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BS"D

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON CHAYEI SARAH - 5781

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These words from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks last year can certainly be said about Rabbi Sacks himself - Yehi Zichro Baruch

from: The Office of Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org> via gmail.mcsv.net
date: Nov. 21, 2019

subject: To Have a Why (Chayei Sarah 5780)

The name of our parsha seems to embody a paradox. It is called Chayei Sarah, "the life of Sarah," but it begins with the death of Sarah. What is more, towards the end, it records the death of Abraham. Why is a parsha about death called "life"? The answer, it seems to me, is that – not always, but often – death and how we face it is a commentary on life and how we live it.

Which brings us to a deeper paradox. The first sentence of this week's parsha of Chayei Sarah, is: "Sarah's lifetime was 127 years: the years of Sarah's life." A well-known comment by Rashi on the apparently superfluous phrase, "the years of Sarah's life," states: "The word 'years' is repeated and without a number to indicate that they were all equally good." How could anyone say that the years of Sarah's life were equally good? Twice, first in Egypt, then in Gerar, she was persuaded by Abraham to say that she was his sister rather than his wife, and then taken into a royal harem, a situation fraught with moral hazard.

There were the years when, despite God's repeated promise of many children, she was infertile, unable to have even a single child. There was the time when she persuaded Abraham to take her handmaid, Hagar, and have a child by her, which caused her great strife of the spirit.[1] These things constituted a life of uncertainty and decades of unmet hopes. How is it remotely plausible to say that all of Sarah's years were equally good? That is Sarah. About Abraham, the text is similarly puzzling. Immediately after the account of his purchase of a burial plot for Sarah, we read:

"Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything" (Gen. 24:1). This too is strange. Seven times, God had promised Abraham the land of Canaan. Yet when Sarah died, he did not own a single plot of land in which to bury her, and had to undergo an elaborate and even humiliating negotiation with the Hittites, forced to admit at the outset that, "I am a stranger and temporary resident among you" (Genesis 23:4). How can the text say that God had blessed Abraham with everything? Equally haunting is its account of Abraham's death, perhaps the most serene in the Torah: "Abraham breathed his last and died at a good age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people." He had been promised that he would become a great nation, the father of many nations, and that he would inherit the land. Not one of these promises had been fulfilled in his lifetime. How then was he "satisfied"?

The answer again is that to understand a death, we have to understand a life. I have mixed feelings about Friedrich Nietzsche. He was one of the most brilliant thinkers of the modern age, and also one of the most dangerous. He himself was ambivalent about Jews and negative about Judaism.[2] Yet one of his most famous remarks is both profound and true: He who has a why in life can bear almost any how.[3]

(In this context I should add a remark he made in *The Genealogy of Morality* that I have not quoted before. Having criticised other sacred Scriptures, he then writes: "the Old Testament – well, that is something quite different: every respect for the Old Testament! I find in it great men, heroic landscape and something of utmost rarity on earth, the incomparable naivety of the strong heart; even more, I find a people." [4] So despite his scepticism about religion in general and the Judaeo-Christian heritage in particular, he had a genuine respect for Tanach.)

Abraham and Sarah were among the supreme examples in all history of what it is to have a Why in life. The entire course of their lives came as a response to a call, a Divine voice, that told them to leave their home and family, set out for an unknown destination, go to live in a land where they would be strangers, abandon every conventional form of security, and have the faith to believe that by living by the standards of righteousness and justice they would be taking the first step to establishing a nation, a land, a faith and a way of life that would be a blessing to all humankind. Biblical narrative is, as Erich Auerbach said, "fraught with background," meaning that much of the story is left unstated. We have to guess at it. That is why there is such a thing as Midrash, filling in the narrative gaps. Nowhere is this more pointed than in the case of the emotions of the key figures. We do not know what Abraham or Isaac felt as they walked toward Mount Moriah. We do not know what Sarah felt when she entered the harems, first of Pharaoh, then of Avimelech of Gerar. With some conspicuous exceptions, we hardly know what any of the Torah's characters felt. Which is why the two explicit statements about Abraham – that God blessed him with everything, and that he ended life old and satisfied – are so important. And when Rashi says that all of Sarah's years were equally good, he is attributing to her what the biblical text attributes to Abraham, namely a serenity in the face of death that came from a profound tranquillity in the face of life. Abraham knew that everything that happened to him, even the bad things, were part of the journey on which God had sent him and Sarah, and he had the faith to walk through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil, knowing that God was with him. That is what Nietzsche called "the strong heart."

In 2017, an unusual book became an international bestseller. One of the things that made it unusual was that its author was ninety years old and this was her first book. Another was that she was a survivor both of Auschwitz, and also of the Death March towards the end of the war, which in some respects was even more brutal than the camp itself.

The book was called *The Choice* and its author was Edith Eger.[5] She, together with her father, mother and sister Magda, arrived at Auschwitz in May 1944, one of 12,000 Jews transported from Kosice, Hungary. Her parents were murdered on that first day. A woman pointed towards a smoking chimney and told Edith that she had better start talking about her

parents in the past tense. With astonishing courage and strength of will, she and Magda survived the camp and the March. When American soldiers eventually lifted her from a heap of bodies in an Austrian forest, she had typhoid fever, pneumonia, pleurisy and a broken back. After a year, when her body had healed, she married and became a mother. Healing of the mind took much longer, and eventually became her vocation in the United States, where she went to live.

On their way to Auschwitz, Edith's mother said to her, "We don't know where we are going, we don't know what is going to happen, but nobody can take away from you what you put in your own mind." That sentence became her survival mechanism. Initially, after the war, to help support the family, she worked in a factory, but eventually she went to university to study psychology and became a psychotherapist. She has used her own experiences of survival to help others survive life crises.

Early on in the book she makes an immensely important distinction between victimisation (what happens to you) and victimhood (how you respond to what happens to you). This is what she says about the first:

We are all likely to be victimised in some way in the course of our lives. At some point we will suffer some kind of affliction or calamity or abuse, caused by circumstances or people or institutions over which we have little or no control. This is life. And this is victimisation. It comes from the outside.

And this, about the second:

In contrast, victimhood comes from the inside. No one can make you a victim but you. We become victims not because of what happens to us but when we choose to hold on to our victimisation. We develop a victim's mind – a way of thinking and being that is rigid, blaming, pessimistic, stuck in the past, unforgiving, punitive, and without healthy limits or boundaries.[6] In an interview on the publication of the book, she said, "I've learned not to look for happiness, because that is external. You were born with love and you were born with joy. That's inside. It's always there."

We have learned this extraordinary mindset from Holocaust survivors like Edith Eger and Viktor Frankl. But in truth, it was there from the very beginning, from Abraham and Sarah, who survived whatever fate threw at them, however much it seemed to derail their mission, and despite everything they found serenity at the end of their lives. They knew that what makes a life satisfying is not external but internal, a sense of purpose, mission, being called, summoned, of starting something that would be continued by those who came after them, of bringing something new into the world by the way they lived their lives. What mattered was the inside, not the outside; their faith, not their often-troubled circumstances.

I believe that faith helps us to find the 'Why' that allows us to bear almost any 'How'. The serenity of Sarah's and Abraham's death was eternal testimony to how they lived.

Shabbat Shalom Jonathan Sacks

[1] I deliberately omit the tradition (Targum Yonatan to Gen. 22:20) that says that at the time of the binding of Isaac, Satan appeared to her and told her that Abraham had sacrificed their son, a shock that caused her death. This tradition is morally problematic.

[2] The best recent study is Robert Holub, *Nietzsche's Jewish Problem*, Princeton University Press, 2015.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, Maxims and Arrows*, 12.

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 107.

[5] Edith Eger, *The Choice*, Rider, 2017.

[6] *Ibid.*, 9.

from: The Office of Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

date: Nov 11, 2020, 5:46 PM

subject: Beginning the Journey (Chayei Sarah 5781)

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

11th November 2020

Beginning the Journey (Chayei Sarah 5781)

Rabbi Sacks z"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will carry on distributing these essays each week, so people around the world can continue to learn and be inspired by his Torah.

SHARE YOUR MEMORIES OF RABBI SACKS Z'L Unfortunately the family are unable to see people in person in the usual way during the Shiva period. We would therefore encourage anyone who wishes to share messages of comfort, stories, video reflections, or photographs to do so by sending them to: tributes@rabbisacks.org

A while back, a British newspaper, *The Times*, interviewed a prominent member of the Jewish community and a member of the House of Lords – let's call him Lord X – on his 92nd birthday. The interviewer said, "Most people, when they reach their 92nd birthday, start thinking about slowing down. You seem to be speeding up. Why is that?"

Lord X's reply was this: "When you get to 92, you see the door starting to close, and I have so much to do before the door closes that the older I get, the harder I have to work."

We get a similar impression of Abraham in this week's parsha. Sarah, his constant companion throughout their journeys, has died. He is 137 years old. We see him mourn Sarah's death, and then he moves into action. He engages in an elaborate negotiation to buy a plot of land in which to bury her. As the narrative makes clear, this is not a simple task. He confesses to the local people, Hittites, that he is "an immigrant and a resident among you" (Gen. 23:4), meaning that he knows he has no right to buy land. It will take a special concession on their part for him to do so. The Hittites politely but firmly try to discourage him. He has no need to buy a burial plot: "No one among us will deny you his burial site to bury your dead." (Gen. 23:6) He can bury Sarah in someone else's graveyard. Equally politely but no less insistently, Abraham makes it clear that he is determined to buy land. In the end, he pays a highly inflated price (400 silver shekels) to do so.

