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ON CHAYEI SARAH - 5768

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Rav Soloveitchik ZT'L

Notes (Volume 3)

Notice These are unapproved unedited notes [of R.Y.?] of classes given by Rav Soloveitchik. We do not know who wrote the notes. However we offer this to the world that maybe someone can get some use out of these notes. A member of the family has looked at the notes and said that look like the real thing . (Rav Soloveitchik did NOT write these notes.) [Thanks to David Isaac for typing these notes]

Lecture delivered by **Rabbi Soloveitchik**
on Saturday night, November 17, 1979

"Chaye Sara" Today's parsha, Chaye Sara, is unique. It has a feature hardly found in the Chumash. Two other parshas are similar in their presentation - sedra "Miketz" and perhaps sections of "Vayeshev". There is something which Chazal noticed and Rashi calls attention to it today. This unique manner, Chazal say, is the characteristic trait of dialogue. It presents to use the very detailed and most complete dialogue of Eliezer, that which he had with Rivka at the well and then it is repeated inside her house before Besuel, her father and Laban, her brother. It is compared to "Miketz" for there the dream is elaborated to Pharaoh. (Also, the dream of the officers in the prison to Joseph is Vayeshev.) It Torah wished this entire account could have been presented in a few P'sukim.

How much is devoted to Shabbos in the Torah? At the most, Shabbos is described in 10 or 15 sentences. Here we have Eliezer's thoughts, what he said, how his prayer was implemented. Here it is complete and also it is complete where Joseph conversed with his brothers. Sometimes, Torah is very brief! It tells us very little about Abraham's early life. Maimonides is the one who gives us the biography of Abraham's life and actually it is not Biblical.

What is the answer? The answer is rooted in a certain concept of Jewish morality as I mentioned last week. What is ethical and what is not ethical? For instance, how humble should a person be? Rambam says a person should not be too humble and naturally not too assertive. It should be the middle of the road. The answer is that whatever the Alm-ghty does is moral and correct. What he doesn't do is immoral. What does G-d accept and what does He reject?

I once asked my father when I was a youngster. "What is the role of the 'Neviim' in the 24 books of the Bible?" The prophet has no right to change one iota of Torah Moshe. For instance, in a Halachic debate it must be conducted by the scholars and according to the Torah. If, for instance, the prophet says, "Rabbi 'X' is right - Rabbi 'Y' is wrong," then he is no prophet at all. He cannot add or eliminate a precept. If he comes and changes then he is false. The "Neviim rishonim" - the prophets, tell us the footsteps of G-d -- what is correct and what isn't. They tell us what the actions and performances on the part of G-d are. For instance, "Bidrochai Taylaychu" - (In My footsteps shall you go) - be good - honest, sincere,

helpful, give zdkah! However, what is good? How much zdkah? There may be alternatives! It is hard to decide which alternative is correct and fair.

For instance, Russia lets 52 or 53 thousand Jews a year emigrate from its country. There was no actual agreement but Jewish agencies through the White House have effected this implementation. Why was this done? To get Jews to go to Eretz Yisroel. You must have a visa to enter Eretz but not the United States. Now, 73% of these emigrants refuse to go to Eretz but rather to western-oriented countries. By their doing so the major part of the money collected here goes not to that which it is intended for. The question is, should this financial aid be suspended? Of course, it would be better to see them go to Eretz but it is better to see them leave the hell of Russia than to stay there. This is the category of "Bidrochai Taylaychu". What these "ways" are we don't exactly know and cannot go to Shulchan Orach to find the answer. Here we must go to the prophets. What are the "Drochim" - the ways? It is to be found in Neviim - the prophets.

Now, what the patriarchs did - their actions is very important. They were the Neviim Rishonim - the earliest prophets who explained and made understandable the ways of Hakadosh Boruch Hu. Therefore, so much detail is expended. Apparently, "Chaye Sara" is rich in these problems and in this parsha there is much to learn. Chaye Sara is the source! It represents an idea which often we don't understand and often violate the basic concepts. It is the highest virtues of life which if we observe and follow, we walk in G-d's path.

