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**Rav Yissocher Frand - Parshas Chayei Sarah
Sarah's Legacy Lives**

"Chayei Sarah" – An Appropriate Name for The Parsha?

At the beginning of the parsha, the Torah says that Sarah lived to be 127 years old. It seems very peculiar that the name of the parsha is "Chayei Sarah" [the life of Sarah] when Sarah dies in its very first pasuk. Of course, it might not be appropriate to name the parsha "the death of Sarah" (Mias Sarah) but perhaps the parsha could have had a more fitting name, as this is the story of her death and burial, not her life.

The truth of the matter is that we find a similar peculiarity in Parshas Vayechi (which literally means "And he lived"). There too, the very first pasuk of the parsha says that Yaakov lived for 147 years, and it is basically about Yaakov's death, rather than his life.

What is the significance of these parsha name choices? The sefer Milchomos Yehudah cites a Medrash from the beginning of our parsha. The Medrash on the first pasuk in Chayei Sarah quotes the pasuk in Tehillim, "Yodeah Hashem yemei temimim; v'nachalasm l'olam teeheyeh" [Hashem is aware of the days of those who are perfect, their legacy shall last forever] [Psalms 37:18]. The point of this Medrash is that even though a person may die, in a certain sense, he continues to live on. If a person lives a full and complete life (yemei temimim) – a life that is full of Torah and full of mitzvos and ma'asim tovim [good deeds], full of children and full of grandchildren – then that person indeed keeps on living. That is what the end of this pasuk refers to – their legacy shall last forever."

Sarah is Imeinu ["our mother"]. We have Three Patriarchs and Four Matriarchs. Klal Yisrael was built on the shoulders of the Matriarchs. So all of us are here today by virtue of the lives of Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu. Is there a greater "legacy", is there a greater "eternity" than having been the matriarch of an entire nation?

In spite of the fact that Sarah lived 127 years and then she died, it is still appropriate to call this parsha "Chayei Sarah" – because Sarah is very much alive, even after the 127 years of her life.

I recently heard an idea which expresses the same concept. During this past Aseres Yemei Teshuva (September 2010), Rebbetzin Kulefsky passed away. She was the widow of Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky who was one of the premier Maggidei Shiur [Talmud teachers] in all of America and, at the end of his life, was actually the Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisroel. At her levaya, Rav Moshe Glustein from Montreal, a mechutan of the Kulefskys, shared a very interesting thought from Rav Chatzkel Abramsky.

The pasuk in Tehillim says, "For in his death he will take nothing with him, (when he goes down into the grave) his honor will not follow him." [P[Psalms 49:18]he simple reading of this pasuk articulates the well-known maxim "You can't take it with you," according to which this pasuk has a very sobering message. Whatever we accumulate in this world, we will not be able to take it with us.

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky put an opposite spin on this pasuk. Rav Abramsky said, this pasuk is teaching something to which we should aspire: When a person goes to the grave, he is not going to take everything with him, because he is going to leave it here on earth! What is he going to leave on earth? His legacy! He is going to leave his children, his grandchildren, and his good deeds (ma'asim tovim). He is going to leave all that he accomplished in this world.

"You are not going to take anything with you" – meaning, do not worry! Your accomplishments will not descend to the grave with you. Nothing follows you to the grave. It all remains here, so that which you have accomplished here in this world can be built on and will continue.

Throughout a person's lifetime, he needs to try to build this legacy, so he will have something to leave over after 120 years! "Lo yered acharav k'vodo" means – Do not think that when you leave this world, your honor will vanish. No! On the contrary! Honor does NOT follow a person to the grave. His honor will remain in this world – in the children he leaves over and in the dividends paid by the growth of institutions he has built and contributed to during his lifetime.

With this idea, Rav Glustein cited an insight from Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, which, again, presents a totally unique interpretation of a well-known passage. When we console a mourner, we say the words "HaMakom Yenachem Eschem..." [M[May the Omnipresent Comfort you...]] Many times at funerals, speakers will try to homiletically explain why we say "HaMakom Yenachem Eschem..." HaMakom is one of the Names describing Hashem, but why is that particular Name used on this occasion, as opposed to so many other Names indicative of other Divine Attributes? Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says HaMakom does NOT refer to Hashem in this passage. The word makom literally means "place." HaMakom Yenachem Eschem means the place that the deceased created for him or herself in Gan Eden should be the biggest consolation! When a person reaches Gan Eden and Hashem gives him his rightful reward for all he did in this world, that MAKOM (place in Gan Eden) will be the biggest consolation for having had to leave this world.

This is another dimension to the idea that "his honor will not descend with him to the grave." In other words, do not think the honor is all lost. The honor will remain – in this world (by the legacy left) and in the world to come (by the MAKOM earned in Gan Eden).

This then is why the parsha is called Chayei Sarah. In spite of the fact that indeed it deals with Sarah's death, in truth, Sarah is still very much alive. This is because Hashem is aware of the days of those who are temimim and the legacy they leave behind is l'olam va'ed [forever and ever] Sarah Imenu is still very much alive and it is appropriate to refer to our parsha as Chayei Sarah!

Where's the Chinuch?

Rabbi Leibel Hyman, z"l (who was a Rav in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem) commented that the parshios of Lech Lecha, Vayera, and Chayei Sarah are

the parshios which contain the story of Avraham Avinu's life. Toldos contains the story of Yitzchak's life. Then Vayetzei, Vayishlach, Vayeshev, Miketz, Vayigash, and Vayechi contain the story of Yakov Avinu and his twelve sons.

We are now finishing the "book" of Avraham Avinu. These three parshios (Lech Lecha, Vayera, Chayei Sarah) contain dialogues between Avraham and many different individuals. He has dialogues with the Kings of Egypt, Gerar, and Sodom. He has dialogues with Sarah and with Hagar. He has dialogues with Lot and Eliezer. Avraham has been engaged in many types of conversation. In this week's parsha, too, Avraham has an extended dialogue with the Children of Ches, negotiating the purchase of a burial plot for his wife.

The narrative of Avraham's life is one of interaction. Avraham Avinu, the Torah teaches, was the greatest pedagogue – a master mechanech! The pasuk says, "For I know him that he commands his children and household that they should keep the way of Hashem to do righteousness and justice..." [B[Bereshis 18:19]Rashi interprets this pasuk to say: G-d says: "I love Avraham Avinu because he will train his children to follow the ways of Hashem..." This is why Hashem chose Avraham—because of his pedagogic abilities!

So let us ask ourselves a question. There are three parshios detailing the life of Avraham Avinu. They contain all these many dialogues. How many times did Avraham Avinu talk to Yitzchak in all the pesukim in the Chumash? The answer is—once. One time, for a total of fifteen words!

Of all that transpired over all these parshios, the Torah only shares 15 words that this great teacher and educator, the role model for all future fathers in terms of how to raise their children in the ways of Hashem, spoke with his son! Does this advocate a pedagogic approach that "the less said the better?" Unlikely!

Apparently, Avraham never told his son, "Listen, you need to get up for minyan." Fifteen words! Where is the Chinuch [education] Where, when, and how did he implement the role of, "For I know him that he has commanded his children and members of his household to keep the ways of Hashem"? We cannot say he did not do it or that he was not successful in this endeavor because we know that he was extremely successful. How do we know that? We know that because when he tells Yitzchak to literally put his neck on the Mizbayach "because I am about to slaughter you," Yitzchak does not question him. He does not say, "Daddy, maybe you did not hear right."

After all, it was an astonishing request! Yitzchak did not object. He did not ask any questions. Not only did he go willingly, Chazal say that Yitzchak told Avraham "Tie me to the Mizbayach tightly, lest I flinch and invalidate the slaughter." How does someone raise a son to react like that? Obviously, Avraham must have been a master educator. So where did it happen?

The answer is that although Avraham may not have talked much to his son, he acted very much. Avraham acted and Yitzchak observed. Yitzchak saw how to treat guests. He saw how to draw those who were distant from Hashem to become near to Him. Yitzchak saw all that Avraham Avinu did. He saw how he talked to his wife. This is the interpretation of, "I know that he commands his children and household after him..."

There is an expression "You can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?" Avraham Avinu walked the walk. Yitzchak observing his father all these years had a profound impression. This is how the education took place in Avraham's household. This is the interpretation of "commanding his children and household to follow in the ways of Hashem to do righteousness and justice."

There is a gentleman in this audience who asked that I not use his name, but he told me that he makes a point – at least a few times a week – to have his Chavrusa [T[Torah study partner]ome over to his house to learn with him (rather than meeting in a shul or Beis Medrash). He wants to show his children what it means "Daddy is learning with a Chavrusa."

He told me that one time he was not feeling well and he needed to daven at home. His daughter, who was five years old at the time, saw him put on Tallis and Tefillin for the first time asked, "What is that?" I am not advocating davening at home, but the point is well taken. Children need to see it. The way to educate is by demonstration, by living, by acting, by being. Yesterday, I spent a long day on trains and I took along a sefer called B'Mechitzas Rabbeinu about the life of someone who lived next door to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in Monsey, NY for many years. He wrote a beautiful sefer which I was reading on the train. Here we can see S'yata D'Shmaya [D[Divine Assistance]I had no idea if I would ever have a chance to use the material I came across in this sefer but here we are on the very next night, and an idea I saw there fits in very appropriately.

Rav Yaakov said a very interesting thing (and I do not mean this to cast aspersions on the way we do things today, because it is obviously a different era): Rav Yaakov said that when he learned in Slabodka, there was no dormitory there. That was the way it was in most European Yeshivos until Rav Meir Shapiro started the Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin, where there was a dormitory and a dining room, which were both novel innovations.

How did Yeshiva Bochrim eat in prior times? There was an institution call "Stancia." This means the Yeshiva would assign every bochur a family with whom he would stay. He would sleep there; he would eat there; he would live with this family. Obviously, the Yeshivas would select appropriate families, and this is how the bochrim lived. Rav Yaakov explained, "Do you know why the Alter of Slabodka did not build a dormitory? It was not because of financial considerations and not because of the great effort it would have required. He wanted bochrim who were away from home learning in Yeshiva to live with families. He wanted them to see how people live! Dormitories and dining rooms are wonderful things but they are institutions. In an institutional life, you do not see how a husband talks to a wife, how parents talk with children, or how families deal with crises. The Alter – who was "The Master Educator" specifically wanted young yeshiva students to live in houses with regular families. He wanted to expose them to what life is all about.

When Rav Ruderman came to Slabodka, he was twelve years old. When bochrim came to Slabodka, they were young. So where was their home life? The answer is that they observed home life in the "stancias."

This is the essence of the above mentioned thought on the parsha. The way Avraham Avinu educated his son Yitzchak was by living it and by Yitzchak seeing it.

We are all familiar with the terminology ma'aseh Avos siman l'Banim [t[the actions of the patriarchs foreshadow that of the descendants]Rav Leibel Hyman emphasizes ma'aseh Avos – the actions of the fathers siman l'Banim will determine the destiny of the character of their offspring.