The purchase of the Cave of Machpelah is evidently a highly significant event, because it is recorded in great detail and highly legal terminology, not just here, but three times subsequently in Genesis (here in 23:17 and subsequently in 25:9; 49:30; and 50:13), each time with the same formality. Here, for instance, is Jacob on his deathbed, speaking to his sons:

Something significant is being hinted at here, otherwise why specify, each time, exactly where the field is and who Abraham bought it from?

Immediately after the story of land purchase, we read, "Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything."

(Gen. 24:1) Again this sounds like the end of a life, not a preface to a new course of action, and again our expectation is confounded. Abraham launches into a new initiative, this time to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac, who at this point is at least 37 years old. Abraham instructs his most trusted servant to go "to my native land, to my birthplace" (Gen. 24:2), to find the appropriate woman. He wants Isaac to have a wife who will share his faith and way of life. Abraham does not stipulate that she should come from his own family, but this seems to be an assumption hovering in the background.

As with the purchase of the field, this course of events is described in more detail than almost anywhere else in the Torah. Every conversational exchange is recorded. The contrast with the story of the Binding of Isaac could not be greater. There, almost everything – Abraham's thoughts, Isaac's feelings – is left unsaid. Here, everything is said. Again, the literary style calls our attention to the significance of what is happening, without telling us precisely what it is.

The explanation is simple and unexpected. Throughout the story of Abraham and Sarah, God promises them two things: children and a land. The promise of the land ("Rise, walk in the land throughout its length and breadth, for I

will give it to you," Gen. 13:17) is repeated no less than seven times. The promise of children occurs four times. Abraham's descendants will be "a great nation" (Gen. 12:22), as many as "the dust of the earth" (Gen. 13:16), and "the stars in the sky" (Gen. 15:5); he will be the father not of one nation but of many (Gen. 17:5).

Despite this, when Sarah dies, Abraham has not a single inch of land that he can call his own, and he has only one child who will continue the covenant, Isaac, who is currently unmarried. Neither promise has been fulfilled. Hence the extraordinary detail of the two main stories in Chayei Sarah: the purchase of land and the finding of a wife for Isaac. There is a moral here, and the Torah slows down the speed of the narrative as it speeds up the action, so that we will not miss the point.

God promises, but we have to act. God promised Abraham the land, but he had to buy the first field. God promised Abraham many descendants, but Abraham had to ensure that his son was married, and to a woman who would share the life of the covenant, so that Abraham would have, as we say today, "Jewish grandchildren."

Despite all the promises, God does not and will not do it alone. By the very act of self-limitation (tzimtzum) through which He creates the space for human freedom, God gives us responsibility, and only by exercising it do we reach our full stature as human beings. God saved Noah from the Flood, but Noah had to make the Ark. He gave the land of Israel to the people of Israel, but they had to fight the battles. God gives us the strength to act, but we have to do the deed. What changes the world, what fulfils our destiny, is not what God does for us but what we do for God.

That is what leaders understand, and it is what made Abraham the first Jewish leader. Leaders take responsibility for creating the conditions through which God's purposes can be fulfilled. They are not passive but active – even in old age, like Abraham in this week's parsha. Indeed in the chapter immediately following the story of finding a wife for Isaac, to our surprise, we read that Abraham remarries and has eight more children. Whatever else this tells us – and there are many interpretations (the most likely being that it explains how Abraham became "the father of many nations") – it certainly conveys the point that Abraham stayed young the way Moses stayed young, "His eyes were undimmed and his natural energy unabated" (Deut. 34:7). Though action takes energy, it gives us energy. The contrast between Noah in old age and Abraham in old age could not be greater.

Perhaps, though, the most important point of this parsha is that large promises – a land, countless children – become real through small beginnings. Leaders begin with an envisioned future, but they also know that there is a long journey between here and there; we can only reach it one act at a time, one day at a time. There is no miraculous shortcut – and if there were, it would not help. The use of a shortcut would culminate in an achievement like Jonah's gourd, which grew overnight, then died overnight. Abraham acquired only a single field and had just one son who would continue the covenant. Yet he did not complain, and he died serene and satisfied. Because he had begun. Because he had left future generations something on which to build. All great change is the work of more than one generation, and none of us will live to see the full fruit of our endeavours. Leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow a life with immortality.

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

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Nov 13, 2014, 2:07 PM

subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chayei Sarah

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

The story of Eliezer finding a shidduch [marriage partner] for Yitzchak is one of the longest narratives in the entire Torah. Rashi cites a Rabbinic teaching: Despite the fact the Torah is normally very 'stingy' in its language and we often derive new laws from just the inclusion of an extra letter vov in

a pasuk, here the Torah elaborates in great, repetitious, detail the events surrounding Eliezer's mission because "the conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs is dearer even than the Torah of the children." In other words, we can learn more about the manners and personalities of the founders of our religion – the "Avos" – by contemplating the actions and conversational nuance of their servants than we can even from delving into the Torah of their descendants.

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

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

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

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

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

The fellow is today not observant. He told Rav Pam "Do you know what I remember about you? When I was in fifth grade, I was taking a test and you caught me cheating." Anyone who knew Rav Pam knows that cheating and falsehood were an anathema to him. The student went on, "Do you know what you told me? You told me 'If you need any help, I can help you.'"

This fellow probably does not remember even one interpretation or insight that Rav Pam ever said, but that is how he remembered him. He remembered that Rav Pam told him "I can help you."

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

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

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

from: Shlomo Katz <skatz@torah.org>
to: hamaayan@torah.org
date: Nov 12, 2020, 12:16 PM
subject: Hamaayan - The Price of Holiness
Parshas Chayei Sarah The Price of Holiness
BS"D Volume 35, No. 5 27 Marcheshvan 5781
November 14, 2020 Sponsored by the Parness family in memory of Max Parness a"h

At the beginning of our Parashah, we read how Avraham bargained with Ephron over Me'arat Ha'machpelah. Ephron said he would give the burial cave to Avraham for free, but the latter insisted on paying for it. Why did Avraham insist on paying for Me'arat Ha'machpelah?

R' Nosson Sternhartz z"l (1780-1845; foremost student of R' Nachman of Breslov z"l) explains: Precisely because Me'arat Ha'machpelah is such a holy place, it was surrounded by forces of impurity as long as Ephron owned it. [It is a prerequisite to man's having free will that the forces of purity and impurity in the world be approximately equal.] Avraham wished to elevate the cave to its appropriate level of holiness (see Rashi to 23:17). However, this required that he pay for the cave, since holiness cannot be attained for nothing. For the same reason, King David refused to accept the site of the Bet Hamikdash from its then-owner as a gift; he insisted on buying it. And, for the same reason, the Zohar teaches that a person should make a point to purchase Mitzvot. (Likkutei Halachot: Hil. Matanah 4:4, 11)

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) writes similarly: The Zohar teaches, "One who wants to engage in a Mitzvah, and to engage with the Holy One Blessed is He, should not seek to do so for free. Rather, he should expend his resources to the extent of his ability." Therefore, the Chafetz Chaim continues, it is wrong for people to form a breakaway Minyan where Aliyot are given away for free, rather than participate in the auction taking place in their Shul. Indeed, on a practical level, when one pays for an Aliyah, he effectively performs multiple Mitzvot—not only reciting a blessing over the Torah, but also lighting or heating the Shul through his donation. (Ahavat Chessed II ch.16)

"I am an alien and a resident among you; grant me an estate for a burial site with you, that I may bury my dead from before me." (23:4)

R' Dovid Feinstein z"l (1929-2020; Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York and a leading Halachic authority, who passed away last week) writes: Many commentaries note the seeming contradiction in calling oneself both an "alien" and a "resident." Perhaps, Avraham meant the following: You Hittites consider me to be an alien because I moved here from Charan, and you probably think that I should take Sarah back there and bury her with her ancestors. However, Hashem has promised to give this land to my descendants after 400 years of exile. Then we will be residents here, so I claim the right to bury Sarah in the land where her offspring will live.