What is the central idea? Which dominates or guides us to understand the "Drochim" paths of G-d? There are three important units or parts in this sedra. "A" the death of Sara. "B" The story of Eliezer. "C" Turning over the role of Abraham to Yitzchak! The minute Rivka entered the tent of Sara, Abraham lost his role. Again, what is the dominating idea? It is the idea of "Chessed" -- kindness. Eliezer used the phrase "Chessed V'Emes" - kindness and truth. There are two kinds of "Chessed". First, there is a "chessed" which people do in the full grandeur - sacrificing their lives to help others. Then there is a "chessed" in small matters, by being polite, being kind and being helpful. Here, Eliezer's task was to choose the mother of the nation, someone to take over the tent of Sarah. This does not literally mean the tent but the lifestyle of Sarah. Apparently, Hashgocha had chosen her because she personified these qualities, of gentleness, kindness and patience. Actually, in his effort to insure that he was choosing the right person, Eliezer did not employ tactfulness and we learn this from the words he used in his approach. He declared, "Hagm'ini Noh, M'at Mayim". This is translated not as "May I have a drink," but "let me swallow directly from your pitcher." She, however, was tactful in that she gave him water to drink and went back separately for water for the camels. She acted in accordance with decency. Torah shows us that there are many ways in how one can be tactful and how "Hachanosas Orchim" can be practiced.

Firstly, we have the example of Abraham and his guests. Torah tells us that Abraham went away from G-d -- from the "Shechina" to attend to those he thought were simple idolators and spent so much time with them, even to the point of accompanying them on their way. It could have taken hours. Meanwhile, G-d "stood and waited". With Rivka we again see "Hachanosas Orchim" hospitality to strangers in that she practically assured a place for them. Although, she was not the boss and had not the authority. We find this also with Lot. To employ the Yiddish, "Kein Mensch Ist Er Nicht Geven," -- he wasn't much of an individual and he had no "sachel" - no common sense. But he was good! He had a certain goodness which he had inherited from Abraham. He was good by nature. The goodness which was implemented from the family of Abraham was great but his fault was that he lacked the courage to shake off the paganism of the time. Which "Midah" - attribute was developed in him? It was "Chessed" - kindness - willing to sacrifice his family for others.

Thus, the "Hachanosas Orchim" the basic quality of this family was "chessed" - kindness and goodness. This is why Eliezer adopted this as the standard to determine if Rivka could take over from Sarah. She had to possess the virtue of chessed; not a heroic action but the "chessed" of

everyday life. It was not the heroism of war. This is what he discovered in Rivka and this is why Torah repeats it and is so loquacious because it wants to impress upon us the virtue of "chessed".

Now we go to the beginning of the sedra, the death of Sarah. It is the only place where the Torah records that Abraham cried. He never cried when he thought that he would be childless or in any of his other travails, only when Sarah died. It is recorded that Moshe cried but twice, when he was an infant, which is natural and the second time at the incident of the daughters of Midyan, in his final year. At the golden calf, at the incident with the spies, etc., he prayed, he supplicated. However, at the end of 40 years, having brought up a second generation, having educated them and then seeing them fall to temptation, he wept. At the beginning, he knew that they couldn't change at once but now he saw failure.

Abraham didn't cry during 100 years of waiting. Some think that you must cry at prayer but it isn't so. We are not accustomed to tears on Abraham's face but he did cry at Sarah's death. A great man prays with passion. Apparently, Torah wants to tell us something.

A child cries because it is a reaction to suffering. Rambam writes, "Who does not mourn the passing of someone dear?" Emotional neutrality is equated with being cruel. However, if he grieves excessively he demonstrates stupidity because he testifies that the world is imperfect in its way. "Avaluth" -- mourning, expresses - not too little and not too much because excess testifies against Hashgocha - the Divine Will. It is not sinful but foolish. Sometimes if man cries he enhances his personality as evidenced by Joseph and his brothers. A few tears enhances the riches of man and washes away the ugliness of man. A man cannot be neutral unless he is cruel. (Note: perek tells us that neutrality was the trademark of Sodom.) An animal can be neutral. This doctrine was written in today's parsha. "Avaluth," crying -- yes; but not excessively as demonstrated by Abraham. Why does Torah state: "Vayokom Milifnai Maso" (He arose from his deed). After his crying, it should say that he "spoke with them, the children of Ches." If he didn't have the "vayokom" the ability to rise from his lowly state, he wouldn't have the courage to continue in his actions. This man was on the ground and this is the halacha. The "Avol" - the mourner sits low near the ground. The "Vayokom" shows that he can arise from the ashes to take charge. We say it on Friday night in L'cho Dodi. "Arise, shake off the ashes!" Abraham arose, shook off his ashes and took over. It is self-discipline. Yes, he cried a lot but did not surrender to despair. He who surrenders loses his personal dignity. He didn't want B'nai Ches to see this for they would belittle him: "He is not the father of mankind," they would say.