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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

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 occurrence of Avraham's life 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. However, Avraham apparently dealt with the death of Sarah in a more stoic fashion. The Torah itself indicates this by inference, when it wrote concerning Avraham's reaction to the tragedy by using a small letter kaf in its description of 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 already endured, his attitude towards life and its vicissitudes was now always one of looking forward and never dwelling 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 - and never dwelled on past misfortune.

I heard an outstanding speech delivered by George Deek, a Christian Arab who is a 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 in saving and resettling the refugees, his grandfather escaped Lebanon and somehow brought the family back to Jaffa and Israel, regained his job with the Israel Electric Company. He 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, in their legend of nakba and, in the main, devoted themselves to attempting to destroy Israel rather than rehabilitating themselves.

That 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
Rabbi Berel Wein

God and Strangers (Vayera 5779)

Covenant & Conversation Judaism & Torah

God appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men were standing over against him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent entrance, and bowed down to the earth... (Gen. 18:1–2)

Thus Parshat Vayera opens with one of the most famous scenes in the Bible: Abraham's meeting with the three enigmatic strangers. The text calls them men. We later discover that they were in fact angels, each with a specific mission.

The chapter at first glance seems simple, almost fable-like. It is, however, complex and ambiguous. It consists of three sections:

Verse 1: God appears to Abraham.

Verses 2–16: Abraham meets the men/angels.

Verses 17–33: The dialogue between God and Abraham about the fate of Sodom.

The relationship between these sections is far from clear. Do they represent one scene, two or three?

The most obvious possibility is three. Each of the above sections is a separate event. First, God appears to Abraham, as Rashi explains, "to visit the sick"[1] after Abraham's circumcision. Then the visitors arrive with the news that Sarah will have a child. Then takes place the great dialogue about justice and the imminent punishment of the people of Sodom.

Maimonides suggests that there are only two scenes: The visit of the angels, and the dialogue with God. The first verse does not describe an event at all; it is, rather, a chapter heading.[2] It tells us that the events that follow are all part of a prophetic revelation, a divine-human encounter.

The third possibility is that we have a single continuous scene. God appears to Abraham, but before He can speak, Abraham sees the passers-by and asks God to wait while he serves them food. Only when they have departed – in verse 17 – does he turn to God, and the conversation begins.

The interpretation of the chapter affects – and hinges upon – the way we translate the word Adonai in Abraham's appeal: "Please Adonai, if now I have found favour in your sight, do not pass by, I pray you, from your servant" (18:3). Adonai can be a reference to one of the names of God. It can also be read as "my lords" or "sirs." In the first case, Abraham would be addressing God. In the second, he would be speaking to the passers-by.

The same linguistic ambiguity appears in the next chapter (19:2), when two of Abraham's visitors – now described as angels – visit Lot in Sodom:

And the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot sat by the city gates. When he saw them, he rose to meet them and bowing low, he said, "I pray you now, adonai, turn aside to your servant's house and tarry all night and bathe your feet and you shall rise up early and go on your way." (Gen. 19:1–2)

As there is no contextual element to suggest that Lot might be speaking to God, it seems clear, in this case, that adonai refers to the visitors.

The simplest reading then of both texts – the one concerning Abraham, the other, Lot – would be to read the word consistently as "sirs." Several English translations indeed take this approach. Here, for example, is the New English Bible's:

The Lord appeared to Abraham... He looked up, and saw three men standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the opening of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. "Sirs," he said, "if I have deserved your favour, do not pass by my humble self without a visit."

Jewish tradition, however, does not.

Normally, differences of interpretation of biblical narrative have no halakhic implications. They are matters of legitimate disagreement. This case of Abraham's addressee is unusual, however, because if we translate Adonai as "God," it is a holy name, and both the writing of the word by a scribe, and the way we treat a parchment or document containing it, have special stringencies in Jewish law. If, by contrast, we translate it as "my lords" or "sirs," it has no special sanctity. Jewish law rules that in the scene with Lot, adonai is read as "sirs," but in the case of Abraham it is read as "God." This is an extraordinary fact, because it suggests that Abraham actually interrupted God as He was about to speak, asking Him to wait while he attended to the visitors. According to tradition, the passage should be read thus:

The Lord appeared to Abraham... He looked up and saw three men standing over against him. On seeing them, he hurried from his tent door to meet them, and bowed down. [Turning to God] he said: "My God, if I have found favour in Your eyes, do not leave Your servant [i.e. Please wait until I have given hospitality to these men]." [He then turned to the men and said:] "Let me send for some water so that you may bathe your feet and rest under this tree..."[3]

This daring interpretation became the basis for a principle in Judaism: "Greater is hospitality than receiving the Divine Presence." [4] Faced with a choice between listening to God, and offering hospitality to what seemed to be human beings, Abraham chose the latter. God acceded to his request, and waited while Abraham brought the visitors food and drink, before engaging him in dialogue about the fate of Sodom. How can this be so? It seems

disrespectful at best, heretical at worst, to put the needs of human beings before attending on the presence of God.

What the passage is telling us, though, is something of immense profundity. The idolaters of Abraham's time worshipped the sun, the stars, and the forces of nature as gods. They worshipped power and the powerful. Abraham knew, however, that God is not in nature but beyond nature. There is only one thing in the universe on which He has set His image: the human person, every person, powerful and powerless alike.

The forces of nature are impersonal, which is why those who worship them eventually lose their humanity. As the book of Psalms puts it:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

They have mouths, but cannot speak,

Eyes, but cannot see;

They have ears, but cannot hear, nostrils but cannot smell...

They that make them become like them,

And so do all who put their trust in them. (Psalms 115:4-8)

One cannot worship impersonal forces and remain a person; compassionate, humane, generous, forgiving. Precisely because we believe that God is personal, someone to whom we can say "You," we honour human dignity as sacrosanct.

Abraham, father of monotheism, knew the paradoxical truth that to live the life of faith is to see the trace of God in the face of the stranger. It is easy to receive the Divine Presence when God appears as God. What is difficult is to sense the Divine Presence when it comes disguised as three anonymous passers-by. That was Abraham's greatness. He knew that serving God and offering hospitality to strangers were not two things but one.

In one of the most beautiful comments on this episode, Rabbi Shalom of Belz notes that in verse 2, the visitors are spoken of as standing above Abraham (nitzavim alav), while in verse 8, Abraham is described as standing above them (omed aleihem). At first, the visitors were higher than Abraham because they were angels and he a mere human being. But when he gave them food and drink and shelter, he stood even higher than the angels.[5] By choosing the most radical of the three possible interpretations of Genesis 18, the sages allowed us to hear one of the most fundamental principles of the life of faith: We honour God by honouring His image, humankind. Shabbat Shalom

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Chayei Sarah

Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Although this Sidra is entitled "The Life of Sarah," it really commences with her death and with the sentence, "And the life of Sarah was 100 years and 20 years and 7 years: These were the years of the life of Sarah." This highly repetitious wording exercised the Midrashic commentators, who gave three explanations, each emphasizing that the Torah is here praising Sarah for her perfection. The Rebbe examines these explanations, showing how each subtly stresses a different aspect of this perfection; and how, in general, righteousness lifts a person above the vicissitudes of time.

1. The First Midrash

"And the life of Sarah was 100 years and 20 years and 7 years: These were the years of the life of Sarah."¹ On this verse the Midrash² comments: "G-d knows the days of the perfect and their inheritance shall be for ever;"³ just as they are perfect so are their years perfect. At 20 she (Sarah) was as beautiful as at seven; at 100 she was as free from sin as at 20."

(Another reading has it that she was as beautiful at 100 as at 20, and as sinless at 20 as at 7.)

The commentators, including Rashi, explain that the Midrash is commenting on the threefold repetition of the word "years," where the phrase "127 years" would have sufficed. And it cites the verse "G-d knows the days of the perfect," making play of the phrase, which could also mean "the perfect days": Suggesting that each day in the life of the righteous is perfect in itself. And this is reinforced by the verse about Sarah, whose wording suggests that all her years were equal in their perfection.

But there are difficulties in this explanation:

(i) The expression of the Midrash is "just as they are perfect, so their years are perfect." But if perfection here means freedom from sin, then the perfection of the person and of his days are one and the same thing. But the Midrash in using the language of comparison ("just as") suggests they are two distinct things.

If, on the other hand, perfection denotes physical beauty, then the Midrash is surely difficult to understand for though Sarah may have been as beautiful at 100 as she was at 20, this was not true of all the intervening period, for there was a time when Sarah was "withered."⁴ So at 100 she may have been perfect but her years (i.e., the period until then) were not.

(ii) The very phrase "their years are perfect?" is strange, for normally this would be taken to be related to the years themselves. But the Midrash here is unusually taking it to refer to the perfection of the person during these years.

(iii) The Midrash seems to make an unwarranted transition from the phrase "the days of the perfect" to the phrase "so their years are perfect." Although this verse mentioning "days" is quoted in order to explain the word "years" in the verse from our Sidra, surely it would be more consistent to use the word "days" in explaining the verse discussing "the days of the perfect."

2. The Second Midrash

After its first explanation, the Midrash adds another: "An alternative explanation is: 'G-d knows the days of the perfect'; this refers to Sarah who was perfect in her actions. Rabbi Jochanan said: Like a perfect calf."

At first glance there are two differences between this and the earlier comment:

(a) the first reading takes "perfect" to apply to "days" while the second applies it to people;

(b) the first understands perfection as comprising all attributes (including the purely physical trait of beauty), but the second relates it to good deeds alone. But there are problems even in the second Midrash:

(i) Surely the second comment should add something to our understanding of the verse "G-d knows the days of the perfect." But what, in effect, does the second comment contain that is not obvious (i.e., that only one who is perfect indeed can be considered perfect)?

(ii) What does Rabbi Jochanan's comment "like a perfect calf" add to our understanding of what preceded it?

(iii) The Midrash, in saying of the verse from the Psalms, "this refers to Sarah" seems to be explaining that verse rather than the verse from our Sidra which it set out to elucidate.

3. The Third Midrash

After explaining the threefold repetition of the word "years" in our verse, the Midrash then comments on the apparently redundant phrase "these were the years of the life of Sarah," and relates it to the second phrase of the verse from Psalms, "and their inheritance shall be forever."

"Why did the Torah need to add, 'these were the years of the life of Sarah?' To tell us that the lives of the righteous are precious to G-d, both in this world and in the world to come."

But this too requires explanation:

- (i) It is obvious that the righteous have a share in the world to come, and even that their future life is precious to G-d. Why then did the Midrash need to tell us this, and bring a verse from the Psalms to prove it?
- (ii) Granted that the future life is hinted at by the repetition “And the life of Sarah was...; these were the years of the life of Sarah” (suggesting two lives, in this world and the next); but how from this verse do we learn the additional point that the lives of the righteous in the world to come are precious to G-d?
- (iii) What is the connection between the two apparently unrelated interpretations of the last phrase of the verse: The simple meaning, that it refers to Sarah’s life in this world; and the Midrashic explanation, that it speaks of her future life?

