sfat Emet

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Chayei Sarah

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

On Whose Account?

This week, the Torah tells us the fascinating story of Eliezer's mission to find a wife for Yitzchok, his master Avraham's son. Eliezer was referred to in previous portions as one who drew from the teachings of his master. In order to accomplish his mission, Eliezer must interact. First he must meet the prospective bride, Rivka, then her parents, Bsu'el and Milkah, and then Rivka's conniving brother Lavan.

The Torah spares no effort to describe at length the ordeal of choosing the bride. Throughout the narrative, Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, is referred to in different ways. Sometimes he is called the "servant of Avraham," other times he is called, just plainly, "the servant," "and other times he is "the man." First he gives Rivka gifts: "And it was, when the camels had finished drinking, the man took a golden nose ring, its weight was a beka, and two bracelets on her arms, ten gold shekels was their weight" (Genesis 24:28). When Lavan sees the gifts he is excited, and he "approached the man, who was still standing by the camels by the spring" (ibid. v.30).

When Eliezer formally introduces himself to B'suel he declares his identity quite firmly. "I am a servant of Avraham" (ibid v. 34). And when Eliezer hears the words of acceptance from the soon-to-be in-laws, the Torah tells us, "when Avraham's servant heard their words, he prostrated himself to the ground unto Hashem" (ibid v.59).

Once again, he gives gifts to the new-found family. This time, however, he is not called with Avraham's servant, but just plainly, "the servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebecca; and delicious fruits he gave to her brother and her mother" (ibid v. 60). There seems to be some special condition for using the terms servant of Avraham. Don't we know who he was? I'd like to add my inflection on that title. One evening, Rav Moshe Feinstein received a call from a young man whom he had never met. "I would like to ask the Rosh Yeshiva to be m'sader kidushin at my wedding." Rav Moshe reacted with a bit of surprise. "But I do not know you. Why are you calling me? Don't you have your own rabbi?"

The young man explained. "I come from a simple family with no yichus, (important lineage). I daven in a small shul with a little-known rabbi. Boruch Hashem, I am marrying a girl who comes from a family of well known

origins, and many distinguished rabbis and lay leaders will be attending the wedding on her behalf.

“I, on the other hand, have little money and even less genealogical prestige. My in-laws don’t think I am much of a scholar, and though I try to learn whenever I can, it seems that my bride’s parents are disappointed in her choice. My parents are very quiet and simple people. They hardly know anyone, and I must admit that I am embarrassed that I will have no famous rabbis who will come from my side of the simcha. It would therefore be a tremendous encouragement to me if the Rosh Yeshiva would come on my behalf, and serve as the officiating rabbi.”

At the time, Rabbi Feinstein was the dean of the prestigious Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem in New York, the head of the council of Torah Sages of Agudath Israel, and filled with myriad responsibilities to fulfill on a communal and personal level. In addition, he was not a young man, and the trip to the wedding would put further strain on his weary body. Nevertheless, Rav Moshe obliged. And the kallah’s (bride’s) family reacted in with awe for the prestige of the groom. “Imagine,” they thought, “his rabbi is none other than the revered Gadol HaDor, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein!”

With that, the young man was able to forge the foundations of a respect that reverberated throughout his married years.

Matches are very delicate, and when Eliezer produced the beautiful gifts, he did not have to be known as Avraham’s servant. “The servant gave gifts. The man took out a nose ring.” But when it comes to laying the story out clearly, Eliezer puts away the monetary status and replaces it with something that money can’t buy.

He declares his affiliation. I am the servant of Avraham. And when he thanks Hashem for the success, it is not the man talking, nor is it the servant. It is the servant of Avraham. Because when one goes into a spiritual deal, he need not present pecuniary credentials or show his bankbook. All he has to do is align himself with the right people, those who are well connected.

*Dedicated in memory of Alta Chaya Rasha bas R’ Mordechai — Roberta Katz By Shmuel and Goldie Katz and Family
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.
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Chadashot Arutz 7

Three important ingredients of successful parenting Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

In this week’s D’var Torah the Chief Rabbi extrapolates three lessons for successful parenting from this week’s Parasha.

Three important ingredients of successful parenting are highlighted in Parashat Chayei Sarah.

From the name of this sedra we learn so much. It’s intriguing: it’s called Chayei Sarah which means the life of Sarah even though when you look at it, it’s about the death of Sarah and all that transpired immediately afterwards. In truth though, it is indeed about the life of Sarah because she gained immortality by successfully making an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of many – most importantly, on the life of her son Yitzchak. This is learnt from a fascinating, tiny letter in our parasha: ‘vayavo Avraham lispod l’ Sara v’livcota’ – ‘Avraham came in order to eulogise Sarah and to cry for her.’ The kaf in v’livcota is a tiny one and our sages explain that it represents the fact that the mourning which Avraham went through, the extent to which he cried, was less than it might have been because he knew that she was an outstanding role model for their son Yitzchak and she would live on through him.