"Sarah is the strong personality; he is weak!" He had to demonstrate his strength to them. He shook off his ashes and then spoke with them. His demand bordered on impunity. Why should Efron sell the best of his property? What gave him the courage? It was the fact that he felt that he'd be able to carry on. They said to him, "You are the divine prince." For a moment, he was completely defeated but it didn't last too long. This is why he carried so much weight with them.

Also, "Kever Yisroel" - the Jewish cemetery - goes back to Abraham. It was the first time that Abraham told them: "My way of life is different." He had to rise as a leader and stand his ground. "I am a stranger but consider myself an old timer."

Lispod V'Liflod. First, you cry and then you begin to assess. Abraham was mourning! What did he lose by Sarah's death? It was motivated by two facts. First, he was loyal; he loved her. How do you love a person? They had lived through all the crises together, the persecutions, the criticism, the waiting for a son which G-d promised. The common experience is the morality of developing friendship, of sharing together happy and tragic moments. This is loyalty.

For example, my brother died in 1967, the same year my mother died. He was four years younger than myself. My mourning is greater for him than for my parents because we grew together. He never had a friend who was not also my friend. The same is here. They shared their moments together.

This motivated Abraham to mourn for Sarah. This is Livkosa - crying. However, he had to mourn for a different reason. He mourned for a companion, a "rebbe" -- a teacher. Not only was he the father but she the mother of all nations. As soon as Abraham is mentioned at the end of Noach, Sarah is mentioned. His whole life can only be understood in the personality of another person, Sarah. Together, their names were changed. Until that occurrence, he was the father of a clan. Now he becomes father of all mankind, to be implemented in the messianic age. Her mission was inexpendable. Both appeared in Jewish history together. With her death, he loses his leadership for afterwards not much is told about him. From hence, he passes on the "Yerusha" the inheritance. He did not leave a "yerusha" as is common but he passed it on. It is said that G-d has no patience with he who gives all away during his lifetime. This refers to material wealth. However, the giving of a teacher to a pupil is different. This is the care here. What is the common denominator of today's haftorah? It is not the choice of a king! It is the turning over of the throne during his lifetime. Here it is: "The King lives and the successor lives!" It is not "King dead - King alive". Basheva (mother of Solomon says: "Thank G-d that you see your successor while you are alive." Abraham himself said he'd be satisfied with Ishmael but G-d gave him Yitzhak as the successor. Why did he cry? He was lonely! She was the teacher, superior prophet - companion! "In retrospect, I begin to see what I lost."

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The Conversations of Avdei Avos

Rabbi Michael Taubes

When looking at this Parsha in its entirety, one cannot help but be struck by the seemingly disproportionate amount of space devoted to what appears to be every last detail concerning the visit of Avraham's servant (identified by Chazal, though not in the Torah, as Eliezer) to the house of Lavan and Rivkah in search of a suitable spouse for Yitzhak. The problem is compounded by the fact that certain details are recorded twice in the Torah, once when they are described as taking place and again when the servant's full report to Rivkah's family of all that had transpired is presented. When one considers that many fundamental principles and halachos of the Torah are barely hinted at or are described in the briefest possible terms, the question of why the Torah here has plenty of time and space to describe the specifics of Eliezer's trip and his verbal recapitulation of his experiences becomes even more acute. Chazal were, of course, sensitive to this problem. They therefore stated, as noted by Rashi (24:42), that "yafeh sichasan shel avdei avos lifnei Hamakom metorasan shel banim." The conversations of (even) the servants of our ancestors are (sometimes) more pleasing before Hashem than the Torah of their descendants. In other words, Hashem is more delighted by the discussions held by our great ancestors and their servants than by even the Torah thoughts expressed in later generations. Hashem therefore included in the Torah many details of Eliezer's conversations while sometimes omitting or hiding significant Torah ideas elsewhere. Why is this the case? Why does Hashem find the conversations of the servants of our ancestors so pleasing? Rav Nissan Alpert, zatzal, suggests two possible approaches (Sefer Limudei Nissan L'Parshas Chayei Sarah, 24:34). One is that from these conversations about particular events, we can gain insight into Hashem's ways and his hashgachah pratees. It is only through a lengthy, fully detailed description of an event that one can begin to see that Hashem's hand is always behind all that happens. The Torah's lesson here is that if one wants to truly appreciate what Hashem does, he should not examine each incident in a chain of events independently, but should look at an entire picture. By examining the totality of an event, one will clearly see Hashem's role. The Torah therefore details the adventures of Eliezer, and his conversation about them, in order for us to clearly perceive the hand of Hashem in the unfolding of the episode. This, in a certain sense, is more pleasing to Hashem even than the Torah studied in subsequent