4. The Preservation of Perfection

We will understand all these points if we first consider the following: When a man finds himself in an environment detrimental to his standards, there are three ways in which he can preserve his integrity:

- (i) He can strengthen himself inwardly not to be influenced by his surroundings. But this is an incomplete victory, for if he were to relax his self-control he would capitulate, thus implying a lowering of status.
- (ii) He can separate himself from those around him. But again his victory is only because he has removed himself from temptation: He has not met it head-on, and is as prone as ever to be lowered.
- (iii) Lastly, he can set out to influence his environment and raise it to his own level.⁵ This is a complete triumph over one’s surroundings—the dangers have not only been avoided, they have been removed entirely.

In the same way a man can preserve himself from change in the face of sin and even physical decay. He can master the ravages of time. Firstly by strengthening himself spiritually he can discountenance the blandishments of the material world. But here the possibility of sin remains, warded off only by constant vigilance. This is why the Midrash in speaking of Sarah says that when she was 100 she was like she was at 20—at this level there is only a resemblance, not an identity, of old age to youth. Secondly, by living the life fired by the essence of the soul rather than by its manifest levels (i.e., by retreat from the physical), one can transcend time and its bodily effects. But this again is an impermanent state, for the body retains its predilection for materialism. Lastly, when the perceptions of the soul permeate the body and all its actions, one’s physical nature is not suppressed but transformed, and the whole being partakes of the timelessness of the spirit in its relations with G-d. The possibility of sin does not arise.

5. The Constancy of Sarah

This is why the Midrash explains that Sarah was, at 100, like she was at 20, only after it has cited the verse from Psalms and added, “just as they are perfect so their years are perfect.” Only by perfection of a life comes that state of changelessness which characterized Sarah. And the repetition of the word “years” in the Sidra tells us that each total (100, 20 and 7) is compared to the others: At 100 Sarah was as far from the possibility of sin as she was at 20 or at 7. In other words, she had attained the highest of the three degrees of integrity.

But how can we reconcile this with the fact that she did undergo changes, and that there was a time when she lost her beauty? The word “shnotam” which means “their years” also means “their changes.”⁶ So the Midrash may subtly be telling us also that even “their changes were perfect.” Even though (and indeed, because) externally the righteous alter and undergo vicissitudes, these ultimately serve only to reveal their underlying constancy, as the light of their souls shines undimmed.

6. The Final Perfection

It has often been explained that the righteous “go from strength to strength”⁷—meaning that their life is (not merely progression within one level, but) a progression to infinitely higher levels of faithfulness. How then can it be to Sarah’s praise that all her years were equal in their excellence? Surely this implies the absence of such a degree of progress?

This is the problem that the second Midrash comes to solve. By telling us that at the point of her death Sarah achieved “perfection in her actions,” it discloses that she then reached that level of perfection and closeness to G-d that retroactively perfects all her previous actions (just as true repentance transforms the sins of the past into merits).⁸

The second Midrash thus goes beyond the first—for the first speaks of an attribute common to all the perfectly righteous figures of history; the second refers to Sarah alone (“this refers to Sarah”), that she transcended this level and actually transformed her earlier actions by her final repentance. And this was why Rabbi Jochanan added the analogy of the “perfect calf,” for it was by the sacrifice of a calf (the Eglah Arufah⁹) that atonement was retroactively made for all the Children of Israel since their exodus from Egypt.¹⁰

7. The Premature Death

But still a problem remains.

Each life has its allotted span, and that limit defines the work which that life has to seek to achieve. But Sarah died prematurely, for, as the Rabbis say, “her soul fainted away”¹¹ when she heard the news of the binding of Isaac (through grief at the binding¹² or through excessive joy¹³). If she did not live to complete her span and its task, how can we call her life perfect?

To answer this, the Midrash tells us, the Torah adds “these were the years of the life of Sarah,” because “the lives of the righteous are precious to G-d both in this world and the next.” In other words, the righteous who die before their time can complete their work, even in the after-life. Just as the reward for the creation of spiritual benefits is ascribed to the deceased,¹⁴ and the good acts of one’s child helps a departed parent.¹⁵

8. The Everlasting Spirit

One final difficulty persists. Time in this life is granted to us, not merely to achieve a certain amount of good works, but also so that time itself be sanctified by our actions. A day filled with Mitzvot is a day which has been made to fulfill its purpose. So even though Sarah could complete her task in other-worldly domains, this-worldly time remained unsanctified and imperfect.

This is why the verse, after mentioning the years of Sarah’s life, then continues: “These are the years of the life of Sarah,” referring, as the Midrash tells us, to her after-life. Since the Torah reckons even this as a continuation of her years, it is telling us that her sanctifying influence persisted in time even after her death. The perfect life does not end in death: It sanctifies all that comes after it.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. V pp. 92-104)

FOOTNOTES

1. Bereishit 23:1.
2. Bereishit Rabbah, loc. cit.
3. Psalms 37:18.
4. Bereishit 18:12.
5. Since man and his environment are affected by each other, it is ultimately impossible that one should not influence the other (Cf. Rambam, Hilchot Deot, beginning of ch. 6).
6. Cf. Or Hatorah, Mikketz 338b, that the word shana—year is from the same root as shinui—change.
7. Psalms 84:8.
8. The Hebrew word for repentance, teshuvah, means “return,” for the act of repentance is a return, in life, of the soul to its Divine Source. The death of the righteous is also the return of the soul to its Source, and retroactively affects every action of their life (Tanya, Part IV, ch. 28).

9. Cf. Devarim 21:1-9.
- 10 Horiot, 6a; Keritut, 26a.
- 11 Rosh Hashana, 16b; Baba Kama, 93a.
- 12 Bereishit Rabbah, 58:5.
- 13 Riva's commentary Sefer Hayashar.
14. Pirkei Avot, 5:8.
- 15 Sanhedrin, 104a.

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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Chayei Sarah (Genesis 23:1 – 25:18)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “My lord hearken to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me.” (Genesis 23:14)
 A significant part of this Torah portion deals with Abraham’s purchase of the Hebron grave-site from the Hittites in order to bury Sarah, his beloved wife. In painstaking detail, the text describes how the patriarch requests to buy the grave, how the Hittites wish him to take it for free, and – when Efron the Hittite finally agrees to make it a sale – he charges Abraham the inflated and outlandish sum of four hundred silver shekels. The Midrash seems perplexed: why expend so much ink and parchment – the entire chapter 23 of the book of Genesis – over a Middle-Eastern souk sale? Moreover, what is the significance in the fact that the very first parcel of land in Israel acquired by a Jew happens to be a grave-site? And finally, how can we explain the irony of the present day Israeli-Palestinian struggle over grave-sites – the Ma’arat HaMakhpela in Hebron where our matriarchs and patriarchs are buried and Joseph’s grave-site in Shekhem – which were specifically paid for in the Bible by our patriarchs?

In order to understand our biblical portion, it is important to remember that throughout the ancient world – with the single exception of Athens – the only privilege accorded a citizen of any specific country was the ‘right’ of burial, as every individual wanted his body to ultimately merge with the soil of his familial birthplace. Abraham insists that he is a stranger as well as a resident (*ger toshav*) of Het; he lives among, but is not one of, the Hittites. Abraham is a proud Hebrew; he refuses the ‘right’ of burial and demands to pay – even if the price is exorbitant – for the establishment of a separate Hebrew cemetery. Sarah’s separate grave-site symbolizes her separate and unique identity. Abraham wants to ensure that she dies as a Hebrew and not a Hittite. In effect, the Hittites are more than willing to give Sarah a free grave, because they want to claim her as a Hittite; Abraham will never allow that!

Interestingly, the Talmud uses the same verb (*kikha*) to describe Abraham’s purchase of a grave-site and to derive the law that a legal engagement can only take place when the groom gives the bride a ring (or a minimum amount of money) to effectuate the marriage. Perhaps our tradition is suggesting that marriage requires a husband to take ultimate responsibility for his wife – especially in terms of securing her separate and unique identity – even beyond her life and into her grave.

This parasha reminds me of two poignant stories. First, when I was a very young rabbi, one of the first “emergency” questions I received was from an older woman leaning on a young Roman Catholic priest for support. She tearfully explained that her husband – who had died just a few hours earlier – was in need of a Jewish burial place. He had converted to Catholicism prior to having married her, and agreed that their children would be raised as Catholics. The Roman Catholic priest was, in fact, their son and she had never met any member of her husband’s Jewish family. Even though they lived as Catholics during thirty- five years of their married life, his final deathbed wish had been to be buried in a Jewish cemetery....

Second, when my good and beloved friend Zalman Bernstein z”l was still living in America and beginning his return to Judaism, he asked me to find him a grave-site in the Mount of Olives cemetery. With the help of the Hevra Kadisha (Sacred Fellowship) of Jerusalem, we set aside a plot. When he inspected it, however, he was most disappointed:

‘You cannot see the Temple Mount,’ he shouted, in his typical fashion. I attempted to explain calmly that after 120 years, he either wouldn’t be able to see anything anyway, or he would be able to see everything no matter where his body lay. ‘You don’t understand,’ he countered. ‘I made a mess of my life so far and did not communicate to my children the glories of Judaism. The grave is my future and my eternity. Perhaps, when my children come to visit me there, if they would be able to see the holiest place in the world, the Temple Mount, they will be inspired by the Temple and come to appreciate what I could not adequately communicate to them while I was alive...’

For each individual, their personal grave-site represents the past and the future. Where and how individuals choose to be buried speaks volumes about how they lived their past lives and the values they aspired to. Similarly, for a nation, the grave-sites of its founders and leaders represent the past and reveal the signposts of the highs and lows in the course of the nation’s history. The way a nation regards its grave-sites and respects its history will determine the quality of its future. Indeed, the nation that chooses to forget its past has abdicated its future, because it has erased the tradition of continuity which it ought have transmitted to the future; the nation that does not properly respect the grave-sites of its founding patriarchs will not have the privilege of hosting the lives of their children and grandchildren. Perhaps this is why the Hebrew word, *kever*, literally a grave, is likewise used in rabbinical literature for womb. And the Hebrew name *Rvkh* (Rebecca), the wife of Isaac who took Sarah’s place as the guiding matriarch, is comprised of the same letters as *hkvr*, the grave and/or the womb, the future which emerges from the past. Is it then any wonder that the first parcel of land in Israel purchased by the first Hebrew was a grave-site, and that the fiercest battles over ownership of the land of Israel surround the graves of our founding fathers and mothers? And perhaps this is why our Sages deduce the proper means for engagement from Abraham’s purchase of a grave-site for Sarah – Jewish familial future must be built upon the life style and values of our departed matriarchs and patriarchs. The grave is also the womb; the past is mother to the future. Shabbat Shalom

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Rav Kook Torah

Chayei Sarah: Guarding the Inner Child

The Torah counts the years of Sarah’s long life: “A hundred years and twenty years and seven years; these were the years of Sarah’s life” (Gen. 23:1). Noting the verse’s wordiness, the Sages commented that throughout all the years of her life – whether at age seven, twenty, or a hundred – Sarah retained the same goodness, the same purity, and the same youthful innocence.

Despite her long years of barrenness, despite twice being kidnapped as she accompanied her husband Abraham on his many journeys, Sarah did not become hard and cynical. Their son was named Isaac – *Yitzchak*, “he will laugh” – due to Abraham’s feelings of wonderment and Sarah’s amazed laughter. “God had given me laughter; all who hear will rejoice for me” (Gen. 21:6).