From here we learn that it is up to parents to be outstanding role model to their children. But we learn another lesson about parenting from our parasha: it’s all about environment. Yitzchak was commanded to never step foot outside of the holy land, he was the one patriarch who was born in Eretz

Yisrael and died in Eretz Yisrael. For his parents it was crucially important that he would always live within a holy environment. Similarly, we as parents need to guarantee that our children – through the shul that they are part of, the school they attend, the chevrah that they mix in – are living in the right environment for the sake of their successful Jewish future.

There is also a third message relating to shidduch: after Sarah’s passing, Avraham went to great efforts to send Eliezer to Mesopotamia and all the details are contained in our parasha. Eliezer prayed, he planned a strategy and he was able to deliver by bringing Rivka, a lady who was filled with yirat shamayim outright fear of God and who was also the epitome of chesed an outstanding person of loving kindness and hence the ideal wife for Yitzchak.

By serving as outstanding role models, by providing a suitable environment for living and educating towards the establishment of successful and healthy home environments, we can help our children, please God, to have wonderful future Jewish lives.

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Rav Kook Torah

Dressing for Prayer

How should we dress when praying? The Talmud (Shabbat 10a) records two contradictory opinions as to what is appropriate attire for prayer:

“Rava bar Rav Huna would put on fine shoes when he prayed. As the verse says “Prepare yourself to meet your God, O Israel” (Amos 4:12).

Rava, on the other hand, would remove his cloak, clasp his hands together, and pray like a servant before his master.”

Which approach is correct? Should we wear fine, formal attire when praying? Or should we adopt the humble demeanor of a lowly servant entreating his Master?

Reverence and Love

The different approaches of these two scholars correspond to two types of prayers. Some prayers are Bakashot — petitions and requests. Other prayers are Shevach, songs and praises of God. Each type of prayer projects a certain image of our relationship with God, and they impact the soul accordingly.

When we pray for God’s assistance, we are keenly aware of our deficiencies and limitations. God is our pillar, supplying our needs and sustaining life.

We rely on His constant kindness and mercy. When we present our requests in prayer, we are like a servant petitioning his master.

Rava would emphasize this humble demeanor by removing his cloak — an expensive article of clothing, conveying pride and respect — before praying.

We have no reason to be proud of our inadequate material state. In addition, Rava would clasp his arms together. This gesture indicated his helplessness and dependence on God’s kindness.

In short, Rava emphasized the aspect of prayer that corresponds to yirah, the awe and reverence of a lowly servant before his Master.

Rava bar Rav Huna, on the other hand, viewed prayer as an expression of ahavat Hashem, our love for God. He approached prayer like a loving and favorite child, donning his finest clothing before meeting with his beloved father.

The soul is uplifted as we sing God’s praises and acknowledge His greatness. We gain greater awareness of the soul’s lofty potential, and the soul is more receptive to inquire into the truth of its Maker. As we plumb the depths of wisdom and knowledge, pondering God’s infinity and greatness, our service of God is based on the attribute of ahavah. This in turn refines our desires in life and elevates our deeds.

Infinite Potential

The approach of ahavah, however, requires caution with regard to one particular pitfall. An individual might mistakenly believe that he has already reached such a high spiritual level that he no longer needs to be careful regarding his day-to-day conduct and behavior. In his mind, minor acts only serve to inculcate proper traits and correct beliefs — which he has already acquired.

Therefore, Rava bar Rav Huna quoted the verse, “Prepare yourself to meet your God, O Israel.” Why did the prophet exhort us to constantly prepare? The verse’s underlining message is the soul’s infinite potential for spiritual growth. No matter what level a person has attained, one should prepare to attain an even higher level. And a person must always guard against the increasing danger of falling from his spiritual state. As the Sages cautioned, “The greater the person, the greater his evil inclination” (Sukkah 52a).

Rava bar Rav Huna would take care to dress in fine clothing when praying. Wearing special clothes raises our awareness of the nobility of the soul as it sings God’s praise.

The scholar in particular emphasized his footwear. He wanted to show that even the lowest, most trivial act requires thought and consideration. All of our deeds should match the elevated level of the soul.

A Time For Each

Given these two opposing approaches, each based on a different type of prayer and Divine service, what should we do? Pray in simple and humble dress, or in fine clothing?