R' Feinstein adds: This may explain how Ephron came up with a price of 400 Shekalim for Me'arat Ha'machpelah and the surrounding field. The Torah establishes the value of a plot of land as one Shekel per year. [The Torah is referring to a plot of land having a specific agricultural output, which is how land area was measured in Biblical and Talmudic times.] Perhaps Ephron viewed the price as a rental fee of one Shekel per year for the approximately 400 years — a total of 400 Shekalim — until Avraham's descendants would actually take ownership of the cave and field away from Ephron's descendants. (Kol Dodi)

"Ve'hayah / 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 even water your camels,' her You will have designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak; and may I know through her that You have done kindness with my master." (24:14)

The Gemara (Chullin 95b, as explained by Rashi z"l) teaches that the test

Eliezer used to find Rivka did not violate the Torah's prohibition on divination because Eliezer did not actually rely on it. R' Naftali Hertz Weisel z"l (1725-1805; German banker, and a prolific author of works of Torah commentary, Hebrew grammar, and Mussar) elaborates: Our verse is not a definitive statement: "The maiden who responds thus is the right girl for Yitzchak." Rather, it is a prayer: "Please, G-d, arrange that the girl who responds thus will be none other than the girl who is meant to marry Yitzchak." Eliezer knew that he was not a prophet, and he did not expect Hashem to inform him in a supernatural manner who was the right girl. Rather, Eliezer had every intention of interviewing the girl before selecting her; he was merely praying that Hashem save him trouble and send the right girl immediately. This explains why our verse begins with a masculine form of the verb ("Ve'hayah"). The subject of the verb is the matter about which he was praying ("Let it be so"), not the girl, which would be the case if it said, "Ve'hayta" / "She will be [the one You have designated]." (Imrei Shefer)

from: Parsha@torahinaction.com
date: Nov 11, 2020, 1:35 PM
subject: Jersey Shore - Parashat Hayye Sarah
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Last Friday, **Rav Dovid Feinstein**, son of Rav Moshe Feinstein, was taken from this world. He was one of the great leaders of our generation, and the holiness that he brought to the world with his presence will be sorely missed. In his memory, I would like to share a dvar Torah which he said on this week's parashah.

At the end of the parashah, it says that Abraham got remarried. One may ask why he decided to remarry when he was already close to 140 years old? Also, the Gemara teaches that Abraham was already privileged to experience the taste of the World to Come, so at this point in his life, he certainly did not desire any pleasures of this world. Rav Dovid explains that even though Abraham was not attracted by the pleasures of this world, he still valued the opportunity to do misvot, which is our entire purpose in this world. Therefore he chose to take another wife, even at his advanced age, in order to continue to fulfill the misvah of bringing children into the world.

Rav Dovid embodied this principle in his own life as well. He lived a long, productive life in which he wrote many sefarim and became one of the top poskim of his time. He was always learning and teaching others but always below the radar. He stayed out of the limelight, preferring to stay in his great father's shadow. However when R Moshe passed away he stepped up to the plate and joined all the organizations like Torah Umesorah, Agudat Israel etc. and became the leader that everyone looked to for guidance, especially for private individuals with problems. He realized that he was needed and therefore kept on doing more and more until his pure neshamah left this world. May his zechut continue to protect us, and may his memory be an inspiration for each of us to strive to become as great as we can be.

Shabbat Shalom Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Practice

Practice makes perfect. In a eulogy delivered by Rabbi Mayer Yechiel Miller, the grandson of Rabbi Avigdor Miller, z"tl, the grandson revealed, "My grandfather was not born great. He worked on becoming great every minute."

This seemingly obvious statement deserves reflection.

I once heard a criticism of the biographies of Torah giants: "The books make us think that all our Torah leaders were prodigies born with uncanny, abnormal abilities and talents. This is very far from the truth. Our greats studied the ideals of our Torah and then worked on their inborn flaws and developed their Hashem-given talents in order to achieve perfection. The Hafess Hayim z"tl learned how to avoid the sin of lashon hara, and Rav Moshe Feinstein z"tl studied anger control and patience."

The simple rule, "Practice makes perfect," applies to the spiritual as well as physical aspects of our being. Rabbi Miller, z"tl, never spoke without weighing the propriety of his words before allowing them to leave his lips. He honed this skill with the diligence of an Olympic athlete preparing for the gold. Each time he was about to speak, he waited five seconds before allowing the words in his mind to leave his lips. Day in and day out he practiced, until he mastered the technique.

Whenever you are about to speak, spend five seconds contemplating what you are about to say. Release the words only after editing them carefully in your mind. Do this three times today, and again tomorrow, and then the next day. Then, as in an exercise program, increase the load. It only takes a few seconds each time, but the practice will lead to a much more perfect you. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

from: torahweb@torahweb.org
date: Nov 11, 2020, 7:21 PM
subject: Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Becoming Blessed
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torahweb.org
Becoming Blessed
Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

This parsha discusses great events of Jewish history, such as the acquisition of meoras hamachpelah and the marriage of Yitzchak to Rivkah. Hidden within the crevices of this story of the nation of Israel, is the story of personal redemption of Eliezer.

Eliezer was a scion of Canaan, the first person to be cursed. It happened when Noach woke up from his drunken stupor, and realized what Cham had done to him, he cursed Cham's son Canaan that he become enslaved. Eliezer was among the progeny of Canaan, and thus from the cursed family. Though Eliezer was very close to Avraham, he could not break out of that curse, and thus when Avraham was looking for a suitable wife for Yitzchak he rejected Eliezer's daughter out of hand, saying, "my son is blessed and you are cursed, and cursed one can't join a blessed family" (Rashi 24:39.)

And yet, in our very parsha Eliezer becomes redeemed! Lavan calls out, "come in, the one blessed by Hashem" (24:31). The Medrash Rabbah (60:5) says that the words "blessed by Hashem" had been put in Lavan's mouth by Hashem, and indeed he had become blessed. What caused such an incredible transformation?

Let us first explore the concept of "cursed". While we think of a "curse" as being a generic term for failure or evil, and "blessing" as a generally positive term of good being bestowed upon a person. But those words actually have a more specific meaning. They are measures of productivity and fecundity.

"Blessing" is the ability to bring forth a lot more than was put in, and "cursed" produces no more than that which was put in. Thus when the earth was cursed in the wake of Adam's sin it would no longer give forth fruit easily. On the other hand, Yitzchak was blessed, and he had reaped a hundred times the seed that he had put in (Breishis 26, 12) .

What is the personal quality most associated with beracha, and inversely with klala? We are told in Mishlei (28:20), "a trustworthy person is full of blessing." Why a "trustworthy" person? Doesn't a "trusted" person only retain what he was given? Why would he be blessed (i.e. produce more than given)?

This requires a bit of rethinking on our part regarding where blessing emanates from. We tend to think of our efforts as producing wealth, but in fact our efforts can only reorganize that which already exists. For example, I can take a tree, saw it into planks, and make a table, but I have merely rearranged the wood. Producing more than I invested is not the product of human effort; planting one seed and producing a tree which yields hundreds of apples is achieved by tapping into "blessing", a force beyond our world. Similarly, when a person starts a business, the earnings commensurate to the effort invested can be described as being the result of his industriousness, but

the extraordinary wealth that a successful business can generate is a blessing sourced from somewhere outside of us.

Imagine a pipe that is a conduit from a reservoir to a sink. The more absorbent the pipe is, the less water flows out to the end; the less absorbent the pipe, the more water will flow through. The more a person sets himself up to merely be a conduit, the more he merits that Hashem will channel benevolence through him.

Canaan was cursed because he attempted to divert - and subvert - the blessings that Hashem had intended for the world as a whole to himself (see Rashi 9:25). He therefore became a slave, someone who has that which is needed for subsistence, but never more.

Eliezer displayed integrity to his mission (Midrash, *ibid.*) He could have tried to take Yitzchak, the prize catch, for himself. Instead, he acted with total integrity, removing himself from the equation totally. When he acted in completely good faith, relating to his mission as its executor and not trying to profit from it, he reentered the realm of the blessed.

This is one of the most counterintuitive lessons of the Torah. We instinctively grab in order to have more and more. The Torah, however, teaches us that the honest and the faithful become the conduit for the blessings of life.

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha CHAYEI SARAH 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Jewish tradition teaches us that the house of our mother Sarah had unique qualities. I have written about this often but add the following nuance to my previous writings. We are taught that in the tent of Sarah there were three outstanding qualities: the blessing of bountiful bread that is the quality of hospitality, the cloud of spirituality that always hovered over her home and the fact that the candle lit for the Sabbath burned throughout the entire week until the entrance of the next Sabbath.

This idea of that candle contains within it the great message that every day of the week is only a prelude to the great day of the Sabbath. We say so in our prayers when we count our days according to the upcoming Sabbath. This is the Jewish soul that constantly yearns for the Sabbath throughout the mundane activities of the weekday world. The Jew cannot believe that somehow the troubles, travails, distractions, and challenges of ordinary life which are omnipresent are really the basic issues of our existence and define our purpose in life.

Those who think that way are hardly removed from the rest of the animal kingdom that exists only in the moment, for the present, without any great vision as to what life should be and what one's purpose in existence is. It is only the Sabbath day that puts the whole week into perspective and enables us to see the greatness that the creator intended for all of us.

Throughout the ages, Jews always defined themselves in terms of the Sabbath. The criterion for Jewish legitimacy always was that one was a Sabbath observer. Jews took the Sabbath and made it their given name and, later in history, even their surname. They always wanted to be identified with the Sabbath, because they realized that the candle of life burns from one Sabbath to the next, and is never extinguished, thereby giving one the glimpse and goal of eternity in an otherwise finite world.