How to Educate

From the inspiring example of Sarah’s purity and faith, we can learn an important lesson about education.

The nation's future depends upon how we educate the next generation. How should we tend to the vineyard of the House of Israel so that the saplings will prosper and grow, anchoring fast roots below and producing pleasant fruit above? How can we make sure that our children will develop into complete Jewish adults, their values firmly rooted in their heritage, living lives that are "pleasing to God and to man"?

We must take care to avoid slavish imitation of the educational methods of other nations. Our educational approach must suit the special nature and unique characteristics of our nation.

Two Views of Childhood

The question of education revolves around an even more basic question. What is childhood? Is it just a preparatory stage leading to adulthood, or does it have intrinsic value in and of itself?

If life is all about working and earning a livelihood, then a child is simply a lump of clay to be formed into a tool to serve in the nation's workforce.

Childhood is but a preparation for adulthood, when one becomes a productive member of society, a cog in the great machine of the nation's economy.

But there is another view of life, an idealistic outlook which values the qualities of purity and innocence. Such a viewpoint sees childhood as a stage of life that has value in its own right. The Sages recognized the special contribution of children to the world. "The world endures only for the sake of the breath of school children," for their Torah is learned in purity, undefiled by sin (Shabbat 119b).

When children are educated properly, we may discern within their pristine souls untold measures of holiness and purity. But this is only true if the grace and beauty of these delicate flowers is not crushed by the spirit-numbing reality of the factory floor and the cynical manipulations of greedy corporations.

Childhood is good and holy, but it is too weak and vulnerable to withstand the powerful forces of society. It is our duty to preserve the simplicity of childhood, to carefully allow our children to mature without losing their innate innocence. This will enable them to acquire the physical strength and spiritual resilience that they lack, while retaining the innocent exuberance of childhood.

My Anointed Ones

"Do not harm meshichai, My anointed ones - this refers to school children" (Shabbat 119b). Why are children called "God's anointed ones"? Anointing is not a one-time event, but an initiation ceremony which influences the years to come. Thus a king is anointed, and throughout the years of his reign he is the melech ha-mashiach, the anointed king.

The same is true with childhood. When it has not been debased by the pressures of an exploitative society, childhood is our anointing, our initiation, so that we may enjoy its pure fruits throughout our lives.

This is the beautiful example that Sarah provides. She lived a life of holiness and pure faith, retaining her childlike wonder and purity throughout the many vicissitudes of her long life. "All her years were equal in goodness" (Rashi).

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ma'amerei HaRe'iyah vol. II, pp. 230-231, from a 1905 lecture that Rav Kook delivered at the opening of a Talmud Torah school in Rehovot.)

See also: Chayei Sarah: Isaac's Afternoon Prayer

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Mashiach Arriving at Any Time

Q: How is it possible to believe that the Mashiach will arrive at any time when reality does not work through sudden miracles but gradually?

A: We believe in miracles. We do not rely on miracles but we believe in them.

Beit Ha-Mikdash Built on Tisha Be-Av

Q: If the Beit Ha-Mikdash is built on the day of Tisha Be-Av, do we continue the fast or stop?

A: Some Poskim say that it is similar to a fast for rain (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 575:11). If it begins to rain before noon, the fast is stopped, if it rains after noon, the fast is completed (This is also the opinion of Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski in the book 'Siach Ha-Nechama Al Bein Ha-Metzarim' p. 73).

Roman Numerals on Watch

Q: Is it permissible to wear a watch with Roman Numerals?

A: Yes. There is no prohibition regarding Roman numerals themselves, just as there is no prohibition for the commonly-used numbers, which were a Turkish creation that was adopted first by the Arabs and then by the entire world.

Pharaoh Spoke Hebrew?

Q: Did Pharaoh and Billam speak Hebrew or did the Torah translate what they said?

A: The Torah translated what they said.

Shaul and David

Q: Why did Shaul chase after David?

A: Shaul was a Tzadik but he mistakenly thought that David would cause damage to Am Yisrael.

Source for the Expression "Baseless Love"

Q: What is the source for the expression "Ahavat Chinam" (Baseless Love)?

A: Maran Ha-Rav Kook. The Gemara in Yoma (9b) says that the Second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred (Sinat Chinam) between Jews. Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains that since we destroyed it through baseless hatred, the remedy to building it is baseless love. Many Gedolei Yisrael later adopted this expression: The Admor of Viznitz, Ha-Rav Yisrael Hagar, said: "It is better for me to stumble 100 times in baselessly loving Israel than one time in baselessly hating Israel" (Ner Yisrael - Ha-Rav Ha-Kadosh R' Yisrael Mei-Viznitz p. 332), the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Likutei Sichot, Volume 7 Vayikra p. 326. Ibid. Volume 34 Devarim p. 229) and Breslov Chasidim: "Ahavat Chinam is good for the world".

The Souls of Converts Were at Sinai

Q: Are converts lacking in some way since they are not the offspring of Avraham Avinu?

A: Our Rabbis already asked this question and answered that the souls of converts were at Mt. Sinai. Shabbat 104. And they are the offspring of Avraham Avinu in their souls, if not physically (See Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 53:19 and 199:4 that converts say "Avoteinu" [our forefathers] in the Shemoneh Esrei and Birkat Ha-Mazon).

Lashon Ha-Ra to Hashem

Q: If I am speaking with Hashem, is it permissible for me to tell him Lashon Ha-Ra?

A: Yeshayahu Ha-Navi was punished when he told Hashem Lashon Ha-Ra about Am Yisrael, saying: I dwell among a Nation of impure lips (Yeshayahu 6:5).

Honoring Older Sister

Q: Is there an obligation to honor an older sister just as one is obligated to do so for an older brother?

A: Yes. Ha-Chida (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 240 #17).

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It might be beneficial to read through the article I sent out last week before reading this article.

Davening for Rain in the Southern Hemisphere II

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Mixed Messages

“How can you have two shullen in the same city, one saying vesein tal umatar and the other not, on the same day?”

Question #2: South of the Border

“What do Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Montivedeo, Recife, and Wellington and Auckland, New Zealand, have in common, but not Johannesburg, Perth, and Santiago, Chile?”

Introduction

Last week, we discussed the unique halachic issues that surfaced when Jewish communities began settling in the southern hemisphere. We learned that the first published responsum on this question was authored by Rav Chayim Shabtai, who was the rav in Salonica until his passing in 1647, and whose responsa were published as *Shu”t Toras Chayim*. His undated responsum is addressed to someone inquiring about the practices of the Jewish community in Brazil, without identifying which city in the country. The questioner assumes that rain during their summer months between Sukkos and Pesach would be very harmful. Therefore, the Brazilian community wanted to recite *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* and *vesein tal umatar* between Pesach and Sukkos and not recite them between Sukkos and Pesach.

We have previously discovered that the Rosh contended that, although in Eretz Yisroel rain is disadvantageous in the summer, in Europe, where he lived his entire life, rain was not only helpful in the summer, but it was essential. Since rain was important after Pesach, he felt that they should recite *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* and *vesein tal umatar* even in the summer months. We also discovered that the Rosh was unsuccessful in changing the practice of his community, and that he, himself, eventually stopped reciting these prayers after Pesach. Although he had not changed his opinion, since he was unsuccessful in changing the accepted practice, he did not want there to be divergent approaches in the same community.

We also learned that the *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chayim 117:2) rules that the halacha does not follow the Rosh. He writes that all communities begin reciting *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* on *Shemini Atzeres* and records only two practices regarding *vesein tal umatar*, the same two expressly mentioned in the *Gemara*. No other regional distinctions are recognized. In addition, we noted that when someone recites *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* or *vesein tal umatar* when he should not, he must repeat the davening. This presents us with the following intriguing question: Someone in Germany or Spain recites *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* or *vesein tal umatar* during or after Pesach. According to the *Shulchan Aruch*, they have recited something that they should not have, whereas the Rosh contends that they have followed the correct procedure. The question is whether we accept the opinion of the Rosh to the extent of not repeating the *shemoneh esrei* in this situation. Rav Yitzchak Abuhav, a highly respected authority, contended that one should not repeat the *shemoneh esrei* out of respect for the Rosh’s position.

In his *Beis Yosef* commentary on the Tur, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* was inclined to reject the Rosh’s ruling completely, to the extent of requiring the repetition of *shemoneh esrei*. However, because of the position of Rav Yitzchak Abuhav, the *Beis Yosef* modified his position, contending that someone who recited *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* or *vesein tal umatar* in Spain or Germany on or after Pesach should repeat the *shemoneh esrei* as a donated prayer, called a *tefillas nedavah*, which one may recite when there is a question as to whether one is required to repeat the prayer. The Rema concludes, like Rav Yitzchak Abuhav, that one should not repeat the *shemoneh esrei* in this situation.

Melbourne, Australia, 1890’s

In the 1890’s, Rav Avraham Eiver Hirschowitz, whose origins were in Lithuania, became the rav of Melbourne. Upon Rav Hirschowitz’s arrival in Melbourne, he discovered that the local community was following the practice of the *Toras Chayim*: They were not reciting *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* at all, and were reciting *vesein tal umatar* in *shomei’a tefillah* during the Australian winter between Pesach and Sukkos, and not reciting it at all during the months of *Marcheshvan* until Pesach. Rav Hirschowitz felt that this practice was an error in Australia, and immediately began addressing letters to several *gedolei Yisroel* regarding this practice. He explained that the *Toras Chayim*’s approach is based on the assumption that rain in the summer is detrimental, which he contended is not the case in Australia. Therefore, he concluded that Australia should follow the exact practice of everywhere else outside Eretz Yisroel and recite *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* from Sukkos to Pesach, and *vesein tal umatar* in *birchas hashanim*, when everyone in *chutz la’aretz* does this.

Much of Rav Hirschowitz’s correspondence on the subject was published in his own work, *Shu”t Beis Avraham*. Apparently, Rav Hirschowitz was not in Melbourne for a long period of time, since it appears that he arrived there in 1892 and left in 1894. He writes in his introduction to *Shu”t Beis Avraham* that on Monday of *parshas Devorim 5654* (1894), he left Australia by ship for the United States. He describes that one of his ports of call was Auckland, New Zealand, which at the time had a daily *minyan* and a Jewish community of some one hundred families. He also describes how they crossed the international dateline while en route, and he was uncertain what he should do regarding observing *Shabbos* while at sea. Rav Hirschowitz published his *sefer* in 1908, at which time he was a rav in Toledo, Ohio. Why was the community following the ruling of the *Toras Chayim*? It appears that the community’s practice had originated with a question sent by them many decades earlier to Rav Shelomoh Hirschell, who had been the chief rabbi of the United Kingdom for forty years until his passing on Monday, the 31st of October, 1842, or fifty years before Rav Hirschowitz’s arrival in Australia. To appreciate why Rav Hirschell’s opinion carried so much weight, let me share a small description of his funeral that was published shortly after his passing in *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, published in the United States: “Rav Shelomoh Hirschell was the Chief Rabbi of the Jews (after the German ritual), in London, the British provinces, and dependencies. [The term “after the German ritual” apparently means that he was viewed as the chief rabbi of the *Ashkenazim*, but not of the *Sefardim*.] The funeral took place on Wednesday. The morning was ushered in by every Jew in the metropolis, with those demonstrations of respect becoming so solemn an occasion; all places of business were closed, and the blinds in every private house were drawn down. The day being *yom kippur katan*, the eve of the new moon, it was observed as a fast by a larger number of persons than are accustomed to the observance. The *taharah* had been performed at a very early hour by the *Dayanim*, the executors, and a select number of the immediate friends of the deceased.” The article continues to describe the loss felt by the community, and who were the *maspidim*.