The Talmud concludes with testimony of how Rav Kehanah would dress for prayer:

“When there was trouble in the world, Rav Kehanah would remove his coat, clasp his arms together, and pray like a servant before his master.

But in times of peace, he would dress honorably, cover himself with a talit and pray, as it says, “Prepare yourself to meet your God, O Israel.””

In the end, we need to both awe and love in our service of God. Sometimes we need to restrain ourselves and carefully watch that we do not descend into materialism and improper conduct. Other times, we need to deepen our love for God by increasing our positive actions.

When should we choose the reverent approach of yirah, and when the devotional path of ahavah?

The best advice is to consider the state of society and the world at large. We should see ourselves as part of the greater reality, at least that which is close to us. Rav Kehanah taught that when there is suffering and misery in the world, this is a sign that the world is lacking those moral qualities that come from yirah, guarding against destructive traits and deeds. In troubled times, Rav Kehanah would clasp his arms together and remove his cloak before praying. In this fashion, he would emphasize the outlook of reverence and awe, like a lowly servant standing before his Master.

But when the world is at peace, it is time to promote positive traits and deeds. Rav Kehanah would then dress in fine clothing, to open the heart and bolster good inclinations. With this preparation, he indicated that he sought higher awareness of God’s infinite light and greater love for God, like the joyful service of a loving son. Donning formal attire, he fulfilled the prophet’s injunction for continual spiritual growth — “Prepare yourself to meet your God, O Israel.”

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshat Chayei Sarah (Genesis 23:1-25:18)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “When Rebecca looked up and saw Isaac, she fell from the camel. And she asked the servant: ‘What man is this walking in the field to meet us?’ And the servant responded, ‘It is my master.’ And she took her veil and covered herself” [Gen. 24:62-65].

The fascinating marriage of Isaac and Rebecca—from the circumstances surrounding their arranged nuptials to the devastating family split over their twin sons’ bitter rivalry—contains vitally important lessons for couples in every generations. On the one hand, the Torah’s description of the tenderness of their marriage is extraordinary: “And Isaac brought [Rebecca] into the tent of his mother, Sarah...and [Rebecca] became his wife; and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted over the loss of his mother” [ibid., 24:67].

The Torah also mentions the impassioned prayers of Isaac on behalf of Rebecca, who was struggling with infertility [ibid., 25:21], as well as their lovemaking while in the land of Gerar [ibid., 26:8].

Nevertheless, and tragically, what seems to be missing from their relationship is open communication. Perhaps no better evidence for the distance between them is their un verbalized dispute surrounding the bekhora, the spiritual blessings bequeathed from father to son.

Differences of opinion between parents will always exist, but if the father prefers Esau and the mother prefers Jacob regarding an issue as momentous as who will don the mantle of spiritual heir to Abraham, ought there not be a discussion and an opportunity to examine the true nature of their sons’ very different characters in order to arrive at a consensus?

Instead, Rebecca resorts to ruse, casting the otherwise-guileless Jacob [A1] into a role of deception for which he is unnaturally suited. Not only does he perpetrate an act that will haunt him for the rest of his life, but what begins as a split between brothers comes to signify the far greater division between Jews and gentiles throughout history.

Why must Rebecca resort to deception? Why could she not simply have raised the issue with Isaac? The answer can be found in the initial encounter between Isaac and Rebecca, which reflects the gulf that separates them. Isaac had been meditating in the fields, and with the approach of Eliezer and the bride-to-be, he raises his eyes:

“When Rebecca looked up and saw Isaac, she fell from the camel. And she asked the servant: ‘What man is this walking in the field to meet us?’ And the servant responded, ‘It is my master.’ And she took her veil and covered herself” [ibid., 24:62-65].

The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Berlin (19th Century Poland), in his commentary Ha’Emek Davar, explains that Rebecca fell because she had never before seen a religious personality, a spiritual persona who communed with nature and actually spoke before God.

So awesome was the sight of Isaac transformed by prayer that she was literally knocked off her feet. Compared to the lying and cheating world of her father, Betuel, and her brother, Laban, Isaac projected a vision of purity with which Rebecca had no previous experience.

When Eliezer revealed the man’s identity, she took the veil and covered herself, not only as a sign of modesty, but as an expression of her unworthiness. From that moment on, the veil between them was never removed. She felt she could never speak to her husband as an equal. She never felt that she had the right to offer a dissenting opinion.

Granted that the veil comes to symbolize the distance between their worlds, why was Isaac unable to bridge that gap?