There have been many great works written about the Sabbath: halachic, philosophical, fanciful, inspirational, and psychological. All of them deal with special facets of the Sabbath, which is like a diamond that sheds light in all directions, no matter which way it is turned. The Sabbath became the

object of love and endearment, and not only of identity and Jewish pride. Jews understood that the destruction of the Sabbath, God forbid, would mean the eventual destruction of the nation and its purpose as being a holy people. This is the treasure that our mother Sarah bequeathed to us – a flame from a lonely candle that lights our way through an often dark and dangerous weekday world. We are witness to the tragedy that engulfs individuals and entire sections of the Jewish people who are devoid of the Sabbath and do not possess that candle of light that only the Sabbath can provide. That is why this week's Torah reading is entitled "The Life of Sarah", because as long as the Sabbath lives within the Jewish world, our mother Sarah is with us, to comfort and guide us, and to help raise us to eternal greatness. Shabbat shalom
Berel Wein

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 14 November 2020 / 27 Heshvan 5781
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parashat Chayei Sarah
Practice Makes Perfect

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

Apparently, it takes at least 10,000 hours of practice to master an artisanal skill. That's a serious amount of time, and sometimes before you clock up those 10,000 hours, you may be tempted to think that you've got it down. I well remember putting a lot less than 10 hours into learning Chuck Berry's classic intro to Johnny B. Goode, in a pastiche version I wrote called "Yankie Levine" for the Ohr Somayach Simchat Beit HaShoeva the year before last (when masks were something that only surgeons wore). Despite what I considered to be adequate practice, on the performance night I found that my fingers had not yet learned the notes that my brain thought they had, and under the pressure of performance, well, let's say, Chuck was rockin' and a'rolling in his grave.

On the other hand (l'havdil), this Rosh Hashana I got up to daven Pesukei d'Zimra in Ohr Somayach, (my privilege for more years that I can remember). I was feeling a little 'under-the-weather,' nothing terrible, but suffering from yet-undiagnosed COVID-19. Nevertheless, I got 'up to bat,' and thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman's relentless drumming the nusach into my head (and years of practice), I adequately completed my task. Rav Shlomo Wolbe once remarked that being a Jew means being "a professional human being". To be professional at anything — especially being a human being — takes a lifetime of dedicated practice.

"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years..." Why didn't the Torah just write, "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred and twenty-seven years"? Sarah never stopped growing. She never stopped practicing to be a professional human being — not at seven years, not at twenty, not at a hundred and not even on the day she left the world. That is what made her the mother of the Jewish People.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah Chayei Sara: Is the title misleading?
A tribute to Rabbi Lord Sacks z"l

Is the title of this week's parsha misleading? Chayei Sara means the life of Sara, but when one has a look at the content of the parsha, sadly it's all about

the death of Sara, and the manner in which Avraham made arrangements to bury her.

In the Midrash, Rabbi Akiva draws a parallel between two outstanding Biblical characters, Sara Imeinu – Sarah our matriarch, and Esther HaMalkah, Queen Esther. What's the connection between the two?

According to Rabbi Akiva, at the beginning of our parsha, the Torah tells us that Sara was 127 years old when she passed away. It was thanks to her merit that at a later time Esther became the queen over 127 provinces.

But the comparisons between the two run far deeper than that. After all, both Sara and Esther were exceptionally selfless and kindhearted people. Both had two names: Sarai became Sara, and Hadassah was Esther. Both of them were connected to royalty: Esther of course was the queen while Sara literally means princess, and she was given that name because she was a person of regal bearing.

Hashem said to Avraham, "Kol asher tomar elecha Sara, shema bekolah." – "Whatever Sarah tells you to do, hearken to her voice."

And in the book of Esther we are told,

"Vaya'as Mordechai kechol asher tzivta eilav Esther." – "Mordechai did all that which Esther asked him to do."

Actually there is one further comparison which I find to be the most compelling of them all: It's thanks to Sara and Esther that we exist as a people today. Esther, with the help of Heaven, was able to intervene in order to save us physically at a time when Haman sought to annihilate Am Yisrael. Sara gave birth to our people and it's thanks to her personal example that we have internalised her values and her teachings, which we keep in our hearts and in our minds to this day. Thanks to Sara, we have survived spiritually as a nation and that's why our parsha is called Chayei Sara. Sadly she passed away but in spirit she will always continue to live on.

Last motsei shabbat we all heard the very sad news of the passing of my illustrious predecessor, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, and throughout this week, we have been grieving. And we have been joined by so many people around the globe, well beyond the confines of our people, because his global impact was so enormous and so extraordinary.

Like Sara Imeinu he was somebody who touched the hearts and moulded the minds of so many people. His impact was enormous and his legacy will certainly continue to live on. Like Sara Imeinu, concerning Rabbi Lord Sacks we will always be able to say that although, sadly, he has passed away, in spirit, he will always continue to live on in our hearts and in our minds. Yehi yichro baruch – may his memory be for an eternal blessing.

Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Drasha Parshas Chayei Sarah - Take My Money, Please!
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

The stories of Sefer Braishis are the guideposts of morality for the Jewish nation. They teach us ethics and guide our character. Sometimes we can even apply their lessons to teach us even the simple and practical ways of the world. This week we can even learn a little business acumen from our forefather, Avraham.

In this week's portion, Avraham sets out to find a burial site for his wife, Sora. He approaches the children of Ches and asks to meet Ephron, who sanctimoniously offers any plot of land and benevolently offers it for nothing.

Avraham does not jump at the offer, but immediately declares that he is ready to pay top dollar: in fact, even before Ephron uses the words, "behold I have given it to you," Avraham responds, "I have given you the money! Take it from me! And now allow me to bury my dead."

Then, in a quick turnabout, Ephron announces an exorbitant price which Avraham, without bargaining or negotiating, pays immediately. The entire transaction is strange. Despite Ephron's generous overtures, it seems that Avraham is throwing the money at him in an effort to consummate the deal. And the minute a price is mentioned, exorbitant as it may be, Avraham pays it without further question. All it seems is that he wanted to close the deal and leave. Why?

Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz, the Bostoner Rebbe of Lawrence, NY once told me this wonderful anecdote:

The Ponovezer Rav, Rabbi Yosef Kahanemen zt"l, was one of the foremost builders of Torah in the post-war era. He was also a remarkable fund-raiser. Once he was welcomed into the home of a wealthy individual who was more interested in discussing Torah with him than giving money to the Ponovezer Yeshiva. Every time the Rav would talk about the donating for the construction of the new building, the man would begin to expound on a different Torah topic. Finally, Rav Kahaneman told him the following story: A woman in Poland had a daughter who was well past her prime. The matchmaker suggested that she alter her passport and claim she was much younger than her true age. He explained that he knew a Polish passport official, who, for the right price, could make her any age she would like. The official met the woman and then looked at the girl. "Oh, this is not a major problem. I am sure that there must have been an error in processing the original document. Of course, we can rectify this most egregious error. In fact, for a small service fee of 500 zloty I can take seven years off the date on her birth certificate, and we can have her at 21 years old!"

Despite the steep service charge, the mother heartily agreed and quickly took the money from her purse. Feeling that there were many more zloty from where the first 500 came from the officer held up his hand. "You know what," he smiled devilishly, "maybe there was a bigger error than we actually had thought! Actually, for 700 zloty I could make her 20 years old!" Reluctantly, the mother agreed and went to her purse for more zloty. At that point, the officer began to get quite greedy. "You know, he said, for an additional 300 zloty, I could even have her at 18!"

The mother became very nervous. Quickly she handed over the 700 zloty and yelled, "No, thank you. 20 years old is fine!" She grabbed her daughter. "Quick," she shouted, "let's get out of here! Soon we will be left with no more zloty and no more years!"

The Rav's message struck its mark. The man stopped his Torah-filled filibuster and handed over a sizable check. Avraham knew his negotiating partner well. He understood that the longer Ephron would wait, the more time Sora would lie in state, and the more expensive the transaction would become. As soon as he heard the false graciousness of Ephron, Avraham immediately told him that he would pay full price – on one condition. Take the money and give me the plot. He understood when it was time to do what had to be done and move on. He was not interested in prolonging negotiations that would only leave him without money and perhaps without land. Often it is worthwhile to take a hit and leave, because the pain of the moment is far less than the agony of insincerity.

Dedicated to our son Roy Zeev Abraham in honor of his Bar Mitzvah. May he continue the cherished tradition that has been handed down to us by our parents, parents' parents' all the way back to the patriarchs.

By Mr. and Mrs. David Abraham

Good Shabbos!

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Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Chayei Sarah

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Patriarchal Events Foreshadow History for Their Descendants

The Ramban in Parshas Lech Lecha and other meforshim elsewhere in Sefer Bereshis discuss the concept of Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim. This basic idea teaches that while the narration of Sefer Bereshis seems to be merely "nice stories," the reality is that the incidents that occurred to the Patriarchs of our nation—Avrohom, Yitzchak, and Yaakov—have profound effects on the rest of Jewish history. "Everything which occurred to the fathers happened to the sons as well." That which the Avos experienced set the pattern and the template for what was destined to happen to Klal Yisrael for the rest of Jewish history.

For example, the Ramban points out the pattern (which does not take a genius to recognize) that when Avram went down to Egypt because of the famine, Pharaoh took Sarai, and as a result of that Hashem punished Pharaoh, who eventually sent Avram and Sarai away with great wealth. This is literally what happened with Yaakov Avinu and his children going down to Egypt because of a famine, and ultimately being sent out with great wealth after Pharaoh was punished. That which happened to the fathers, happened to the sons!