Apparently, when the community in Australia first asked Rav Hirschell, he ruled that they should follow the practice as concluded by the *Toras Chayim*. At the time, this was probably the only published responsum on the question of reciting *vesein tal umatar* in the southern hemisphere. Therefore, the community refrained from reciting *mashiv haruach umorid hagashem* ever in their prayers. They refrained from doing so from *Marcheshvan* to Pesach because of concern that this was detrimental to their own needs.

We will never know why Rav Hirschell ruled that they should follow the approach of the *Toras Chayim*. Rav Hirschowitz’s approach appears to be what most authorities accept. For example, we find responsa on the subject from Rav Kook (*Shu”t Orach Mishpat, Orach Chayim #24*), Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (*Shu”t Har Tzvi, Orach Chayim #56*), Dayan Yitzchok Weiss of Manchester and the *Eidah Hachareidis* (*Shu”t Minchas Yitzchok 6:171*),

and Rav Betzalel Stern (Shu"t Betzeil Hachachmah 6:85), all of whom accept this approach also.

We should note that the two practices, that of the Toras Chayim and that of the Shulchan Aruch, do not dispute in halacha. The Toras Chayim ruled his way when there is a season locally in which rain is definitely detrimental. Since I have found no authority who disputes this ruling of the Rambam, as explained in our previous articles, I assume that, were this indeed the case, all would agree that one should refrain from reciting mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar when it would be detrimental, locally, for it to rain in this season.

South is very different

However, one major authority, Rav Shmuel Vozner of Bnei Braq, disagrees with this approach. In a responsum dated the 9th of Kislev 5721 (1961) addressed to Rabbi Avraham Leitner, the rav of a community named Adas Yerei'im in Montivideo, Uruguay, Rav Vozner disagrees with everyone since the time of the Toras Chayim, ruling that the discussions about the Gemara and the rishonim were germane only in the northern hemisphere, where the basic needs are for rain in the winter and some places might require rain even in the spring and summer. However, opines Rav Vozner, in the southern hemisphere, where the seasons are reversed, davening for rain between Sukkos and Pesach is tantamount to asking Hashem to change the climates completely and to make the southern hemisphere climates identical to the northern, which would, of course, be catastrophic. Therefore, Rav Vozner rules that, in the southern hemisphere, one should recite mashiv haruach umorid hagashem from Pesach until Sukkos, and daven for rain vesein tal umatar in birchos hashanim when it is appropriate there (Shu"t Shevet Halevi 1:21). It would stand to reason that, according to Rav Vozner's approach, the prayers of tefillas geshem and tefillas tal should also be reversed -- southern hemisphere Jewry should recite tefillas geshem on Pesach and tefillas tal on Sukkos. In the ninth volume of Rav Vozner's teshuvos, there is a lengthy responsum from his son, Rav Benzion Vozner, who served as a rav in Sydney, Australia, for six years, expanding and explaining his father's position, which he himself advocates (Shu"t Shevet Halevi 9:148).

Halachic conclusion

Based on the entire discussion, I present five possible approaches one could follow regarding the recital of mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar in the southern hemisphere.

Rosh: Since these areas are regions and not just cities, the laws germane to both of these inserts in the davening should be dependent on local conditions. Although the Rosh himself held this way, as we have seen, the other halachic authorities did not accept his position.

Shulchan Aruch: The obvious reading of the Shulchan Aruch is that these communities should follow the same practice as is practiced in chutz la'aretz northern hemisphere communities.

Toras Chayim: Although he follows the general approach that I ascribed above to the Shulchan Aruch, he adds that in seasons when rain is unfavorable, one should omit mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar.

Rav Vozner: The entire discussion in early authorities is germane only to practices in the northern hemisphere, but in the southern hemisphere one should follow reverse practices, thus reciting mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar in its winter months, which correspond to the summer months in the northern hemisphere.

Lots of dew: Although I have not seen this position quoted in any halachic work, I have been told that there are individuals who follow an approach that makes sure that one will always fulfill the mitzvah of davening. All year long, they recite morid hatal in the second brocha of shemoneh esrei, and they recite vesein tal umatar in shomei'a tefillah whenever there is an opinion that one should recite vesein tal umatar. The advantage of this last approach is that one will never create a situation in which the prayer must be repeated.

What do they do?

While researching these questions, I sent out inquiries to various contacts I have who live or have lived in different southern hemisphere communities, asking them what is practiced in their various places. Here is what I discovered:

In general, the most common practice is to follow the approach that I called above that of the Shulchan Aruch, that one follows the schedule identically to what is done in the northern hemisphere.

In some places, indeed, we find different shullen following divergent approaches. When this is the situation, usually one congregation follows the standard, accepted approach of the Shulchan Aruch, whereas the other refrains from reciting vesein tal umatar or mashiv haruach umorid hagashem in its usual place, during the local summer. I will note that, logically, this should be true only in a place and season where rain is indeed detrimental to the locals.

Mixed Messages

At this point, we can address the opening questions of our article. Our first question was: "How can you have two shullen in the same city, one saying vesein tal umatar, and the other not, on the same day?"

One answer would be that we are describing two shullen located somewhere in the southern hemisphere, which are following differing piskei halacha as to what they should do. I am told that there are cities in which this is the case.

The second of our opening questions was: "What do Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Montivideo, Recife, and Auckland, New Zealand, have in common, but not Johannesburg, Perth, and Santiago, Chile?"

Even someone who has followed all the fine points in our discussion will probably still not be able to answer this question, although he will realize that every one of these places lies in the southern hemisphere. Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Montivideo, Recife, and Auckland, New Zealand all have in common that, in my research on this topic, I found each of these places to have been the basis of the question asked from a posek on this issue.

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***Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Chayei Sara
For the week ending 3 November 2018 / 25 Heshvan 5779
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights***

Three Relationships

"Beware not to return my son to there..." (24:6)

Why didn't Avraham want Yitzchak to go to Charan? Surely it would have been preferable for him to see his future wife than Eliezer to act as an agent? As a result of Avraham's bringing Yitzchak up on an altar as a korban (offering), Yitzchak became infused with a special sanctity. He became an Olah temima, a 'pure elevation-offering.' Avraham did not want Yitzchak to lose that elevated status by Eliezer's taking him out of the Land of Israel. The first of our Holy Temples was destroyed as a result of the Jewish People's transgressing the three cardinal sins: murder, idol worship and sexual immorality. These three sins represent a breakdown in the three relationships that a person has in this world: with his fellow, with G-d, and with himself.

Murder is the ultimate breakdown of man's relationship with his neighbor. Idol worship is the breakdown of man's relationship with G-d, and immorality is the breakdown of man's relationship with himself: He loses his tzurat Adam – his elevated human status - and becomes more like an animal. It occurred to me that these three relationships are mirrored in the Avot – the Patriarchs. Avraham is ultimate antidote to murder: He is the pillar of Chesed, of kindness, the ultimate expression of love for one's fellow. It was

Avraham whose tent was open to the four compass points ready to receive guests.

Yitzchak is the ultimate antidote for idol worship as we saw above. He is the Olah temima, the ultimate expression of mesirut nefesh, of being prepared to give up one's life for G-d.

Which leaves Yaakov. I thought for a while how Yaakov was the ultimate antidote to immorality, and then I remembered a Midrash that describes the ladder in Yaakov's dream, and how the malachim (angels) were ascending and descending on it. Their reason was to compare the visage engraved on the Kisei HaKavod — the mystical Throne on which Hashem sits — with the likeness of Yaakov. In other words, Yaakov is the tzurat Adam, the true picture of Man and all that makes him holy and elevated above the beasts.

Sources: *Pesikta Zutresa, Radak, Maharal*

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Mourning Sarah

Grief is the most powerful and most painful of human emotions. Yet, it is an emotion which few human beings can avoid in their lifetime. We all face loss, and we all grieve.

Interestingly, the first death of which we read in detail in the Bible is a murder. And the reaction of the murderer is one of denial and, ultimately, guilt. I speak, of course, of Cain's slaying of Abel. We do not read of Cain's grief, nor do we know at all of the reaction of Abel's parents, Adam and Eve, to his death.

In this week's Torah portion, for the first time, we learn in detail of the reaction of a surviving relative to the death of a loved one. I speak, of course, of Abraham and his response to the death of his wife, Sarah.

Much has been written about the psychology of the emotion of grief. It is a complex emotion and is a very long, sometimes life-long, process.

It seems that there are at least two components to normal grief. There is an emotional component, consisting of feelings of great sadness and pervasive melancholy. There is also an intellectual component, as the mourner seeks to make some sense of his or her loss and to find purpose and meaning in the death of the loved one, to thus be able to move on in life.

So it is not surprising that when Abraham learned of Sarah's death, and he apparently was not in the vicinity of where she died, he came rushing to make the arrangements for her burial.

We read that he "came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her". Note the two components of his response. Crying, expressing feelings of loss through sobs and tears, bechi, was one component. The other component was much more cerebral and consisted of a well thought-out and carefully composed eulogy. Abraham honored Sarah with his heart, his feelings, but also with his head, with his mind and intellect.

Both aspects of this dual response are necessary. Over the first, the emotional aspect, we have little control. Feelings burst forth even when we try to suppress them.

But the second aspect, the reasoned and verbally expressed eulogy, is one over which we have great control. We can plan intentionally what we will say and what we won't say in a eulogy, a hesped.

There is a beautiful eulogy in the homiletic writings of the great 18th century sage, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, author of the authoritative halachic work, Nodah B'Yehuda. In that eulogy, Rabbi Landau speaks about his wife, Leeba, and compares her to the matriarch Sarah.

He notes that in our text, Abraham cries "for her", the pronoun "her" being used instead of the proper name. However, he "eulogizes Sarah". No pronoun here, but her personal name — the name by which she was known to him and to all of her acquaintances.

Rabbi Landau insists that Abraham was setting an example for all eulogies to follow, for all time and eternity. A eulogy must be specific and speak in detail about the particular and unique qualities of the deceased. One should not just eulogize "her", one must eulogize "Sarah". Those listening to the eulogy must come away with a better sense of who the deceased was, with some details about what made the deceased special.

Too often at funerals, we hear clergymen make very impersonal remarks about death and eternity, and they do not leave us with even an impression of the biographical details and significance of the life that was just lost.

Abraham set the tone for a proper eulogy. He eulogized the Sarah that he knew. Not some abstract description which could fit any woman, but an exquisitely detailed portrait of the real Sarah, from the perspective of one who shared his life with her.