The harrowing experience of the Akedah left Isaac in a permanent state of shock. In fact, a part of him always remained behind on Mount Moriah, as hinted at in the final verse of the Akedah: “Abraham returned to his young men, and together they went to Be’er Sheva, and Abraham resided in Be’er Sheva” [ibid., 22:19].

Where is Isaac? Why is he not mentioned? Very likely, the verse alludes to the fact that only Abraham came down from the mountain, while Isaac, or part of him, remained behind on the altar. Thus it is not surprising that the

traumatized Isaac became a silent, non-communicative survivor. Indeed, Elie Wiesel referred to Isaac as the first survivor.

And if neither wife nor husband could speak openly with each other, there could be no real communication between them.

In my many years of offering marital counseling, I am never put off when one partner screams at the other. As a wife once said to her husband who complained that she yelled at him too often: “With whom then should I let out my frustrations? The stranger next door?” Of course, I am not advocating shouting, but a far more serious danger sign is silence—non-communication—between the couple.

A crucial lesson, then, from the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca is that we must spend a lifetime working on ourselves and on our relationship with our spouse. Most importantly, we must be honest with ourselves and honest with our spouse: loving them as we love ourselves, and learning how to disagree lovingly and respectfully.

Shabbat Shalom

from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com>

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The Blessings of a Good Life

by R. Gidon Rothstein

When Lack Is a Blessing

After Avraham buys Me'arat HaMachpelah to bury Sarah, 24:1 opens a new story by telling us that Hashem blessed Avraham bakol. Ramban points us to a debate (Baba Batra 16b) about the meaning of bakol, most simply “in all.”

R. Meir says it means he did not have a daughter, which Ramban says would have been a blessing, since the only marriage partners for her would have been Canaanites.

Avraham could not retrieve a husband, as he was about to do with a wife for Yitzchak, since women live where their husbands are. Sending a daughter there would mean she'd be living exactly where he was told to leave, and she would almost inevitably adopt her husband's idolatrous ways, since women tend to be under the influence of their husbands.

He doesn't make the point explicitly, but Ramban is reading R. Meir as saying that sometimes not having that which most of us would think we'd always want can be a blessing. A daughter, in Avraham's world, would necessarily have brought such problems that it was better for Avraham not to have one, according to R. Meir.

Avraham's Daughter and Her Name

R. Yehudah says bakol means Avraham did have a daughter, which Ramban reads as how fully blessed he was, that he had all people want, including a daughter. Ramban does not explain why R. Yehudah disregarded R. Meir's concerns, and I won't speculate.

He spends more time on Acherim, others, who said Avraham had a daughter and her name was Bakol. He cannot accept the literal reading of that view, because it would turn a broad blessing into a discussion of a name. Instead, he takes us to the metaphysical, saying that bakol refers to the foundation of Hashem's handling of the world called “kol, everything.”

He cites many verses where the word appears; as is often true in kabbalistic contexts, he takes a word most of us would read simply as a reference to an aspect of Hashem's interactions with the world. One example is Yeshayahu 44:24, “Anochi Hashem oseh kol, I am Hashem Who made all,” which Ramban is reading as “who made kol, the foundation of how the world works.”

How Hashem Runs the World

Two more comments about this aspect of how the world works (before he returns to Avraham) seem to me to enormously complicate our understanding of his view. First, he says this kol is the eighth of the Attributes Hashem taught Moshe (in his count of those Attributes, I'm pretty sure he means ve-emet, truth). Since he thinks all those Attributes are about mercy, emet might be the most merciful possible version of truth, but it's

truth nonetheless.

That idea is captured by the second point I wanted to share, that Kol refers to Hashem and His Beit Din, His Heavenly Court as it were, who are always indicated by the word Va-Hashem (really, V-Adon...). Again, Hashem and his Court are merciful in all they do, but a court is a place of truth and justice, so the image conveys something other than just mercy.

I suggest this hesitantly, but Ramban seems to me to be implying an underlying truth and justice to Hashem's running the world, even granting all the great mercy. There's more to this—Ramban says this kol is the bride of Shir haShirim, since the word for bride is kallah, close to kol, and that Chazal refer to this as Keneset Yisrael, the gathering of all; both those statements bear much thought and need to be interpreted carefully—but I don't want to get bogged down and find myself out of space.

I cannot resist, however, noting that Ramban also relates this to Yirmiyahu 44:18, where, after the Destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash, Yirmiyahu with the Jews who have chosen to go to Egypt (despite Hashem's call for them to stay). The women there refuse to give up their idolatry, saying that it's since they've stopped sacrificing to the hosts of Heaven that they've lacked kol (which, for Ramban, would mean they've lost control of the world, as they thought they had before). Both the story and this Ramban deserve more thought, but we have to move on.