Some of the instances of the Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim pattern are extremely obvious, like the case I just mentioned. Others are not so obvious. Perhaps we will only understand some of them in retrospect when the future redemption takes place and "history will be completed." Tonight, I would just like to share what I think is a very chilling instance of this principle. In this week's parsha, Avraham comes back from the Akeida to learn that his wife has passed away. Avraham has the task of finding a suitable burial place for Sarah Imeinu. Chazal (at least according to some Rishonim) consider this to be the last of the Avraham's "Ten Tests". Whether it is the final test or not, Chazal are replete with the Ribono shel Olam's appreciation for how Avraham Avinu acted in this incident.

I will cite just two examples of how Chazal look at what Avraham Avinu did here:

There is a famous Gemara in Bava Basra [16a]. The Satan approaches the Ribono shel Olam and tells Him "I have searched the entire world and I did not find another Tzadik like Avraham, for You told him 'Arise – walk the length and breadth of the Land for I will give it to you,' and yet, when he needed to bury Sarah he could not find a place to bury her (he had to buy it) and yet he did not question Your Ways." (The Gemara then says that HaKadosh Baruch Hu asked the Satan if he had ever seen the righteous Iyov, but we are not getting into that story.)

Similarly, there is a famous Medrash (Shemos Rabbah), which Rashi quotes in the beginning of Parshas Va'Era. The Almighty appeared to Moshe Rabbeinu (after Moshe had complained to Him "...Why have You harmed this people, why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name he harmed this people, but You did not rescue Your people." [Shemos 5:22-23]). Hashem responded: "I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as Kel Shakkai, but through My Name Hashem I did not become known to them." [Shemos 6:3].

The Medrash explains the deeper message in Hashem's mentioning the Avos to Moshe Rabbeinu here: "Woe to people who are lost and who are never to be found. Many times, I appeared to them (the Avos) only with My "less miraculous" manifestation (Kel Shakkai) without making known to them My Name Hashem (which can change nature) and yet they never complained to Me despite all the troubles they encountered in life!"

Here again, the Medrash mentions that Hashem praised Avraham to Moshe, citing the fact that he had to pay an exorbitant price to pay for a gravesite for his wife, after having been promised that the entire Land would belong to his children – and yet Avraham never complained!

I heard an interesting question from Rav Issac Bernstein, a Rav in London England. He asks: Did Avraham Avinu really need to buy the Me'aras HaMachpelah? As soon as he went to Bnei Ches and asked for a place to

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bury his wife they told him "...You are a prince of G-d in our midst; in the choicest of our burial places bury your dead, any of us will not withhold his burial place from you, from burying your dead." [Bereshis 23:6] It sounds like they were telling him "It is yours for free!" Avraham Avinu responded, "I want to pay for it!" So Ephron, once he smelled the money, started negotiating a price.

But Avraham did not have to pay for this! It was offered to him for nothing. Why didn't he want to accept it? I can give you several reasons.

First, just like by the King of Sodom – Avraham refused to take anything that he did not pay for — "I do not want you to say that you made Avraham rich." [Bereshis 14:23], so too here he did not want a free burial plot! In general, there is a principle — "He who hates presents will live." [Mishlei 15:27].

Additionally, perhaps Avraham adopted the philosophy of the Brisker Rav. When Rav Yitzchak Zev Sovloveitchik was marrying off one of his sons, the proprietor of a Jerusalem catering hall came to him and said I want you to make the wedding by me and it will be free of charge. The Brisker Rav refused the offer and insisted on paying for it. He later commented "The most expensive way of doing something is getting it for free." (When you get something for free, you wind up indebted to your benefactor. Then you really need to pay).

However, whatever Avraham Avinu's calculations were to refuse the free gravesite, the truth of the matter is that it was offered to him free of charge. So what are these Gemaras and Medrashim telling us by pointing to Avraham Avinu who did not complain to G-d even though he needed to pay for a gravesite after being promised that the Land would belong to him? Rav Bernstein cites an eye opening Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer which mentions both of these teachings of Chazal and helps us understand the meaning of these Medrashim.

It says in Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer that when the Malachim came to Avraham Avinu in Parshas Vayera and he wanted to slaughter a cow to make a meal for them, the cow ran away...into the Me'aras HaMachpelah! Avraham ran after the cow and followed it into the ancient cave. When he went inside, he discovered Adam and Chava lying in the Me'aras HaMachpelah surrounded by lit candles with a fragrant aroma. He found them lying in exquisite serenity and suddenly felt spiritually inspired and uplifted by the site. At that moment he declared "This is where I want my wife and I to be buried!"

That is when Avraham Avinu first thought of purchasing the Me'aras HaMachpelah. When the time came to bury Sarah, he told the Children of Yevus (even though they were genealogically the Children of Ches as the Torah calls them Chitites, – since they lived in the city of Yevus, they were also referred to as Yevusim) that he wanted to buy the cave from them. They responded – we know that G-d is destined to give your descendants all this land, including our city of Yevus. Swear to us that you will not take the City of Yevus unless we give you permission! Avraham Avinu, the Medrash continues, agreed to the deal and signed a document to that effect. The inhabitants of Yevus took the document and made statues, which they put in the center of the city, to which they attached the document containing Avraham's oath that his descendants would not forcibly take the City of Yevus away from its original inhabitants.

Generations later, when the Israelites approached the City of Yevus, they saw these statues with the document and they therefore could not take the city away from the inhabitants, because of Avraham's oath.

Yevus is Yerushalayim. The Chittim in effect told Avraham – "Ad chatzi haMalchus..." – it is all yours to have – but not Yerushalayim! For that Avraham had to make an oath and for that he paid.

What is the end of the story? The Jews could not conquer Yevus. At the end of Sefer Shmuel, Dovid HaMelech came to a fellow named Aravna haYevusi and he asks to buy Yevus from him, because the Jews were unable to conquer it as a result of Avraham's shavua. That is the only way we got Yerushalayim. Dovid HaMelech the great-great (many times) grandson of Avraham Avinu had to pay to get Yerushalayim.

For 3,000 years, we have been fighting over Yerushalayim. That is what I mean that this is another example of Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim. We know that Yerushalayim is the united and eternal capital of Eretz Yisrael. The Arabs say "No, this is our holy place also." This is history repeating itself. The actions of the fathers foreshadow what will happen with their children. For 3,000 years, this has been going on – what will be with Jerusalem? Eventually, we got it and with G-d's Help we are going to once again have it – without anyone contesting our right to exclusive ownership. *Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com*
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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Chayei Sarah: Avraham Avinu's wonderful death

'And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said: "Send me away unto my master"' (Chayei Sarah 24:54)

As opposed to its name, this week's Torah portion of Chayei Sarah ("The Life of Sarah") does not actually talk about her life, but rather tells the story of her passing. Actually, the entire portion deals with the deaths of Sarah and Abraham and the establishment of the next generation with the marriage of Isaac to Rebecca.

At the beginning of the Torah portion, we hear about the death of Sarah and about Abraham's efforts to purchase Ma'arat Hamachpela (the Cave of the Patriarchs) in the city of Hebron, to serve as a family burial complex for Sarah and himself. After this, we read about Abraham's servant being sent to Aram Naharayim to search for a partner for Isaac. That search ultimately ends with Rebecca being brought back to Abraham's home and with the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca. As the portion concludes, we read about Abraham's final years, his parting from his sons, his death and his burial in the Cave of the Patriarchs, where he had buried his wife Sarah.

Abraham's death is described almost idyllically: "And Abraham expired and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people." (Genesis 25, 8)

Abraham died satisfied! What was he satisfied with? We are familiar with the sense of satisfaction, a sense of fullness and of reaching a maximum level of energy. Indeed, this is how the Ramban (Nachmanides, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, biblical scholar and commentator born in Spain in 1194, died in Israel in 1270) describes Abraham's death. "This means he realized all the desires of his heart, and sated with all good things... that his soul was sated with days, and had no desire for his days to provide anything new for him... and this is the description of God's kindness toward the righteous and of His benevolence to them."

Abraham adopted a lifestyle that filled him spiritually. He believed in his life, his deeds, and acted to implement the godly values he had discovered. Abraham busied himself with acts of loving-kindness and welcoming guests; he made sure to spread the deep truths he stood for after many long years of examination; he wandered to a distant land where he planted his roots; he walked before God with innocence and faith. His life was full of faith and with the actions that stemmed from it. When it came his time to pass from the world, he did not experience distress. He died satisfied, pleased and fulfilled.

THE SAGES of the Midrash added another layer to these words in an attempt to explain Abraham's impressive death, if such a word can be used to describe a death. "The Blessed be He shows the righteous while they are still in this world what will be the reward that will be given to them in the

world to come, and their souls are satisfied and they sleep.” (Genesis Raba 62, 2)

The Midrash describes death as sleep. When life is full and satisfying, when there is harmony among one’s values, desires and deeds, a moment comes when life ends and a person can look back satisfied and pleased, while also looking forward with faith to the reward in the next world.

Bronnie Ware is an Australian nurse who takes care of terminally ill patients during the last stages of their lives. As part of her work, she conducted honest conversations with her patients and decided to document their last words in her book, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. She describes five things that people regret when they are at the cusp of death: that they did not live a life true to themselves, but rather tried to answer to the expectations of others; that they worked too hard; that they did not express their feelings; that they did not keep in touch with friends; that they did not allow themselves to be happier.

Abraham represents the person who was true to his values, worked hard for lofty goals, was a loyal friend, and in short, a person who lived a gratifying life full of content. Such a person feels satisfied when he is about to die. He says to himself, “I lived a life that was good and significant. Now I can close my eyes with a sense of tranquility.”