generations. His second approach is that through reading and analyzing such conversations, we learn something about chesed, a trait certainly evident in the story of Eliezer. Since chesed is a product of emotion, and not just intellect, when one sees or describes acts of chesed one is motivated to demonstrate that quality as well. In order to inspire the heart, the Torah devotes a seemingly inordinate amount of attention to Eliezer's story. The conversations about this event, when analyzed properly, can motivate, perhaps even more than the study of Torah, the behavior which Hashem desires.

It is possible, however, to suggest a different approach. The conversations of the avdei avos, reflect the behavior and the characteristics that they learned from the avos themselves. By recording these conversations, the Torah is showing us what we really must learn from our ancestors: a moral and ethical code of conduct that impacts not only how we talk and act, but how those around us learn to talk and act. The study of Torah, and the quest to serve HKB"H, must impact the person's entire personality, affecting every aspect of his life and overall behavior. It is for this reason that the Torah spends so much time telling us about the avos - and even the avdei avos. The Torah is not a history book. The events of much of Sefer Bereishis are recorded in order to help teach us how to live and to inspire proper conduct. Therefore, even the experiences of the avdei avos become important. By reading about them, we see not only how the avos acted, but how their actions impacted others. It is interesting to note that in the secular world, great accomplishments in art, literature, science and the like are considered significant without any investigation into the behavior or the ethical standards of the individual who attains these accomplishments. Indeed, many of us are no longer surprised to hear about the low moral level and sometimes even the depravity of someone who has earned the limelight based on a particular valued achievement. Not so in the world of Torah. No matter how brilliant or insightful a person may be, we are interested in his Torah only if he himself, in his personal life, lives up to the standards demanded by the Torah. It is thus of great importance to read about Eliezer's conversations, and to examine how he behaved, how he was influenced by Avraham Avinu, and, by extension, how Avraham himself must have acted. Because the study of Torah and achievement in Torah is of value only if the conduct, the day-to-day practices, and even the conversations of the person studying reflect the moral and ethical code that the Torah requires of us, such conversations are more significant in the eyes of Hashem than even the study of Torah itself.

This is why Chazal tell us (Vayikra Rabbah 9:3) that *derech eretz kadma* l'Torah, proper ethical behavior is a prerequisite for success in Torah. Torah is valued only when presented by someone who is well grounded in *derech eretz*. This may also be why Rabban Gamliel, as reported by the Gemara (Berachos 28a), insisted that each talmid in his *beis medrash* must be *tocho k'baro* - his inside, his essence, his true personality had to reflect what he represented on the outside. If one presents himself as a Torah personality, he must truly be such a role model in his personal conduct. And this is also why the Gemara (Moed Katan 17a) states, based on a *pasuk* in Malachi (2:7), that one should seek to learn Torah only from a teacher who is similar in behavior to a . Unlike in the secular world, where the level of morality of the individual disseminating knowledge is often not considered, in the Torah world we are required to seek out only those teachers and rabbim whose personal code of behavior, whose integrity and honesty, and whose moral conduct are consistent with the Torah's demands. Even the conversations of our spiritual role models--and of those influenced by these role models--must serve as examples to us in order for their Torah teachings to possess value.

From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org on behalf of

Rabbi Yissocher Frand [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Friday, November 17, 2006 9:46 AM To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chayei Sarah

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chayei Sarah -

The Trauma Of Dealing With A Grief-Stricken Person

After the death of his beloved wife Sarah, Avraham Avinu approached the Children of Ches and asked for a burial plot for his wife. This is of course the prelude to the story of the purchase of the *Mearas HaMachpelah* where four Biblical couples are buried (Adam and Chava; Avraham and Sarah; Yitzchak and Rivkah; Yakov and Leah).

In introducing the beginning of the negotiating process the *pasuk* [verse] uses what might be considered a strange expression: "vaYakam Avraham [And Avraham got up] from the presence of his deceased" [Bereshis 23:3].

The commentaries explore the special nuance of the expression "he got up." What is hinted at by this unique expression?