How Eliezer Knew

In verse fourteen, Eliezer sets up a way to find a wife for Yitzchak. Rashi thinks it was a test; if she offered to draw water for the camels when asked only to do it for Eliezer himself, that would show she had the quality of kindness befitting a member of the household of Avraham Avinu.

Ramban disagrees for textual reasons that need not detain us. He thinks Eliezer only meant this as how he would identify the right girl/woman whom Hashe sent. What would confirm she's the one is that he will then find out she's from Avraham's family, is of good intellect and physical charms, etc. He was asking Hashem to let the interaction at the well identify a young woman to investigate further, not tell him this was absolutely the right woman.

That fits what's rapidly becoming a central theme for me, that Jewish tradition understands Hashem to want us to balance our efforts with Divine intervention. In so doing, it reduces the level of the miraculous that Eliezer sought (and therefore reduces the burden of explaining how Eliezer could be so apparently arrogant as to assume Hashem would do this for him). He was hoping for a Divine kindness, not miracle. And he got it.

Where We Pray and What Comforts Us

When Rivkah arrives in Canaan, she and her caravan encounter Yitzchak, who is returning from Be'er Lachai Ro'i, where Hagar met the angel when she was pregnant with Yishma'el. Verse 62 says he was “ba mi-bo,” an odd phrase (literally “coming from having come”); Ramban explains that it means he was returning from one of his frequent journeys out to the well.

It was a good place to go to pray, according to Ramban, since an angel had appeared to a human being there, and it and was close to where Yitzchak was living. For that to make sense, he must be assuming that Yitzchak thought that a place where an angel appeared is a better place to pray. I think that's because where the metaphysical has interfaced with the physical is a place we can have better hope of our prayers (from the physical world) more effectively interfacing with (or entering) the metaphysical.

Of course, one could counter that Hashem hears all prayers, so why would the place matter? Once again, Ramban goes no further and neither will we.

Verse 67 says Yitzchak brought Rivkah “ha-ohelah Sarah imo, to the tent Sarah his mother.” Ramban takes the ambiguous phrasing to mean this was the first time Sarah's tent was pitched since her passing, as a sign of honor to Sarah and a function of the intensity of Yitzchak's mourning for her. With the arrival of Rivkah, he honored her by giving her his mother's tent, and was finally comforted.

He adds, “for what reason is there for the verse to mention a man's love for his wife,” a reminder that his culture operated under different assumptions

than most of us do today.

Knowing What's Enough

Almost at the end of the parsha, 25:8, Avraham passes away, “zaken ve-save'a, old and sated.” Ramban says it means he saw the fulfillment of all his heart's desires, was sated with all the good that had come his way. In 35:29, Yitzchak dies “old and sated of days,” which he says is similar, that he had no urge to see what more days would bring. David HaMelech (I Divrei HaYamim 29:28), too, dies be-seivah tovah, a good satiation.

It's a kindness to the righteous (that they die after seeing enough of their hopes come to fruition to satisfy them) as well as an expression of their good character, that they do not want more than is appropriate. .

That's not a common trait, as Kohelet 5:9 says, that one who loves money will never be satisfied by money, and the Midrash (Kohelet Rabbah 1:13) says people don't leave this world with half their desires fulfilled. The righteous set proper horizons, which lets them then be satisfied before they go to the next world.

In these Rambans, Chayyei Sarah is about finding blessings. Whether it's Avraham's blessing, the blessing of finding Rivkah, or the blessing of a satisfied life, people in Chayyei Sarah model for us what it is and how to get it.

http://www.baltimorejewishlife.com/news/print.php?ARTICLE_ID=80797

Seeing Eliezer act appropriately as a guest reminds us to discuss a practical topic, dealt with in this article by a guest writer:

By Rabbi Avraham Rosenthal **Halachic Table Manners**

The dictionary informs us that “manners” are a form of proper behavior. And there are manners for just about everything. But somehow, when it comes to “table manners,” the list of “do's and don'ts” seems to be endless.

Halachic literature also has a list of “table manners.” It is interesting that when Rabbeinu Yaakov ben Asher, commonly known as the Baal Haturim, organized the halachos of the Gemara and early Rishonim, he chose to include an entire chapter that deals exclusively with how a person should conduct himself while eating.