Last Shabbat, the Jewish nation parted from one of its best and most beloved leaders, Rabbi Professor Lord Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory, the former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. Rabbi Sacks was a role model who filled his life with significant deeds. He was a profound philosopher with an astute and penetrating understanding of the human soul and of human society. He worked tirelessly deriving Torah wisdom and illuminating the entire world with it. He was also a loyal and fundamental representative of the Jewish nation to the nations of the world and their leaders. With his unique talents and fervent faith, he excelled at showing how Judaism calls upon all people to take responsibility for their lives and for repairing society and all of humanity.

The untimely passing of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is a tremendous loss to the Jewish people. He will continue to be a model of a person who dedicated his life to lofty purposes and successfully achieved his goals.

May his memory be a blessing.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

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Rav Kook Torah

Psalm 26: Two Levels of Love

Chanan Morrison

“O God, I love the abode of Your house, and the dwelling-place of Your glory.” (Psalms 26:8)

What is the difference between קִיעוֹן בֵּיתְךָ “the abode of Your house” and מְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ “the dwelling-place of Your glory”?

True Love and Self-Love

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, well known for his sharp-witted sayings, was a fearless champion of truth. Once he saw a young man enjoying a fillet of fish.

“Why are you eating the fish?” the rabbi asked.

Surprised by the question, the young man replied, “Because I love fish!”

“And is it because you love the fish so much that you killed and cooked it? If you really loved the fish, you would have let it live in the water!”

“The truth is,” the rabbi observed, “that you do not love the fish. You love yourself. Because the fish gratifies your appetite, you killed and ate it.”

Two Stages

This verse portrays the psalmist’s mental preparations for prayer. He first notes his delight upon entering a sacred place. “O God, I love the abode of Your house!”

As we develop feelings of love, they are connected to our sense of self. The love and pleasure we experience when entering God’s house are rooted in the awareness that we find ourselves in a place of sanctity. The soul is intoxicated with the uplifting experience of holiness and inspiration.

This love is bound to our self. We are aware we are standing in קִיעוֹן בֵּיתְךָ, in “the abode of God’s house.” The focus is on us, on our love and delight. Then comes the higher level of מְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ. The holiness intensifies; the love is refined and purified. This is no longer a love where the self has a place. There is no longer a self-awareness that allows one to say, “I love.” There is no קִיעוֹן, no abode where I exist.

There is only an exceptional love without parallel in the physical realm, a love only found in the highest love of God. This love transcends any sense of an external observer.

There is only מְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ, “the dwelling-place of Your glory.”

This is the extraordinary experience of boundless, eternal love; it belongs to the state of heightened consciousness when “My flesh and my heart cease; God is the rock of my heart, my portion forever” (Psalms 73:26).²

With this great love, the psalmist is ready to engage in the majesty of lofty prayer.

(Adapted from Olat Re’iyah vol. I, p. 44)

1 Story told by Rabbi Abraham Twerski in Visions of the Fathers (ArtScroll, 1999). 2 Cf. Tanya chapter 43.

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Rabbi Nachman Kahana

BS”D Parashat Chayai Sarah 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Parashat Chayai Sarah

Our rabbis have taught that HaShem put Avraham Avinu through ten tests.

Most commentators say that the ninth was the “binding of Yitzchak” (Akeidat Yitzchak) and the tenth, the negotiations between Avraham and the Hittite Council of Elders for the purchase of Ma’arat Ha’machpela as a burial site for Sarah.

If logic dictates that every succeeding test increased in difficulty, then what was the focus of this last test of real estate purchase set before Avraham that caused it to be more challenging than the Akeida?

Was it the need to deal with worldly matters of “real estate” while he was steeped in a profound emotional crisis at the loss of his beloved Sarah?

Perhaps! Was it his being taken advantage of by the unscrupulous Efron the Hittite, who charged 400 shekels for a burial site? Perhaps!

These were indeed aggravating realities, but the real hard core of the test – I believe – ran far deeper into the area which was to impact upon Jewish history.

A fundamental religious principle appears in many of our classical commentaries and responsa:

The actions of the fathers (Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov) guide their children (the Jewish people) along the path to redemption

The moment of truth came when Avraham, despite the ramifications of what he was presently going to say, stood up before the Hittite Council of Elders and proclaimed:

I am a stranger and a dweller among you

Rashi quotes the midrash which explains what Avraham meant:

If you wish [to sell the burial site], I will act as a stranger who recognizes your right of ownership over the area; but if you do not [sell me the burial site], I will implement my right of sovereignty and seize the land by virtue of G-d’s promise to me, “And to your children will I give this land”

Recall that Avraham was told by HaShem to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's home to take up residence in a land which HaShem would identify later. At that time, Europe was desolate, as were most parts of Africa and Asia, not to speak of the Americas. But instead of sending Avraham to establish a Jewish State in an unpopulated area where there would be no protest, Avraham was directed to the most populous area in the world – a thin sliver of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea inhabited by seven nations numbering in the hundreds of thousands, possibly even millions.

Each of these peoples, all descendants of Cham the son of Noach, arrived in the land much before Avraham. They cultivated its fields, constructed buildings, and established places of worship, which taken together served as a common civilization.

At this juncture in their history, a stranger arrives from the east and declares that he is the true sovereign over all the land. Not just the area of Canaan, but of all the lands from the Euphrates in the north to the Nile in the south, and from the Mediterranean in the west to Mesopotamia in the east.

By this statement, Avraham challenged the rights of countless peoples who considered themselves as the owners of these lands by virtue of conquest and possession. This was an act of immense courage; because from that moment on, Avraham was perceived by everyone to be a threat to their way of life – to their very existence.

We were here before you! You are a foreign implant in the Middle East. We do not tolerate other beliefs! Does this sound strangely familiar? Don't we hear it daily from Arab spokesmen, echoing the feelings of the ancient children of Cham when reacting to Avraham's declaration of sovereignty? These anti-G-d, latter-day advocates of denial spew their venom in the media, on campus, in the Security Council, on Capitol Hill, and on the Temple Mount.

And we ask ourselves where is the Avraham of our generation who will stand up before the world and declare that Eretz Yisrael is our G-d-given heritage?

This is obviously too huge a test for today's Jewish leaders – whether they be great talmidei chachamim who, almost to the man, advocate a low profile when dealing with Yishmael in the east and Esav in the west, and certainly the secular Jews who believe that our ties to the land are historic and do not stem from G-d's promise to our forefathers.

If I were to merit the opportunity to stand before an international forum, I would shout the words of Avraham Avinu. Although we recognize certain individual rights of non-Jews in the Holy Land, G-d and His people Israel are the sovereigns over the entire land between the two great rivers.

The rejection of our sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael as being G-d given is the root cause of all our problems today in Eretz Yisrael.

In the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War, when Hashem presented to Am Yisrael the entire area of Eretz Yisrael west of the Jordan River on a silver platter, the Jewish thing to do would have been to immediately:

Erase the two abominations standing on the Temple Mount.

Annex all the areas of Shomron, Yehuda, Aza, and the Golan Heights into the State of Israel.

Open the bridges over the Jordan River to Jordan and help, facilitate, assist and inspire all the Arabs to leave the country.

Commence on an ambitious project of resettling the newly acquired land between the Sea and the River.

Throw open the gates of Aliya for the millions who would have returned had the government acted according to the first four.

However, since our leaders lack the Jewish pride which filled Avraham Avinu, we are witnessing the negation of everything which is right.

The Temple Mount has become the focal point for Moslems in Eretz Yisrael, when on a typical Friday in Ramadan 300,000 Moslems ascend the Mount and turn their backs on Yerushalayim to bow down to Mecca.

Our government is being pressured to establish another failed Arab state in the area of Shomron, Yehuda and Aza, and to relinquishing the Golan Heights to the Syrians in return for a piece of paper.

Instead of diminishing the Arab population, our government does everything to increase it as they turn a blind eye to the multiple Arab marriages, so that a Bedouin family can number from 50 to 75 and more children, and slowly take over the entire Negev.

The long-awaited ingathering of all Jews to Eretz Yisrael did not crystallize because of the weakness of the "children" compared to the pride and strength of Avraham Avinu when he declared our G-d-given sovereignty over every millimeter of this Holy Land.

In past desperate periods in our history, HaShem sent a leader who exuded the Jewish pride exemplified by Avraham Avinu. When that day will come in our time, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran and all the other would-be Hitlers who slither around the planet will be no more. And the banners of the twelve Jewish tribes will be raised by the people who have returned to take possession of all of Eretz Yisrael.

We need the gallant leader who would stand tall on the Temple Mount with talit and tefillin and announce to the world that the "Land of Israel" is not a mere cliché, it is a fundamental decree of HaShem that the Land is sanctified and is the possession of HaShem's chosen people, according to the minimum borders as stated in the Torah. These borders include the present day's states of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Sinai Peninsula, parts of Turkey; in short all the lands between the Mediterranean and the entire length of the Euphrates River whose source begins in Turkey and empties into what is commonly called the Persian Gulf.