The *Baal HaTurim* says that this teaches that one is not allowed to talk in front of a dead body. Avraham had to get up and walk away before discussing business matters with the Children of Ches.

The *Sforno* learns that "he arose" teaches that the laws of mourning did not apply to Avraham yet (before burial).

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz offers the following interpretation: the *pasuk* is trying to convey that Avraham Avinu arose and separated from his personal grief before beginning to interact with other people. Many times, when people are grief stricken, it is very difficult for them to control their emotions. When people experience terrible periods of grief, they often wear their emotions on their sleeves. When they deal with other people, the other people are unfortunately subjected to their grief as well.

The *pasuk* is teaching that Avraham was a total master of himself and his emotions. He was able to wipe away his tears and not burden others with his own grief. "My grief is my grief, but now I have to deal with people and in my dealings with people, they don't have to be subject to my emotional distress." "He got up" -- means he internalized his personal emotions and dealt with the Children of Ches as though nothing had happened.

Even at the most grief-stricken moment in his life, after losing his wife, Avraham Avinu was able to act with composure and respect for his fellow man. He was thereby able to spare them the trauma of dealing with a grief-stricken person.

Eliezer Was Fully Trusted – In Financial Matters Only

The Parsha describes Avraham Avinu sending his trusted servant to find a proper mate for his son Yitzchak. Eliezer is called Avraham's servant as well as the "elder member of his household." He is described as one "who ruled over everything that belonged to Avraham" (*haMoshel bechol asher lo*) [Bereshis 24:2]

In effect, Eliezer was not only Avraham's slave and servant -- Eliezer was Avraham's attorney. Avraham Avinu gave over the responsibility for running his entire household to him. Avraham, as we know from earlier Parshiyot, was a very wealthy man. Eliezer was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Avraham Avinu's entire estate. He was a trusted person whose integrity was beyond reproach. He was in charge of everything! He signed the checks. He decided when to buy and when to sell.

Why then, at the end of this very same *pasuk*, did Avraham request "place you hand under my thigh" (an expression requesting that Eliezer take an oath)? At this point, Avraham was suddenly no longer prepared to trust Eliezer. Avraham demanded that Eliezer swear -- in the name of the G-d of Heaven and Earth that he would not take a wife for Yitzchak from the daughters of Cannan, who lived in their midst.

This doesn't seem to make any sense. The beginning of the *pasuk* gives Eliezer the highest accolades possible -- "zekan beiso, haMoshel b'chol asher lo". Then the end of the *pasuk* turns around and says: "I want you to swear to me that you will follow my instructions." Which is it? Is Eliezer to be trusted or is he not to be trusted?

The Be'er Mayim Chayim writes that we learn from here that regarding stocks, flocks, real estate, and the whole financial portfolio, Eliezer was in charge. But regarding the spirituality of his son and his descendants, Avraham did not trust anyone. Regarding money and financial matters, Eliezer is trustworthy. But regarding the spiritual future of Klal Yisrael, an oath must be demanded!

It is told that Rav Yisrael Salanter was once traveling and he had to stay overnight at an inn. The inn was full. The inn keeper ran out of meat. The inn keeper did not personally know Rav Yisrael Salanter, but based on appearances, judged him to be a knowledgeable Jew. He approached Rav Yisrael and asked "Perhaps you can slaughter a chicken for me in my back yard?" Rav Yisrael, however excused himself, telling the innkeeper that he was not a certified shochet [ritual slaughterer] and could not help him.

The next morning Rav Yisrael proposed to the innkeeper that he invest in a financial investment that he felt would yield tremendous profit for the innkeeper. "Give me X amount of rubles and I will give you a great return on your money."

The innkeeper responded, "I should give you my money? You are a complete stranger to me. I don't know you in the least."

Rav Yisrael admonished, "Last night you did not know me any better. Based only on my looks and my dress you assumed that you could trust my shechitah. But today when I asked you to invest money with me, you suddenly need to check me out!"

The innkeeper obviously had his priorities wrong. Regarding spiritual matters, if the person "looked religious", he could be trusted. Regarding money, he needed "facts and data" to corroborate the person's integrity. Avraham was just the opposite. Regarding material matters, Eliezer had full authority. "Spare me the details." However, regarding his son, Yitzchak: "Place your hand beneath my thigh."