No Talking Please The Gemara (Taanis 5b) relates that two of the great Sages, Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchok, were dining together, and Rav Nachman asked Rabbi Yitzchok to relate some words of Torah. Rabbi Yitzchok responded that one does not speak during the meal, out of concern that the food will enter the trachea, endangering the person's life. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 170:1) cites this ruling as the very first halachah concerning how a person should conduct himself during a meal. Seemingly, to add emphasis to the severity of the prohibition, he writes that one is not even allowed to respond “asuta” (the Aramaic version of “Gesundheit”) during the meal if someone sneezes. Although there is a view that maintains that this prohibition is in effect throughout the entire meal (Prishah 170:1), most Acharonim hold that one is allowed to speak between courses (Aruch Hashulchan 170:1; Mishnah Berurah 170:1). Numerous Acharonim are troubled by the fact that, although this prohibition is based on the Gemara and is cited as halachah in the Shulchan Aruch, people are not careful about it, and, in the words of the Chida, “We see that the elder rabbonim are not particular about this.” To explain why people are not careful about this observance, the Acharonim point to the words of the Prishah (170:1) who writes that this prohibition was in effect only during the time of Chazal. In their time, the custom was to eat while reclining on the left side. That particular position increased the likelihood of food entering the trachea if one spoke while eating. Nowadays, however, this precaution is no longer relevant, as we eat in an upright position. In addition, the Acharonim note the passage of Gemara (Shabbos 129b) that when it is common practice to do something dangerous, one can rely on the dictum, “Hashem protects fools” (Tehillim 116:6) [see Birkei Yosef 170:1; Sha'arei Teshuvah 170:1; Elyah Rabbah 170:1]. It should be noted that at least two of the great poskim write explicitly that there is no difference between our time and the time of Chazal, and that it is forbidden nowadays to speak during the meal (Pri Megadim #170, Eishel Avraham #1; Aruch Hashulchan 170:2). Additionally, the Maharsham, basing himself on the words of the Beis Yosef elsewhere, writes that a talmid chochom is not allowed to speak during the meal, as he cannot rely on the dictum, “Hashem protects fools” (Da'as Torah 170).

Permissible Situations Even according to the stringent opinion that nowadays one should refrain from talking while eating, the Acharonim mention some situations where it is permissible to do so. These include: 1) If one who is eating sees someone about to do something that is forbidden, he may warn him. This ruling teaches something

surprising. There is a well-known Talmudic dictum, *chamira sakanta mei'isura*, that something dangerous should be treated more seriously than something which is forbidden (see Chulin 9a-10a). Based on this rule, one who is eating should not be allowed to tell someone about to transgress to desist, as the one eating is placing himself in danger. Nevertheless, the Acharonim rule that it is permitted (Pri Megadim 170, Eishel Avraham #1). 2) The halachah is that if one inadvertently began eating without first reciting a bracha, if the food will become disgusting if one spits it out, he should move the food to one side of the mouth and recite the bracha (Shulchan Aruch 172:2). We see that this is not considered talking while eating. Based on this, some poskim suggest that, where necessary, one is allowed to move the food to one side of the mouth and then speak (Badei Hashulchan 39:3).

Torah Learning during the Meal Having discussed the law about talking while eating, let us now discuss the importance of learning Torah during the meal. The source for this concept is a Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (3:3) that states: “Rebbi Shimon says: Three people who ate at the same table and did not speak words of Torah, it is as if they had eaten from offerings to the dead (idols), as it says: ‘For all tables are full of vomit and filth without the Omnipresent’ (Yeshayahu 28:8). But three people who ate at the same table and did speak words of Torah, it is as if they had eaten from the table of the Omnipresent, as it says: ‘And he said to me, this is the table that is before Hashem’ (Yechezkeil 41:22).” At least two of the commentators on the Mishnah maintain that one can fulfill the obligation of learning Torah at a meal simply by reciting *birkas hamazon* (see Rashi and Rabbeinu Ovadyah Mibartenura). However, some are bothered by this approach, as it is obvious that when Rabbi Shimon formulated this ruling, he was speaking to people who recite *birkas hamazon*. If so, everyone who eats a meal automatically fulfills this requirement, and there is no need to tell us to do so (Tosafos Yom Tov). Indeed, the Mishnah Berurah (170:1) cites the view of the Shelah that one should study something – such as a Mishnah, halachah, some aggadata or mussar, and that one does not fulfill this obligation through *birkas hamazon*. The Mishnah Berurah, quoting the Chayei Adom, mentions that one should recite the chapter of Tehillim (#23), “Hashem ro'i lo echsor, which are words of Torah as well as a tefillah for sustenance. The Aruch Hashulchan (170:1) writes that *lechatchilah* one should learn *divrei Torah* during the meal, and *bidi'eved*, he can fulfill this obligation by reciting “Al naharos Bavel” or “Shir hamaalos” prior to *bentching*. In order to fulfill the obligation of speaking *divrei Torah* at the meal, some have a custom of saying, “Mayim acharonim chovah” – “mayim acharonim are obligatory,” before washing *mayim acharonim* (Ben Ish Chai, Shelach I, #7). Although it would seem from the words of the Mishnah that there is an obligation to learn Torah only when a minimum of three people eat together, according to many sources, even an individual must do so. The Likutei Maharich (Seder Hanhagas Haseudah, s.v. *divrei Torah*), citing Shaarei Kedushah, notes that there is a disagreement on this matter between the Midrash and the Zohar, and that one should be stringent. The Mishnah Berurah (170:1) writes that “there is a *mitzvah* for each person to study Torah at the table,” indicating that an individual is also obligated.