There is so much that careful students of Torah have learned from the lives of Abraham and Sarah. One lesson that I personally cherish is the lesson of Abraham's eulogy for his life's companion. The actual words of this eulogy are not recorded, but the message is clear. It was not an anonymous "her" that he mourned, but a real, flesh and blood, deeply beloved life-long spouse, Sarah.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

"Abraham's Eulogy for His Beloved Sarah"

In this week's parasha, parashat Chayei Sarah, we learn of the passing of the Matriarch, Sarah, at age 127.

In Genesis 23:2, the Torah states *וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבֶּעַ, הִיא הַקְּבֵרוֹן, בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וַתָּבֵא אַבְרָהָם לְסִפְדָּ לְשָׂרָה, וְלִבְכַתָּהּ*, Sarah died in Kiriath-Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her.

The Torah proceeds to share the fascinating details of the negotiations between Abraham and Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, and Abraham's efforts to secure a proper burial place for Sarah, his beloved wife.

Abraham successfully purchases the Cave of Machpelah, which, of course, became the fabled burial place of not only Sarah, but of all the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, with the exception of Rachel.

The famed Torah luminary, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau questions the reason for the apparent redundancy of the term *לְשָׂרָה* "l'Sarah," for Sarah. Scripture, in Genesis 23:2, had already noted, *וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה*, "va'tah'maht Sarah," that Sarah had died in Kiriath-Arba. It would have been sufficient for the Torah to have stated that Abraham came to eulogize "her" and to cry for "her." What is the reason for the repetition of the word, "l'Sarah"?

The Nodah b'Yehudah suggests that Abraham's eulogy was presented only after the eulogies delivered by several of Abraham's contemporaries, who all spoke of Sarah's legendary stature and accomplishments. Although there is no textual source for this, perhaps the Noda b'Yehuda felt that the term *וַתָּבֵא*, "va'yah'vo," and he came, implied that Abraham spoke after previous eulogies had already been delivered.

When the locals spoke of Sarah, they apparently spoke primarily of her role as the wife of the great Abraham. Abraham, however, wished to extol Sarah in her own right, not merely regarding her role as a facilitator for his accomplishments.

Abraham, better than anyone, recognized Sarah's special innate virtues, and therefore felt compelled to offer her the praise that she rightfully deserved, extolling Sarah as a spiritual giant in her own right. The fact that the Torah chooses to repeat the word "l'Sarah," for Sarah, implies that Abraham cried specifically for the loss of Sarah, a truly righteous individual, rather than weeping over the impact of her death on him.

This particular interpretation, shows the very special relationship between the first Patriarch and the first Matriarch, both in life and in death. Clearly, Sarah lived her life to advance and enhance her husband's deeds, and Abraham lived his life to advance and enhance Sarah's unique achievements. Not for a moment to compare myself or my wife to Abraham and Sarah, but, this Torah portion and the Nodah b'Yehudah's sensitive interpretation, compels me to share a few words of praise for my own wife, Aidel.

Aidel and I will soon, with G-d's help, celebrate 43 years of marriage. Now that we are "empty nesters," we frequently recall the early years. As newlyweds and as communal leaders in a dynamic and growing community, our early years of marriage paralleled not only the historic development and growth of the Lincoln Square Synagogue and its Adult Education Program, which I headed for 15 years (attracting over 1,000 students each week), but also the founding and growth of the remarkable LSS Beginners Service.

As many of you know, the Beginners Service was the brainchild of the world-famous composer, Steve Reich. Steve threw out a challenge to me and said that if I would conduct a service for people with little or no synagogue background, he and his then-girlfriend, now wife, Beryl Korot, would attend. In December 1975, two weeks after our wedding, the Beginners Service began in the cavernous ballroom of the old Lincoln Square Synagogue building with only four attendees: myself, Steve Reich, Beryl Korot, and another fellow, a tall accountant, also named Steve Reich.

Every other week, some strange guy would come in on roller skates, with a tennis racket in hand, and ask, "How do you know that there's a G-d?" Who would ever believe that such a service would ever succeed? After all, we were competing with, at that time, the most popular Shabbat synagogue service in New York City, conducted by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin and Cantor Sherwood Goffin. ins

Slowly but surely, people started coming, and then, on Saturday March 18, 1981, The New York Times published a front page, second section story on the Beginners Service. The rest is history. It was standing room only, from then on.

Over the past 42 years, approximately 15-20,000 people have attended the Beginners Service, and through the efforts of NJOP, Beginners Services are now offered all over the country and throughout the world. Every week, I still marvel at the privilege of being able to conduct the service. At the end of June, each year, I ask myself, if the next year can top the previous year's extraordinary experiences. And, each year, an exciting group of new "Beginners" join the service, and, invariably, serve as a great source of inspiration to both myself and Aidel. The Beginners Service has proven to be one of the most effective methods of bringing people to religious observance. The success rate is truly remarkable.

As we reminisce, Aidel and I think of the 15-20,000 guests whom we've hosted over the last 42 years. It's hard to believe that in the first 10 years, when we had four little children afoot, and had little help in the kitchen, we hosted guests for meals on both Friday nights and for Shabbat lunch every week, with the exception of lunch, once a month, when there was a Beginners luncheon at the synagogue.

When Aidel, in her wisdom, realized that it was important for us to have private family time for the children, we stopped hosting on Friday night and usually invited guests only for Shabbat lunch. We did not have a personal cook, or even much kitchen help. I did most of the shopping and Aidel did all of the cooking. With no previous cooking experience, Aidel proved to be an outstanding cook, in addition to working part-time as an exceptionally talented clinical therapist and taking extraordinary care of our children.

Many people perceive the Beginners rabbi's wife as simply an extension of the rabbi himself, but she is much more than that. Aidel has been my partner in everything that I've accomplished, first as Educational Director, and later as the Founder and Director of NJOP. She has been at my side providing astute guidance, wise counsel, and unconditional support for everything that I do. It would be fair for me to say, as Rabbi Akiva said of his wife (Nedarim 50a) שְׁלִי וְשְׁלֵכָם, שְׁלָהּ הָיָה, what I have accomplished and what others have

benefitted, are really due to her. While others may see Aidel as an extension of my success, I see my success, due primarily to my wife, Aidel.

We look back and wonder how we did it without a sleep-in nanny, without much kitchen help? I did the shopping, she cooked the food, we set the table, and after Shabbat we washed the dishes and immediately started preparing for the next Shabbat. As the children grew older, they helped, and now we miss them as we set the Shabbat table ourselves.

I can't speak for Aidel, but from this husband, there are no regrets, just intense gratitude.

These words of tribute are not intended to serve as a living eulogy. Parashat Chayei Sarah was just a propitious opportunity that I couldn't pass up to express some well-deserved words of thanks.

May Aidel and our family be blessed with good health and happiness for many years to come. May we continue to merit to help our brothers and sisters, who have enhanced our lives so profoundly, grow in their Judaism and enrich our people with their good and noble deeds.

May you be blessed.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Chayei Sarah

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

A number of weeks ago, I wrote about Ishmael. Actually, I wrote about his mother, and the piece was not so kind to her. I received scores of e-mail, some praising the piece, others railing that it was not strong enough, and still others decrying it, saying that it bordered on racism.

Today, once again, I am going to write about Ishmael. But before you gird your loins, let me tell you that I won't speak about the biblical Ishmael, but rather his namesake, Rabbi Ishmael.

You see, one of the great sages of the Talmud was named Rabbi Ishmael. A fact that should shock our genteel readers. In fact, the Talmud is filled with quotes from Rabbi Ishmael. But how did he get such a name? After all, why would anyone name their child after the "wild-ass of a man whose hand is against everyone, and everyone's hand is against him" (Genesis 16:11)? Rabbi Yishmael's opinions are from the most significant in the entire Talmud yet his name is surely not a Rabbinic one? Or perhaps there is more to Ishmael than we truly know.

The answer is somewhat simple. It is based on two words in the Torah.

"Yitzchak and Yishmael." Let me put them in context. You see, the Torah tells us "Abraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content, and he was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah. (Genesis 25:8-9)." It seems innocuous enough. But alas, the Talmud infers something from two words that turn Ishmael, from the castigated wild-man, to one who is worthy of place in Jewish history, a Talmudic giant bearing his name.

The Talmud in Bava Basra tells us, that from the fact that Ishmael, the older son, yielded the precedence to Isaac, the more holy son, we gather that Ishmael repented of his evil ways and, in fact this is what is meant by the "good old age" mentioned in connection with Abraham's passing.

Amazing! An entire life's transformed is embodied in the smallest act of letting a younger brother go first. And Ishmael becomes the hero after whom the great rabbi is named! How is that? Just because he let his younger brother go first? Is that really possible?

Richard Busby (1606-1695), headmaster of the prestigious Westminster School was a strict disciplinarian. It is reputed that in his 58 years as headmaster only one pupil passed through the school without being personally beaten by Busby. With its fine reputation, the school was visited by King Charles II.

As Dr. Busby was showing King Charles II around the school, it was noticed that, contrary to etiquette, the headmaster kept his hat on in the royal

presence. One of the king's aides, mention this flagrant violation of protocol to the headmaster.

Bushy demurred. He excused himself in these words: "It would not do for my boys to suppose that there existed a greater man on earth than I."

Think about it. Who was at that funeral? All of Ishmael's grandchildren, each strongly entrenched in the belief that they were the descendants of the truly chosen son.

And now comes Avraham's funeral, an occasion attended by hundreds of his followers and admirers. Protocol would have the true heir walk first. It's the perfect setting to make a statement. It is the setting where you can insist that you are the true heir and tell the world, that now, with the passing of Avraham, "there is no greater man on earth than I."

Yet Ishmael defers. He lets Isaac go first. It is perhaps a greater act than laying down a sword or embracing an enemy. It is breaking an ingrained character trait. And breaking a character trait, breaking the desire for a little bit of respect in the eyes of observers is a true sign of greatness.

Thank you Rabbi Yishmael's mom for letting us know that. Thank you Yishmael for being so brave. Pass the message on.

Good Shabbos

The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Rabbi Herschel Shachter

Parshat Chayei Sara - Jewish Burial

The Torah tells us that when our mother, Sara, died Avraham refused to bury her in the general municipal cemetery. He insisted on designating a separate location as *kever yisroel*. Why have the Jews insisted throughout the ages on maintaining a separate cemetery?

The halachah divides all religious articles used to fulfill mitzvot into two categories: *tefillin*, *mezuzah*, and *sifrei Torah*, are labeled as "tashmishei kedushah"; as opposed to *lulav*, a *shofar*, an *etrog*, and *schach* of a *sukkah*, which are labeled as, "tashmishei mitzvah". The practical difference between the two categories is the following: an old pair of *tefillin*, or an old *sefer Torah* or *mezuzah*, which can no longer serve as the object of a mitzvah, may not be discarded but must be placed in the *sheimos* and buried in a dignified fashion. An old *lulav* or *shofar* which one no longer plans to use for mitzvah purposes loses its status as "*huktzah limitzvato*" and need not be placed in the *sheimos* and may be discarded. The sanctity which descends upon "tashmishei mitzvah" which is derived from the fact that "*chal shem shamayim al hasukkah*" is only temporary in nature, and vanishes into thin air as soon as the object is no longer set aside for use in the performance of a mitzvah.