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Chayei Sarah are provided below: These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #524, The Badekin

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Chaye Sarah

In the long chapter of Genesis 24, we read of how Abraham instructed his servant to travel to Aram-Naharaim, where the rest of his family was located, to choose and bring back a wife for Isaac, his son. It is an extraordinary passage. Isaac takes no part in the process. We do not read that his father consulted him; that he gave his consent to the arrangement;

or that his views entered into the episode in any way. All we read, when Abraham's servant returned with Rebecca, is that:

Isaac conducted her into the tent and took her as his wife. So she became his wife, and he loved her and was consoled for the death of his mother (24: 67). It is yet another detail in the general picture we have of Isaac as a figure in the shadow of Abraham, who does what his father does rather than strike out in any new direction of his own.

Esau and Jacob are different. They choose their own marriage partners. Yet once again there is an emphasis on parental wishes. Of Esau we read:

When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. This was a source of bitter grief to Isaac and Rebecca (26: 34-35). Jacob, by contrast, "obeyed his father and mother" by going to Paddan Aram to find a wife from his mother's family (28: 7).

The question that arises from these episodes - especially that of Isaac - is to what extent they are normative. Do they constitute a precedent? Does a parent have a right, in Judaism, to determine who their children will marry? May a child choose a marriage partner against the wishes of a parent? In the case of conflict, whose view do we follow?

The issue arose in the Middle Ages. We must remember that we are talking about an era in which parental authority, as well as respect for age and tradition, were far stronger than they are now. Normally it was expected that a child would act in accordance with the will of his or her parents.

Indeed, as late as 1680, Sir Robert Filmer (in his Patriarcha) argued for the divine right of kings on the basis of the absolute authority - even the power of life and death - of parents over children, and did so on the basis of biblical texts.

Strikingly, though, the halakhists did not follow this line. Writing in the thirteenth century, Rabbi Shlomo ibn Adret (Rashba) argued that getting married is a positive command, and parental wishes may not override the fulfilment of a command by a child, since the wishes of G-d take precedence over those of human beings.

In addition, the Talmud states that "Forty days before a child is formed, a heavenly voice declares: the daughter of X to the son of Y." Marriages are made in heaven, and presumably the child is in a better position than his parents to recognise his soul-mate.

As for Isaac, Rashba's explanation is simple. Isaac was a "perfect offering", a child of special sanctity, who (unlike Abraham and Jacob, both of whom travelled to Egypt) was not allowed to leave the land of Israel. Had this not been so, says Rashba, he would certainly have undertaken the journey himself to choose a wife (Rashba, Teshuvot ha-meyuchasot le-Ramban, 272).

R. Joseph Colon (Maharik, 1420-1480), considering the same issue, refers to a responsum of Rabbenu Asher in which the author rules that a son is not bound to obey his father if he tells him not to speak to X with whom the father has a dispute. The command to love your neighbour overrides the command to obey your parents. Since the love of husband and wife is a supreme example of love-of-neighbour, it too takes priority over a parent's wishes.

There is a further consideration. Children are bound to revere and honour their parents and do them service, specifically in matters that concern their welfare. It does not extend open-endedly to deferring to their wishes in matters relating not to them but to others, including the child itself.

Elaborating on this position, Rabbi Elijah Capsali gave the following ruling in a case where a father forbade his son to marry the woman whom "his soul desired":

Though the command of filial honour and reverence is inexpressibly great . . . nonetheless it appears in my humble opinion that if the girl about whom you ask is a proper wife for the aforementioned Reuben - that is, there is in her or in her family no blemish - then the command of filial honour and reverence is irrelevant, and the son is not to abandon her so as to fulfil his father's command.

For it is nearly certain that this father virtually commands his son to violate the Torah . . . for we see (in the Talmud) that a man ought not to marry a woman who does not please him. So that when the father commands his son not to marry this woman, it is as though he commands him to violate the Torah; and it is well known that the son is not to obey his father in such cases . . .

Now, if we were to decide that the son is obliged to obey his parents and marry, though his heart is not in the match, we would cause the growth of hatred and strife in the home, which is not the way of our holy Torah - most certainly in this case, where he loves her. Indeed, we can cite in this situation: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song of Songs 8: 7). Were he to marry another whom he does not desire, his entire life would be painful and bitter.

Moreover we may also argue that the Torah obliges the son to filial honour and reverence only in matters that affect the parents' physical well-being and support . . . but in matters that do not affect the parent in these areas, we may say that the Torah does not oblige us to be obedient. Therefore, the son is not obliged by the rules of reverence and honour to accept his father's command in the matter of marriage. (See Gerald Blidstein, Honour thy Father and Mother, pp 85-94) On the basis of these responsa, R. Moses Isserles rules (Rema, Yoreh Deah 240: 25): "If the father objects to his son's marriage to the woman of his choice, the son is not obliged to listen to his father."