So, remember the three Bs: B careful, B healthy, B here

And JLMM: Jewish Lives Matter More

Shabbat Shalom,
Nachman Kahana

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Subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

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

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And Abraham was old, well-stricken in age..." (Gen. 24:1)

In addition to their shared ideals, the symbiotic relationship between Abraham and Isaac includes a remarkable likeness in physical appearance. Interestingly, one of the consequences of their physical similarity is the basis for one of the most curious statements in the Talmud. On the verse in our portion, "Abraham was old, well-stricken in age", our Sages conclude that at this point in time, the symptoms of old age were introduced to the world [Talmud Bava Metzia 87a].

The reason? People seeking out Abraham would mistakenly address Isaac, and those seeking out Isaac would approach Abraham. Disturbed by the confusion, Abraham pleads for God's mercy to make him look old, and Abraham's plea is answered: a 120 year-old man will never again look like his 20 year-old son!

How do we understand why Abraham was so upset by this case of mistaken identities? After all, what's wrong with being mistaken for your son?

Doesn't every aging parent dream of slowing down the aging process and remaining perpetually young?

We find the answers hidden between the lines of this teaching, in which the dialectic of the complex relationship between father and son is expressed. Despite our desire for closeness between the generations, a father must appear different from his son for two reasons.

First, it is so that he can receive the filial obligations due to him as the transmitter of life and tradition. This idea is rooted in the Biblical commandment that the younger generation honors the elder. In fact, the last will and testament of Rabbi Yehudah the Pious (12th Century Germany) forbade anyone from taking a spouse with the same first name as that of their parents. This, explained Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik zt'l, was to avoid giving the impression that a child would ever address a parent by their first name.

We may be close to our parents, but they are not to be confused with our friends.

Second, the son must appear different from his father so that the son understands his obligation to add his unique contribution to the wisdom of the past. Abraham pleads with God that Isaac's outward appearance should demonstrate that he is not a carbon copy of his father, but rather a unique individual. After all, when Isaac becomes a patriarch himself, he will represent the trait of *gevurah*, that part of God's manifestation of strength and justice that provides an important counterbalance to Abraham's trait of *hesed* (loving-kindness).

Abraham, the dynamic and creative world traveler, stands in contrast to the introspective and pensive Isaac, who never stepped beyond the sacred soil of Israel. With great insight, Abraham understood that unless the confusion in appearance ceased, Isaac might never realize the necessity of "coming into his own" and developing his own separate identity.

A Talmudic teaching of the pedagogic relationship between grandparents and grandchildren illustrates the importance of the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between the generations. Rabbi Hiya bar Abba states, "Whoever hears Torah from his grandchild is equivalent to having received it from Sinai"! [Kiddushin 30a] This concept reveals that the line between Sinai and the present can be drawn in both directions. Not only do grandfathers pass down the tradition to their children and grandchildren, but grandchildren pass the tradition up to their forebears.

We can and must glean insights into the Torah from the younger generations. Consider the fascinating Talmudic passage that describes how, when Moses ascended on High to receive the Torah from the Almighty, the master of all prophets found God affixing crowns (*tagim*) to the holy letters of the law [Talmud, *Menahot* 29b]. When Moses inquired about their significance, God answered that the day would arrive when a great Sage, Rabbi Akiva, would derive laws from each twirl and curlicue.

Whereas Moses was given the fundamentals, namely the Biblical words and their crowns (corresponding to the laws and methods of explication and extrapolation), Rabbi Akiva, in a later generation, deduced necessary laws for his day, predicated upon the laws and principles that Moses received at Sinai.

This is the legitimate march of Torah that Maimonides documents in his introduction to his commentary of the Mishna, and it is the methodology by which modern-day responsa deal with issues such as electricity on the Sabbath, brain-stem death/life-support, and in-vitro fertilization, and more. The eternity of Torah demands both the fealty of the children to the teachings of the parents and the opportunity for the children to build on and develop that teaching. This duality of Sinai enhances our present-day experience. Abraham prays for a distinctive old age to enable Isaac to develop his uniqueness. Sons and fathers are not exactly the same, even if many fathers would like to think that they are. Only if sons understand the similarity, and if fathers leave room for individuality, can the generations become truly united in Jewish eternity.
Shabbat Shalom!

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When does Mincha Start?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Why Mincha?

If the word *mincha* means a "gift" or sometimes, more particularly, "an offering made from flour," why does this word refer exclusively to our afternoon prayer, rather than to any of our other prayers?"

Question #2: When Mincha?

"When is the optimal time to daven *mincha*?"

Question #3: What Mincha?

"What do the words *mincha ketanah* and *mincha gedolah* mean?"

Introduction

The Gemara in *Brachos* that I will cite shortly quotes a *posuk* from this week's *parsha* as the source for our daily *mincha* prayer, providing an opportunity to discuss some of the laws concerning when one may begin davening *mincha*.

Why *mincha*?

But first, why do we call the prayer *mincha*? As our questioner noted, the word *mincha* means a gift, and the Torah uses the term *mincha* to refer to a grain offering, which could be offered at any time of the day. Some *mincha* offerings were voluntary, whereas others were required. Some were private offerings, such as the forty loaves that accompanied the *korban todah*, the thanksgiving offering. Others were *korbanos tzibur*, public offerings, such as the *lechem hapanim* that graced the *shulchan* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the *korban omer* offered on the second day of *Pesach*, and the special *shtei halechem* that were offered on *Shavuot*.

Assuming that our daily afternoon prayer corresponds to the afternoon *korban* offered in the *Beis Hamikdash* (as we will soon discuss), that offering is called *tamid shel bein ha'arbaim*, the offering brought every afternoon. The term *bein ha'arbaim* means the afternoon, since it is after the sun begins its daily descent and before sundown. The *korban tamid* was offered twice a day, in the morning, *shacharis*, and in the afternoon, *bein ha'arbaim*. Thus, since our morning prayer is called *shacharis*, shouldn't we call the afternoon one *bein ha'arbaim*? And, even assuming that the prayer is called *mincha* because the *tamid shel bein ha'arbaim* was accompanied by a *mincha* offering, the morning *tamid*, also, was accompanied by a *mincha* offering, yet its corresponding prayer is called *shacharis*.

As you would imagine, I am not the first one to pose this question; about 800 years ago, it was raised by *Tosafos* (*Pesachim* 107a, s.v. *Samuch*), who provides two answers. *Tosafos* suggests that since *korbanos mincha* accompanied the two daily *korbanos tamid*, and the morning one is called *shacharis*, the afternoon *korban* was called *mincha*. Perhaps calling the afternoon prayer *bein ha'arbaim* was considered too unwieldy. *Tosafos* presents a second approach, which is based on a Talmudic passage that refers to the prayer of *Eliyahu* on Mount Carmel as *mincha*. To quote the Gemara, "A person should always be careful concerning the *mincha* prayer, since *Eliyahu* was answered only with the *mincha* prayer" (*Brachos* 6b). *Tosafos* notes that *Eliyahu* prayed while the afternoon *korban mincha* was offered (see *Melachim* I 18:36), and therefore, the association of a successful prayer with the *korban mincha* was established— and the name stuck!
Brachos

A different *rishon*, the *Avudraham*, suggests a third approach, which is based on the fact that *Adam Harishon* sinned in the afternoon – the same time of the day when we would be praying the *mincha* service. The Torah describes that *Adam* sinned *leruach hayom*, which *Targum Onkelos* calls *manach yoma*, the same word as *mincha*!

Thus, whereas according to both of *Tosafos'* approaches the term *mincha* used for the afternoon prayer is borrowed from a different context, in *Avudraham'*s understanding, the word *mincha* does mean the afternoon. Having answered the first of our opening questions, let us now begin an introduction that is needed to explain and answer the second question. "When is the optimal time to daven *Mincha*?"

Prayer origin

The Gemara (*Brachos* 26b) reports a dispute between *amora'im* regarding the origin of our three daily *tefillos*. Rabbi *Yehoshua ben Levi* ruled that *tefillos* were established to commemorate the daily *korbanos* offered in the *Beis Hamikdash*, whereas Rabbi *Yosi ben Rabbi Chanina* contended that they were established by the *Avos*. Specifically, *Avraham Avinu* established *shacharis*, *Yitzchok Avinu* created *mincha*, and *Yaakov Avinu* instituted *maariv*, each of which the Gemara derives from *pesukim*.

The Gemara then demonstrates that both Rabbi *Yehoshua ben Levi'*s approach and that of Rabbi *Yosi ben Rabbi Chanina* date back to the time of the *tanna'im*, and it concludes that both opinions are correct – the *tefillos* were established by our forefathers and, at the same time, our observance

also includes a commemoration of the daily korbanos. This is evidenced by the halachic requirement to recite these tefillos at the times appropriate for offering their corresponding korbanos. In other words, the times governing when each tefillah should be recited match the time that the corresponding korbanos were offered in the Beis Hamikdash, and, before it was built, in the Mishkan.

Prayer deadline

The Mishnah (Brachos 26a) discusses the latest time that one may daven the various prayers, citing a dispute regarding the latest time for shacharis, the tanna kamma holding at midday and Rabbi Yehudah holding at one third of the day, two hours before midday. (This is the conclusion of the Gemara on 27a; the Gemara also concludes there that we paskin like Rabbi Yehudah.) Similarly, the Mishnah (Brachos 26a) cites a dispute as to the latest time that one can daven mincha.