Staring is Impolite In order to understand the next halachah, we need to discuss some halachos relevant to *orlah*. During the first three years after a tree or a grape vine has been planted, we are forbidden to eat or benefit from its fruits, as they are considered *orlah*. Fruits that grow after the third year are permitted. The Mishnah (Orlah 1:5) discusses a situation where an “old,” meaning more than three years old, vine was grafted on to a “young” vine, younger than three years old, and obligated in *orlah*. Rabbi Meir rules that if the plant draws its nourishment from the older vine, *orlah* does not apply, but if the sustenance is coming from the younger vine, the fruits are forbidden. The Gemara Yerushalmi (Orlah 1:3) gives us an indication how we are to know from which plant the fruits are drawing nourishment. If the leaves are facing the older vine, it is drawing sustenance from the younger vine, while if the leaves face the younger vine, the nourishment is coming from the older one. The Gemara then says that this is similar to the concept that a guest is embarrassed to look at the face of his host and turns away while eating. Based on this Yerushalmi, the Rambam (Hilchos Brachos 7:6) writes that when someone is eating, one should not look at him or at his food, so as not to embarrass him (Mor Uketzi'a #170). The Shulchan Aruch (170:4) cites the words of the Rambam. The Acharonim argue under which circumstances this halachah is said. Some maintain that since it is derived from the Yerushalmi mentioned above, it is forbidden to look only at a guest who is eating. Since the guest is receiving the food gratis, he is more likely to be embarrassed (see Mor Uketzi'a ad locum; Aruch Hashulchan 170:7). Others contend that since the Rambam did not make any distinctions between guests and other people, it is always forbidden to look at someone while he is eating (Toras Chayim [Rav Yaakov Shalom Sofer of Pest] 170:6). Some maintain that to observe a *tzaddik* or a *talmid chochom* eating is permissible. This is because the intention of the onlooker is not to embarrass but rather to show honor and deference, as well as to fulfill the *mitzvah* of clinging to *talmidei chachomim* (Mishnah Halachah #170).

Do What You're Told The Gemara (Pesachim 86b; see also Derech Eretz Rabbah 6:1)

relates that Rav Huna was a guest in the house of Rav Nachman. When he entered, they instructed him to sit on a bed, and he did so. (The story continues, but we will focus on what is germane to our topic.) Afterwards, Rav Nachman asked him why he readily sat on the bed, something that was considered an act of haughtiness, when he could have instead opted to sit on a bench. Rav Huna replied that he was fulfilling the dictum of “kol mah sheyomar lecha baal habayis aseih” – “whatever the host says to do, do.” Tosafos (ad locum, s.v. ein) points out that we see from this Gemara that even if one’s host tells him to do something which smacks of haughtiness and he would normally not behave in such a way, nevertheless, he should do as he is told. Indeed, the Mishnah Berurah 170:16 cites this opinion as halachah lema’aseh. It should be noted that there is a disagreement among the poskim whether the guest should comply immediately (Birkei Yosef 170:8; Sha’arei Teshuvah 170:6) or whether he is allowed to decline at first until the host insists (Magen Avraham 170:10). The Shulchan Aruch (170:5) cites the above-mentioned Gemara and writes: “One who enters a house, whatever the host tells him to do, he should do.” The Levush (ad locum) explains the reason behind this idea by citing a pasuk from Megillas Ester (1:22): “Each person should rule in his house.” In other words, derech erez, or etiquette, demands that the word of the host is law. It is interesting to note that the Acharonim place numerous limitations on this halachah. For example: 1) The Mishnah Berurah (170:16) writes that if the guest has a particular chumrah which is based upon a concern that he might transgress a prohibition, he is not required to forgo this stringency in order to accommodate his host. However, if the guest has a practice where he refrains from a particular action or food in order to act with prishus, asceticism, he should hide his stringencies from others. 2) The dictum of following the instructions of the host applies to everything but eating and drinking. In other words, if a person is uninterested in eating and is concerned that if he does eat, it will affect his health, he does not have to do so, even if the host insists that he eat (Mishnah Berurah 170:17). 3) Even if one is invited to eat at someone’s home, if the guest suspects that the host does not have sufficient funds to feed his family, it is forbidden to eat there, as it borders on thievery (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 42:18). If a person is caught in such a situation, he should try and give some excuse why he cannot eat. It is reported that great tzaddikim, when finding themselves in similar situations, would say, “The doctor told me not to eat this,” having in mind that the “doctor” is the Rambam (see Piskei Teshuvos #170, footnote #45).