How did the Rabbis know how to determine which religious articles belonged to which category? R. Chaim of Volozhin explains in his work, "*Nefesh Hachayim*", that the source of all permanent *kedushah* is the Torah. *tefillin*, *mezuzah* and *sefer Torah*, which all contain passages from the Torah are considered as *tashmishei kedushah*. Even the *bayit* of the *shel rosh* which only has the letter *shin* on it, also qualifies as *tashmishei kedushah*. One word, even one letter of Torah has the significance of Torah. The *sukkah*, the *etrog*, and the *tzitzit*, however have no Torah confined within them, and therefore can not qualify as *tashmishei kedushah*.

The human body is always involved in the performance of mitzvot while one is alive. The fact that all men have the *tzelem elokim* would certainly more than sufficient to require that we respect each other. But after one dies, and the *tzelem elokim* is no longer there, and the body is no longer performing mitzvot there should no longer be any requirement to respect the dead body. Here the halachah of *tashmishei kedushah* becomes relevant. The Jewish body, which was involved with Torah acquires the status of *tashmishei kedushah* and may not simply be discarded after death. And even those Jews

who never learned a word, or even a letter of Torah during their lifetime, according to the talmudic tradition had already been involved in Torah study before they were born. Hence, the Jewish dead must be buried with dignity, in a separate Jewish cemetery.

If one placed an old *lulav* or an old *shofar* into the *sheimos* this would be disrespectful to the *tashmishei kedushah* which are found there. It is the study of Torah which endows the Jew with the *kedushat yisroel*.

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Ben-Tzion Spitz

Chaye Sara: The Plot to Kill Abraham's Servant

Hatreds not vowed and concealed are to be feared more than those openly declared. – Marcus Tullius Cicero

Abraham sends his servant (named by the Midrash as Eliezer) to Haran from Canaan, to Abraham's family, to find a bride for Isaac. Eliezer finds Rebecca daughter of Betuel, and immediately understands that she is the one for Isaac. Abraham's nephew, Betuel, and Betuel's son, Lavan, greet Eliezer warmly, and upon hearing Eliezer's account, immediately agree that the match should be made.

The biblical account that follows however, is highly enigmatic. First of all, Betuel completely disappears from the narrative. Secondly, Rebecca's family appears to want to then delay Rebecca's departure.

The Midrash fills in some of the gaps and provides a wild story. The Midrash tells of a conspiracy to kill Eliezer. Betuel attempts to secretly poison Eliezer, however, an angel intervenes, switching Eliezer's and Betuel's food, leading the poisoner, Betuel, to be poisoned and to die. Hence his disappearance from the rest of the account.

However, that still leaves us with the question of the motive. Why did Betuel want to kill Eliezer? Why initially agree to the marriage and then try to delay it?

The Berdichever on the story explains that Betuel and Lavan actually wanted to prevent Isaac from ever having progeny. In their Talmudic deviousness, they knew the law that if a person sends an agent to marry someone on his behalf, the sender is prohibited to marry anyone else while the agent is away. The law is to prevent a case of marrying someone who in actuality would be forbidden to him without knowing it.

Their plan was therefore simple and Talmudically sound. They would accept Isaac's marriage proposal through Eliezer, contractually binding Isaac and Rebecca. Then they would kill Eliezer and keep Rebecca at home, preventing Isaac from ever marrying anyone else and ensuring that he would have no progeny.

Of course, divine intervention assured that the evil conspiracy came to naught. It's still not clear why Betuel and Lavan had such jealousy and hatred of their cousins Abraham and Isaac that they would want to destroy their future children's lives to achieve their hateful plans. We see Lavan attempt to subvert Isaac's son Jacob a generation later, only to be thwarted again by God.

It is amazing that millennia later we are still surrounded by the spiritual descendants of Betuel and Lavan, by people who hate us and want to destroy us and our progeny.

May all our enemies' evil plans be thwarted and turned against them and may we merit to see the hatred and jealousy of the world turn to peace and understanding.

Dedication - To the victims of The Tree of Life Congregation attack. May their families be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. Shabbat Shalom

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Chayei Sarah

פרשת חיי שרה תשעט

חנו לי אחות קבר עמכם ואקברה מתי מלפני

Grant me burial property with you, so that I may bury my dead from before me. (23:4)

Achuzah (according to *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*) means settlement, the act of becoming domiciled in a given place. When Avraham asked permission to bury his wife, Sarah, he asked that she be able to rest in a place that would be her permanent, everlasting home. Avraham *Avinu* lived his entire life as a wanderer, refusing to settle in any one place, because this would contradict his mission in life: to reach out wherever possible to touch the lives of many, wherever they may be. He was not going to sit back and wait for people to come to him. He had a responsibility. Now, however, the necessity to bury his wife mandated him, for the first time, to purchase a piece of land. His wife's grave would be the first bond to tie him to the land, the place that would draw him to it, and "hold him," as in *achaz*, grasp, hold.

It is ironic that the Patriarch, the father of our nation, did not have an "outreach center," a large domicile to serve as his mainstay, his anchor to give him stability, the place which he could call home, to which he would return each night. Avraham owned nothing – because he needed nothing. He devoted all of himself to Hashem, realizing that, at the end of the day, the only parcel of land which has any sort of permanence is the gravesite. This was his first and only *achuzah*.

Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Imeinu* lived a life of purpose. Blessed with material wealth and prestige – and, finally, an heir - they could have sat back and rested upon their laurels. This, however, would not have earned them Patriarchal and Matriarchal distinction. Life is not about working and retirement. Life is about acting for Hashem. We do not live for ourselves. Hashem commanded Avraham, *Hishalech Lefanai v'ehyai samim*, "Walk before Me and be perfect" (*Bereishis* 17:1). Our Patriarch was not satisfied with the exclusively personal level of perfection that he had achieved (or perhaps his definition of personal achievement was to change the world around him). He invested all of himself into elevating the world around him. His concept, *Ohr lagoyim*, "A light unto the nations" was about personal illumination. Let the world around him observe the spiritual, emotional and moral stature of one who serves Hashem, and let this be their inspiration.

Life for Avraham and Sarah was not a bed of roses. For most of their marriage, they did not have a child, and, when their only son achieved his seminal spiritual experience as the *Olah Temimah*, perfect sacrifice, Sarah died, leaving Avraham alone – to mourn, to exalt in Hashem, to reap and enjoy the *nachas* from his son – alone. He married him off – alone. Yes, life was not perfect, but they never complained. They rose above the pain, which can be brutal, relentless and blinding. How did they do it? *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, explains that they were able to do so specifically because they lived with a mission to elevate the world around them. Their mission remained in full force even in their darkest hour. The sign of true *malchus*, sovereignty, is the sense of responsibility to care for all that is under one's rule. A king is not allowed the luxury of becoming self-absorbed with his personal disappointments and travail. He must constantly work for the betterment of his kingdom. Thus, as soon as Avraham laid Sarah to rest, *Vayakam Avraham mei'al p'nei meiso*, "And Avraham rose up from his dead" (*Ibid* 23:8) and continued his mission.

People walk around with their personal problems on their shoulders or written all over their faces. If they would at least carry communal problems on their shoulders it would not be so bad, but they are overwhelmed -- and it takes a toll on them. *Rav Belsky* relates that a man once went to visit *Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl*. When he walked into the *Rosh Yeshivah's* study, it was obvious that he was quite agitated. Apparently, the *bachur*, *yeshivah* student, who had just left the study was the source of the *Rosh Yeshivah's* agitation. *Rav Hutner* said, *Farvos zenen heintige bachurim azoi frustrated, vu is de simchas ha'chaim?* "Why are the *bachurim* these days so frustrated? Where is the *simchas ha'chaim*, the zest for life?" (This occurred about thirty years ago – imagine his reaction today!)

People fall into a funk and either cannot, or will not, pull themselves out of it. They feel it is the responsibility of everyone around them either to suffer with them or to help them. *Rav Belsky* cites an interesting passage in *Meseches Bava Kamma* (31a) from which he derives an insightful lesson: "Two potters are walking, and one trips on an obstruction in the road and falls. The second potter falls on the first." Two potters have fallen, and both have lost their clay pots. It stands to reason that whoever had left the obstruction in the road, causing the first potter to trip and fall, should be held responsible for the damages to both potters. The *Mishnah* apparently does not see it this way. It concludes that the first potter to fall must pay for all of the damages: *She'hayah lo laamod v'lo amad*, "He should have picked himself up right away." Since he did not – he must pay.

The lesson is obvious: Everyone is responsible for his own "mess." If he falls, he must pick himself up and get out of the way, before he becomes a living obstruction. This is true even if he had fallen due to the negligence of others. He has no

business laying on the floor, feeling sorry for himself. A person who lacks basic intrinsic happiness is a danger, not only to himself, but to others as well.

Numerous causes might account for one feeling down: he is upset with his parents, his children, or his boss – or lack thereof; his lack of *mazel*, or just the plain unfairness of life (as he sees it). Nonetheless, when he is upset, he creates an environment of depression around him which affects others – first and foremost, those closest to him: his family. While he might convince himself that he is justified, his self-justification certainly does not grant him license to negatively affect others.

Let him learn from Avraham and Sarah whose *simchas ha'chaim* was infectious, causing others to feel positively about themselves. A happy person breeds happiness. A depressed person infects others with his negativity. He accomplishes nothing for himself other than hurting those closest to him.

ואברהם זקן בא בימים וד' ברכך את אברהם בכל

Now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed him with everything. (24:1)

We think of life as measured by years: a long life is one during which one has lived many years; a short life is defined the opposite way. *Horav Elyahu Lopian, zl*, derives from the above *pasuk* that we should measure life by days – complete days. He quotes the *Zohar HaKadosh*, who teaches that at the beginning of each day, a person's forthcoming "day" asks him, "What will it be today?" What type of day will you have? Will you stand up to the challenges and tests prepared for you by the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination? Will your *yetzer tov*, good inclination, rally and give you the resolution and fortitude to overcome, to triumph? Hence, when a person (at the end of his "one hundred and twenty years") stands before the Heavenly Tribunal and claims success for a life well-lived, he might be shocked to realize how many deficient days he has had. He will be mortified to confront the reality that he actually has not lived such a long life after all. In fact, when he tallies up the sum total of his complete days, he will be saddened to note that he has had a very short lifespan. Avraham *Avinu* lived a life of perfection, in which every moment of every day was used constructively. Thus, he was *ba bayamim*, "came with all of his day."

How does one merit to live such a life? What is the key component that one should employ? What perspective should one maintain in order to live every day to its fullest? I think the answer lies in the concluding words of the *pasuk*: *Va'Hashem beirach es Avraham bakol*, "And Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." When a person acknowledges that everything in life is a blessing from Hashem -- *bakol* – everything -- the good and (what seems to be) the bad are all part of Hashem's blessing, then the person's perspective on his day – the various events, incidents, challenges – highs and lows – are all accepted as having been Heavenly decreed. Such a person goes about his day with complete equanimity, with total faith in Hashem. Thus, every day is complete – no ups and downs. Everything is up, since it emanates from Hashem. His entire life is lived to fulfill the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem.