What we see from all these sources is that Jewish law - despite its immense emphasis on honouring parents - also insists that parents make space for their children to make their own decisions in matters affecting their personal happiness. The rabbis extended to parents nothing like the absolute authority attributed to them by figures like Sir Robert Filmer. Abraham did not command his servant to find a wife for Isaac because he believed he had the right to make the choice, but because he knew that Isaac was not allowed to leave the land and make the journey himself. There is great wisdom in this approach. The Jewish family is not authoritarian. It is based, rather, on mutual respect - the child's respect for those who have brought them into the world, and the parents' respect for the right of an adult child to make his or her own choices free of excessive parental interference.

<http://chareidi.shemaisrael.com/archives5760/kisavo/oslifkin3.htm>
Opinion & Comment

The Torah Universe: The Kiss of Death by Rabbi Nosson Slifkin

The giant reptile paused in its tracks upon seeing me. It stared at me out of huge eyes that were black as coal as I tentatively reached out my hand to scratch its chin. Then, deciding that I presented no threat -- after all, I was only a quarter of its size -- it carried on walking. I quickly moved out of its way to prevent being crushed by its great weight. Then I climbed onto its back for a unique ride through the African jungle.

The guide told me that this was one of thirteen giant tortoises in Kenya. They had been washed ashore several decades earlier, after having fallen off ships that had taken them from their home in the Seychelles islands to use as food. He estimated their age at close to two hundred years.

This unique experience came to mind when surveying parshas Chayei Soroh, "the life of Soroh." The title of the parsha would seem to reflect a singular lack of good taste, as it begins with the end of the life of Soroh. It then proceeds to discuss the purchase of her burial plot (from which we learn the laws of kiddushin) and the later aging and subsequent death of Avrohom. Aside from the unfortunate title, the concepts of aging and death, which are the themes of this parsha, are also difficult to understand. Why should people age?

It's not as ridiculous a question as it sounds if you've studied tortoises. For certain tortoises don't age. They just get older and older and older, without showing any decline in physical or mental faculties, until eventually they

are overtaken by some disease or another. The aging process, according to a recent issue of National Geographic, seems to be linked to a specific set of genes that tortoises don't possess. In experiments on fruit flies, scientists have managed to counteract the aging effect, causing the flies to live some thirty times longer than their usual life expectancy. If they ever find a way to do that for humans, we'll be living for more than two thousand years.

Perhaps the longer life-spans of humans before the Great Flood was due to an absence of these genes. But in any event, why do we have them?

Aging is a process that is bitterly resented and fought by almost everyone. After National Geographic published its article, in which it graphically detailed the ways in which the body deteriorates throughout adulthood, they received a number of letters from people protesting that they didn't want to become depressed by reading about how they are wasting away. Why does it happen?

The Chofetz Chaim used to speak about the Immortals Club, a society that has millions of members worldwide. These are people who believe that they are going to live forever. Of course, they will profess to acknowledge that everyone dies eventually. But for all practical intents and purposes they don't actually think that it's going to happen to them. Why do they blind themselves to the fact of mortality?

Because it interferes with their plans. Most people are obsessed with pursuing material pleasures, financial security, and other such goals that are limited to this world alone. Their soul plays a tertiary role to their body. Hence, people consider their twenties and thirties to be their prime, their heyday. The fortieth birthday presents a mid- life crisis, their forties and fifties are spent fighting the aging process, and after that they go into a decline.

For the person who lives life with his soul as his highest priority, things proceed somewhat differently. Avrohom was well over a hundred years old when he was described as a person who was "bo bayomim," which according to the Kli Yakar means "coming into his heyday." He wasn't past his prime, he was just entering it.

Aging is a kindness. The young person is too easily caught up with his body and with material goals. The aging process reminds him that he isn't going to live forever, and that only spiritual accomplishments are going to accompany him to the next world. He is reminded to increase his study of Torah and his fulfillment of mitzvos, things that he can take with him. Spiritual accomplishments increase with added age. The Torah does not consider the elderly person to be a foggy or a fuddy-duddy. He is a zoken, which is an acronym for zeh konoh chochmoh -- "this one has acquired wisdom." He has seen the best of times and the worst of times, and these afford him a uniquely broad perspective on things.