Aside from Leaving Earlier, we quoted a Gemara (Pesachim 86) which states: “Kol mah sheyomar lecha baal habayis aseih” – “whatever the host says to do, do.” Some texts add two words to the conclusion of this quote: “chutz mi’tzei” – “aside from ‘leave.’” According to these texts, the Gemara’s dictum is that a person must always listen to his host, unless the host tells him to leave. It should be noted that, according to numerous views in the Rishonim and Acharonim, these words do not belong in the Gemara at all. The Maharsha (ad locum, Chiddushei Aggados) opines that the suggestion implied by this text is halachically incorrect, for if the host insists that his guest leaves, how can the guest continue staying there without permission? The Meiri (ad locum) writes that these words were “added by some scoffers.” Be that as it may, many Acharonim discuss this alternative text and provide numerous approaches to understand it. Since some of the explanations have practical halachic ramifications, we will briefly present two of them. 1) The Bach (Orach Chaim 170) explains that whenever a host asks his guest to help him with some type of work in the house, the guest is obliged to do so. However, if the host asks him to “go out” and do something for him outside, e.g., to pick up something from the store, the guest is not required to oblige. 2) The Sfas Emes (Pesachim 86b) explains that Chazal’s original dictum was simply “kol mah sheyomar lecha baal habayis aseih,” and according to this, if the host told the guest to leave, he was required to do so. However, after the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, where, due to Bar Kamtza’s embarrassment over being forced to leave the meal, the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, Chazal added to the rule and said that if the guest would be embarrassed, he does not have to listen to the host.

Learning from Avraham Avinu The Acharonim (see Magen Avraham 170:10) cite a Gemara (Arachin 16b) that states: “A person should not change his place of lodgings.” In other words, if a person was a guest in a city and he ate and slept in the home of a particular family, when he revisits that city, he should return to the original host. The Gemara derives this from Avraham Avinu. The pasuk tells us that upon returning to Eretz Canaan from Mitzrayim, “Vayeilech lemasa’av” – “he went to his travels.” Chazal understand that on his return trip he stayed in the same inns where he stayed when traveling towards Mitzrayim. Although most of the Gemara is beyond the scope of this article, it can be said that a person must make every effort to try and heed this dictum, even if it means some inconvenience. The reason for this, explains the Gemara, is because, by not doing so, people will think badly of both the host and the guest. They will think the reason why the guest is staying elsewhere is because the host did not fulfill the mitzvah of hachnosas orchim properly. And they will think badly of the guest, because his actions indicate that he does not get along with other people. Based on this, if the guest has a legitimate excuse not to stay in the home of his original host, he is

allowed to seek other lodgings. For example: Yehudah arrives from out-of-town to attend the wedding of Levi’s son, and Levi graciously invites Yehudah to sleep and eat in his home. During Yehudah’s next trip to that city to participate in the wedding of Naftali’s daughter, he may stay in Naftali’s house and does not have to stay with Levi. This is because everyone realizes why Yehudah is changing his place of lodging. Similarly, if the original host is unable to have guests, the guest is permitted to find another place to stay (Ahaleich Ba’amitecha [Rav Betzalel Stern] chapter #25).

Torah is Primary Concerning learning words of Torah during the meal, the Chassid Yaavetz (Avos 3:4) writes as follows: “It is a great obligation, for the time of eating is a test and an indicator whether one loves Torah or not. This can be compared to a person who has a son in a distant land and at the time of his joy, he remembers him, as it is written (Tehillim 137:6): ‘If I fail to elevate Yerushalayim above the forehead of my joys.’ Therefore, at the time of eating when a person is happy, if he remembers the Torah, it is recognizable that its love is bound to his heart... A person should make the Torah primary and eating secondary. People do the opposite, as their joy is only when they attain a ‘sea of pleasures,’ and they are depressed and distressed when they do not attain them... It is fitting for a person to rejoice only with fear of Hashem, which is the purpose for which we were created...”