The *mitzvah* of *mechiyas Amalek*, erasing the memory of our archenemy, Amalek, includes an unusual text, which is part of the *mitzvah*. *Timcheh es zeicher Amalek*, "Erase the memory of Amalek from beneath the Heavens" (*Devarim* 25:19). What is the meaning of, "From beneath the Heavens"? The *Tiferes Shmuel* (as cited by *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*) explains that these words define the root of Amalek's belief, and, hence, his sinful behavior. He believes that everything that occurs in this world happens *mitachas ha'Shomayim*, "from beneath the Heavens" – naturally. Heaven plays no role in whatever happens in this world. Thus, we are mandated to erase Amalek – *mitachas ha'Shomayim*, and become aware that everything which takes place anywhere in the universe is all min *ha'Shomayim*, from Heaven, by Heaven.

The *Gerrer Rebbe, zl, Imrei Emes*, derives this idea from the *pasuk* *V'sashmeidim mitachas shmei Hashem*, "Destroy them from beneath Hashem's Heavens" (*Eichah* 3:66). We must destroy the notion that anything happens by chance. Coincidence is a word that should be erased from the lexicon of the observant Jew. Coincidence and chance are two words that are heretical. Nothing happens "under the Heavens." Without Hashem's decree, nothing would happen – period.

Prior to the *Satmar Rebbe's chuppah*, his father, the saintly *Kedushas Yom Tov* asked him, "Do you know why the *chuppah*, wedding canopy, takes place beneath the stars, outside (preferably) and not in a building? It is to remind the *chossan* and *kallah* to look up to Heaven and rely solely on Heaven. It would be a grave error to place one's trust in his father/father-in-law or the dowry one has been promised." It is Heaven – and only Heaven -- upon whom we should place our trust."

The *Kedushas Yom Tov* (unknowingly?) was foreshadowing his own *petirah*, demise, immediately after his son's *sheva brachos*.

"Things happen" is a popular, overused cliché. Interestingly, we never apply this cliché when "good" things happen. It is when something totally unexpected occurs, something not to our liking, something which suddenly supplants us from our comfort zone. Then, for lack of a better word, we say, "Things happen." What happened is that

“Hashem happened”! It seems bad, but, if we would think, apply ourselves and wait patiently, we would see that there is a good and just reason for everything that occurs.

Rav Biderman presents an insightful analogy – one about which we should think – and rethink – constantly. Someone wanted to take the bus to work one day. “Things happen,” and he missed the bus. He was now forced to take a taxi – something which did not bring him great joy – since the taxi was long in arriving and charged a hefty sum. It was not going to be one of his better days. The man was visibly upset and could not stop kvetching about all of his “suffering,” due to being late for the bus.

A good friend, who possessed more than a modicum of common sense, told him, “If you hear that the bus that you missed was in an accident, and that a number of passengers were injured, some critically – would you not praise Hashem for having you miss that bus? Now, I ask you, is it really important for you that the bus should flip over and any number of people be injured just so that you could have a good feeling? Instead, you should praise Hashem that He is leading you in good ways, regardless of what happened to that bus. Who knows why you missed that bus? Nonetheless, you must believe that there was a very good reason for *you to miss that bus.*”

דהיה הנערה אשר אמר אליה הטי נא כדך ואשתה ואמרה שתה וגם גמליך אשקה אתה הכחת לעבדך לייצחק

Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say, “Please tip over your jug so I may drink,” and who replies, “Drink, and I will water your camels,” her will You have designated for Your servant. (24:14)

Osah hochachta, “He will You have designated”: She is fitting for Yitzchak Avinu due to her performance of acts of lovingkindness. Such a girl is worthy of entering the home of Avraham Avinu, the Patriarch who personified *gemillas chesed*, acts of lovingkindness. While offering to give water also for the camels was certainly an act of thoughtfulness and *chesed*, was that all it was? Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, observes that there was another factor – something about the manner in which she carried out her act of kindness. The Torah states, *Vatomar sh’sei adoni va’timaher va’torad kadah*; “And she said, ‘Drink, my master’ and she quickly lowered her jug” (ibid 24:18). Rav Sholom asks: What is the difference between lowering the pail in the natural manner and lowering it quickly? Obviously, if the Torah chose to immortalize the word, *Va’timaher*, “And she quickly” (lowered the pail), it indicates that the alacrity with which Rivkah (*Imeinu*) carried out her kindness was noteworthy and made all of the difference in the world. Her promptness elevated an act of kindness to such a sphere of sanctity that it was forever perpetuated in the Torah.

Rav Sholom goes so far as to assert that the barometer for determining whether an act of *chesed* is motivated by one’s good heart is alacrity. When one cares, he acts quickly. It is not the act that shows, but the attitude that accompanies it which demonstrates one’s purity of heart. The time differential between lowering the pail quickly versus normally is probably a second or two – but those two seconds demonstrate that the act of *chesed* is heartfelt!

We perform favors for people. We perform acts of *chesed*. Some of us go to great lengths to help others – to lend money, spend time, give advice, be there in a time of need – whether real or imagined – but, how are these wonderful acts executed? Are they performed begrudgingly, because we must, or because we want to? That is a question which is answered in the manner in which we carry out our kindness.

A *ben Torah* was having difficulty in finding his mate due to a not-so-simple demand that was non-negotiable. He had an elderly mother to whom he was extremely attached. He attended to her many needs and was always present to see to it that her twilight years were not spent in solitude. Any girl whom he would marry would have to move in to his mother’s apartment with him. Understandably, it would take a special young woman to accept such a lifestyle from the onset of her marriage.

Concerned relatives of this *bachur*, young man, approached Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl, for advice. Perhaps he could speak to the *bachur* and explain to him that no girl in her right mind would initially enter into matrimony under such trying conditions. To expect so much from a young woman was unrealistic.

Imagine their surprise when Rav Shlomo Zalmen agreed with the *bachur*! The primary criterion for a girl to qualify as a spouse with whom to share a Torah life and build a Torah home is *gemillas chesed*. A spouse who lacks the sensitivity for her husband’s aged mother is deficient in her *middah*, attribute, of *chesed*. The *gadol hador* had spoken. He left no room for discussion.

A few months passed, and the *bachur* met his *bashert*. He became engaged to a special young woman who was willing to move in with his mother and assist in her care. Upon hearing the wonderful news, Rav Shlomo Zalmen sent for the *chossan*. Rav Shlomo Zalmen wished him all the best, then said, “When you were looking for a spouse and the question was for what qualities in a girl should one seek, I said that priority number one was *gemillas chesed*. Now that you have found a special *kallah*, it is my wish to inform you that it is incumbent upon you to move your mother into a senior citizens home that will provide for her needs on a constant basis. Your new *kallah* should not be relegated to carry such a load. While she has demonstrated her

attribute of *chesed* by her willingness to accept upon herself to share with you in assisting your mother, it is nonetheless your primary responsibility – not that of your wife.

יאמר אל אדני אלי לא תלך האשה אחרי

And I said to my master, “Perhaps the woman will not follow me?” (24:39)

Life is not always a bed of roses. Disappointments are part of the Heavenly-designed world in which we live. How one reacts and responds to disappointments is the barometer of his acknowledgement that it is Hashem – not he – who runs the world. Accepting disappointment – and, in fact, growing from it – is the mark of a great person.

When Avraham Avinu sent his trusted student/servant, Eliezer, on a mission to find a suitable mate for his son, Yitzchak (*Avimu*), he set forth one critical criterion which was non-negotiable: Under no circumstances was Yitzchak permitted to live with the prospective bride’s family. The *kallah* must be willing to pull up roots and move to Avraham’s home. If the girl was unwilling to move, he would free Eliezer from the oath that he had made to Avraham prior to his leaving on this mission.

Rashi observes that Eliezer would have wanted Yitzchak as a son-in-law. He, too, had a daughter whom he felt worthy of Yitzchak. Thus, when he said *ulai*, “perhaps,” which is also spelled as *eilai*, “to me,” he was alluding to his master, “Perhaps the two of us can work out an arrangement whereby Yitzchak would marry my daughter.” To Eliezer’s chagrin, Avraham dismissed the match. He gave a very good reason: “My son is blessed. You, on the other hand, are a descendant of Canaan/Cham, who was cursed by Noach. It is not possible for one who is blessed to unite with one who is cursed. Despite his despicable lineage, Eliezer was a great person, and, quite possibly, his daughter could have been a wonderful young woman, but Avraham’s criteria for family lineage superseded their personal achievements. (I do not think that our Patriarch was advocating taking a spouse whose lineage is illustrious or, at least, impressive. He was simply stating that curse and blessing do not unite; Cham and Avraham do not constitute a *shidduch*).

Eliezer was much more than the manager of Avraham’s household. He was Avraham’s *talmid*, student, who is characterized in the *Talmud* (*Yoma* 28b) as a mirror image of Avraham in his Torah learning and righteousness. He transmitted Avraham’s Torah teachings to others. For sixty years he labored as Avraham’s faithful servant. Thus, he felt that he was fit to be Yitzchak’s father-in-law. Let us imagine what coursed through his mind when Avraham told him that despite his extraordinary service, virtue and erudition, he did not make the grade, because he was an *arur*, descendant of a lineage that was accursed. Such disappointment would have destroyed and probably turned off most people.

Not Eliezer, explains Horav Avraham Pam, zl (quoted by Rabbi Sholom Smith in *Message from Rav Pam*). Eliezer is the classic example of a person faithfully performing his job with devotion and commitment – despite the disappointment and frequent heartache. Eliezer is teaching us a powerful lesson in living life. Life does not always go as planned. How many have received an exemplary and often very expensive education, only to see a competitor (who probably cannot hold a candle to him) receive the position, the raise, the desired class. This *parsha* is about *shidduchim*, matrimonial matches. I am probably opening up a can of worms by stating that this is one area in which disappointment reigns, where what makes sense and what should be – “does not” and “is not”. How often does the girl with *everything* but... money, pedigree, etc. wait – and wait? Make no mistake; she will marry her *bashert*, Heavenly-designated spouse, and he will be outstanding, but the wait and the challenge to her and her family’s *emunah* and *bitachon*, faith and trust, can, at times, be overwhelming.

Eliezer, *eved Avraham*, teaches a lesson which applies to us all: life is filled with disappointments. This is all part of Hashem’s *nisyanos*, tests. We must rise to the occasion, withstand the pressure, and roll with the punches. It is all part of demonstrating our spiritual mettle, our *emunah* in Hashem. So, the next time disappointment glares down at you, stare back, or ignore it, and go about your endeavor as if nothing has happened. Eliezer did that. This is what Hashem wants of us. It is all part of life.

that is inexpensive. Likewise, since we cannot exist without Torah teachers, they become like air and water – under acknowledged.

In Memory of our beloved parents, grandparents, and great grandparents .. Rabbi

נפטר ליה השון תשע"ג הרב יקותיאל בן יוסף אברהם יוסף שמוחה הכהן ליה
And Sofie Hofmann ליה
נפטרה ליה כסלו תשע"ג צפורה בת החבר אברהם יוסף שמוחה הכהן ליה
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