However, the Mishnah does not mention when one may begin davening mincha. Instead, a beraisa quoted by the Gemara (26b) shares the following, seemingly incomplete, information: “When is mincha gedolah? After six and a half hours. And when is mincha ketanah? After nine and a half hours.” The Gemara does not explain what halachic significance these two terms, mincha gedolah and mincha ketanah, have. From the context, it appears that each of these two terms refers to a time in the day, but from what point are we measuring 6½ hours and 9½ hours, and how long is the hour we are using in our measure? And, what halachic ramifications do these two times have?

Different hours!

Whereas our contemporary clock uses hours that are all exactly sixty minutes long, and each minute is also of the same, exact duration, this method of calculating time, although extremely accurate from one perspective, does not take into consideration the major event that defines our day – the path of the sun around the earth, or the earth around the sun.

As we all well know, the length of time of daylight varies greatly throughout the year, and sunrise and sunset always vary slightly from one day to the next. Chazal use a calculation of time that involves dividing the daylight hours into 12 equal units. These hours, which vary in length from day to day, are called sha’os zemaniyos (singular, sha’ah zemanis). As we will soon mention, there are different opinions whether we calculate this from halachic dawn, called alos hashachar, until nightfall (tzeis hakochovim, when the stars are visible) or from sunrise to sunset. For our purposes, let us assume that we consider sunrise to be the beginning, or “zero-hour” of our day, and sunset as the end of the twelfth hour. We now divide our day into twelve equal hours, but the length of each hour will vary throughout the year.

When is noon?

Calculating this way, the end of the sixth hour is always exactly midday, the point in the day when the sun is at its highest point and closest to being directly overhead. (In reality, the sun is never directly overhead, unless one is located somewhere near the equator, between the two tropics. North of the tropics, the sun is always in the southern half of the sky, rather than directly overhead.) This time of the day is sometimes called “high noon,” which is the time of the day when the sun creates no shadow, and halacha calls it chatzos.

We should be careful not to confuse this with 12:00 noon on our clock.

Twelve o’clock is rarely the actual time of chatzos; this is primarily because the creation of time zones caused the time on our clocks to diverge from the sun’s time. Standardized time zones were not formulated until the invention and common use of the railroad. Until that time, each city created its own time, based on sunrise and sunset in that city, and noon and high noon were identical. However, this system proved difficult to use when trains arrived on a schedule from a different city, where sunrise was earlier or later on a given day. In order that people could anticipate when the trains would arrive in their town, they created a system whereby people in different places would keep the same clock.

Mincha gedolah

Returning to the passage of Gemara in Brachos, the question is why the beraisa is telling us about two points of the day, called mincha ketanah and mincha gedolah.

The Rambam appears to have understood the beraisa to be explaining when is the earliest time to daven mincha, but provides two times. One, mincha gedolah, is the earliest possible time, whereas the other is the preferred time. In other words, the earliest time to daven mincha is at 6½ hours, although it is preferred for someone to wait until 9½ hours to daven mincha. This is because it is ideal to daven mincha later in the day and closer to sunset. Other rishonim appear to have understood this passage somewhat differently from the Rambam (see Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 233, citing Rosh and Tur), although there is not a significant difference in halacha between the two approaches. The Aruch Hashulchan explains that, even according to the Rambam, waiting until mincha ketanah to daven is not required, but only preferred. If there is a reason to daven at mincha gedolah, such as if one would like to begin a seudah, one may. Certainly, the exigencies of travel or employment allow one to daven at mincha gedolah, even according to the Rambam.

Clocking minutes?

When, on my clock, have we reached mincha gedolah? Assuming that I know when chatzos is, do I add thirty minutes to determine when is mincha gedolah? Or must I know exactly how long each sha’ah zemanis is today and add half of that to chatzos, which will make mincha gedolah either somewhat earlier or somewhat later than it is according to the 30-minute method, depending on the part of the year?

The Rema (Orach Chayim 233:1) rules that we use the calculation of sha’os zemaniyos. Notwithstanding that the Mishnah Berurah (233:4) accepts this conclusion, in his own notes on his rulings (Shaar Hatziyun), he queries that perhaps this should be determined by thirty clock minutes. Why?

As we mentioned above, the time for each prayer is based on a corresponding korban in the Beis Hamikdash. In the case of tefillas mincha, the corresponding korban could have been offered immediately after chatzos (see Mishnah Pesachim 61a). We wait an additional half hour to make sure that no one errs and offers it too early. Since the extra half hour is to make sure that a person does not miscalculate, perhaps its time should be thirty minutes, not dependent on whether the day is longer or shorter (see Rashi, Pesachim 93b). Should the hedge factor to avoid error vary according to season?

Therefore, the Mishnah Berurah implies he is uncertain whether this half hour should be zemanis or not. Because of this, the minhag in Yerushalayim, for example, is to be stringent in both directions. In winter months, when a sha’ah zemanis is less than an hour, the practice is not to daven mincha until thirty minutes after chatzos. In the summer months, when a sha’ah zemanis is greater than an hour, mincha gedolah is calculated on the basis of 6½ sha’os zemaniyos.

Davened earlier

What is the halacha if someone davened mincha between halachic midday and mincha gedolah, which is too early to daven? Must he daven again?

Based on the words of the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch, the Magen Avraham concludes that he has not fulfilled the mitzvah and is required to daven again.

Rashi implies that he agrees with this position, when, in his comments explaining this beraisa in Brachos 26b, he writes: “If one would like to offer the afternoon tamid earlier than mincha gedolah, he may not, since the Torah says bein ha’arbayim, which means when there begin to be evening shadows, because the sun is now inclining to the western part of the sky. This is after 6½, since between 5½ and 6½, the sun is directly overhead.”

This leads to the following question: The Mishnah (Pesachim 61a) states that the korban Pesach cannot be offered before noon, but implies that, if offered immediately after halachic noon, it is kosher. Yet, the time for both the daily afternoon tamid and the korban Pesach is expressed in the Torah by the same term, bein ha’arbayim. Thus, if the korban Pesach is kosher when offered at halachic midday, a korban tamid offered at midday should also be kosher.

Therefore, the daily mincha prayer, which corresponds to the afternoon tamid, should be “kosher” when prayed at midday – in other words, it should fulfill the mitzvah, at least bedei’evid (Pri Megadim).

Although there are approaches to resolve this question, the Pri Chodosh and other acharonim dispute the conclusion of the Magen Avraham, concluding that someone who davened mincha after chatzos but before mincha gedolah fulfilled the requirement and does not daven mincha again (Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 232:1 and 233; Aruch Hachulchan; Mishnah Berurah 233:2, quoting Beis Yaakov and Magen Giborim).

Tashlumim

There is a halachic rule that someone who missed one of the daily prayers should make it up during the next tefillah slot by reciting a second shemoneh esrei, immediately after davening the correct, appropriate prayer. For example, if someone missed mincha, then, immediately after reciting shemoneh esrei of maariv, he should recite a second shemoneh esrei, to make up the missed mincha. This replacement prayer is called tefillas tashlumim. The following question is germane to someone who davened mincha too early; that is, he davened after chatzos and before mincha gedolah, in which case, according to the Magen Avraham, he is required to daven mincha again. What if the person did not daven the mincha again that day, does the Magen Avraham require him to daven a tefillas tashlumim for the missed mincha? Some contend that, in this situation, the Magen Avraham does not require a tefillas tashlumim. Their reason is that tefillas tashlumim does not replace the lost mitzvah of tefillah bizmanah, the prayer recited in its correct time, since that cannot be replaced – rather, a tefillas tashlumim replaces only a missing tefillah. But, in our situation, this individual davened – although he recited his prayer before mincha gedolah. Although he may have missed mincha bizmanah, nothing is gained from having him daven a make-up because he has already davened (Tenuvas Sadeh).

Mincha ketanah

I mentioned earlier the Rambam’s opinion that the optimal time to daven mincha is after mincha ketanah, which the beraisa teaches is 9½ hours of the day. How do we calculate “9½ hours of the day”?

As discussed earlier, there are various opinions how to calculate this, some measuring the day from alos hashachar until tzeis hakochavim and others from sunrise to sunset. The most accepted approach is to calculate the 9½ hours as measured from sunrise to sunset. In fractions, this is 19/24 into the sunshine part of the day.

Conclusion

Often, we are in a rush – there is so much to do, I need to get to work – and we know, all too well, the yetzeir hora’s methods of encouraging us to rush through davening. We all realize that davening properly requires reading slowly and carefully, and that the power of tefillah is very great. Through tefillah one can save lives, bring people closer to Hashem, and overturn harsh decrees. We have to believe in this power. One should not think, “Who am I to daven to Hashem?” Rather, we must continually drive home the concept that Hashem wants our tefillos, and He listens to them! Man was created by Hashem as the only creation that has free choice. Therefore, our serving Hashem and our davening is unique in the entire spectrum of creation.

Understanding how much concern Chazal placed in the relatively minor aspects of davening should make us even more aware of the fact that davening is our attempt at building a relationship with Hashem. As the Kuzari notes, every day should have three high points – the three times that we daven. Certainly, one should do whatever one can to make sure to pay attention to the meaning of the words of one’s Tefillah. We should gain our strength and inspiration for the rest of the day from these three prayers. Let us hope that Hashem will accept our tefillos, together with those of Klal Yisrael!