Rav Yochanan would stand up [even] in the presence of elderly Arameans (non-Jews), and say: "Imagine the experiences that these people have passed through!" (Kiddushin 33a). Armed with the wisdom of experience, focused on spiritual pursuits, the zoken is able to work towards the next stage of his life.

It has been noted that there are many parallels between death and marriage. We already noted that the laws of kiddushin are learned from the purchase of a burial plot. The day of entry into both is a quasi Yom Kippur for which one dresses in white; they are both followed by seven-day periods. Some would use these parallels to compare marriage to death. But the truth is that death is to be compared to marriage.

In marriage, one enters into a more advanced stage of life, which is a relationship with another. In death, too, one enters a more advanced stage of life in which one consummates a relationship with another -- G-d. It is no coincidence that fall, the time of year in which the natural world dies away, is the time of year in which we celebrate Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres. These festivals represent the consummation of the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people. Such a relationship can only occur when the physical world has been suitably negated. The gemara (Brochos 8a) tells us that with the finest form of death, termed "the kiss," the life departs from this world as easily as a hair being lifted from a saucer of milk.

The story told of a certain rabbi on his deathbed who was surprised to see his students weeping. "Why are you sorry for me?" he asked them. "All my life, I have been preparing for this moment!" The parsha of "the life of Sarah" does not speak of the ending of her life. The posuk speaks of the end of "the years of the life of Sarah." These numbered only one hundred and twenty-seven full and satisfactory years. But her life continued for an eternity beyond that. "Tzaddikim bemisom keruyim chaim -- The righteous even after their deaths are called 'living.' "

* Sources: Bereishis Rabbah 58:1, 65:9. Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch, Bereishis 23:1.

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From: innernet-owner@innernet.org.il on behalf of Heritage House [innernet@gmail.com] Sent: Tuesday, December 13, 2005 1:37 AM To: innernet@innernet.org.il Subject: InnerNet - "Comforting the Mourner" INNERNET MAGAZINE <http://innernet.org.il> December 2005

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"COMFORTING THE MOURNER"

by **Rabbi Maurice Lamm & Dodi Lee Lamm, M.S.W.**

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[This article, originally written for rabbis, was adapted for anyone who needs to comfort a close friend or relative. --Ed.]

One's first encounter with a mourner usually comes upon hearing the news of the death. The mourner may not have yet completely absorbed the finality of what happened. In that first encounter with the newly bereaved, one needs to connect both empathically and concretely. "When?" "How?" and "Where did it happen?" are appropriate questions. They are concrete and they simply seek information, but they allow the mourner to verbally relay a story that often feels surrealistic, even when the death was expected.

Other informational questions are also important to explore at this time. "Where were you when it happened?" "How did you find out?" "Do the other family members know?" "Have any arrangements for a burial been made?" This begins to connect one to the experience of the mourner. The mourner may not come to grips with the reality of the loss for a while, but this concrete stage is an important beginning.

This is also the time to let the mourner know that everything that can be done to give the deceased a respectful, honorable funeral is being done. At a time of total helplessness in being able to bring the deceased back to life, it is comforting for the person to know that an honorable funeral is being arranged. The mourner might even find that helping with the funeral arrangements is a great source of comfort...

* * *

Following the funeral, one needs to assess the mourner's desire for solitude upon returning from the cemetery and the immediate days following, and respect his preference. Solitude gives the mourner space to think and get past many perceived obstacles to the problem of continuing life after experiencing the ugliness of death and its shocking finality.

It is similarly important to respect the mourner's wish for silence. This is the reason why consolers traditionally need to wait for the mourner to speak first, thereby allowing him or her to set the agenda for their shiva call. Many mourners express their clear wish for everyone to "stay away." This should be honored. Silence gives mourners the space to reflect, feel what they need to feel, and collect themselves. Sometimes silence speaks volumes. Just being with the mourner sans speaking banalities and trivialities is exactly the support the mourner needs.

There is a counseling approach called active listening. Communication comes in all forms, including speech, emotional response, and body language. For example, it is important to maintain good eye contact. It conveys to the mourner that you are not uncomfortable dealing with death

and listening to the mourner's unvarnished feelings. Empathy can often be conveyed with a calm presence, eye contact, attentiveness, and a display of genuine interest. These are very effective in establishing a connection with the mourner and are also central components for consoling the bereaved.

Reflecting back is a way of letting the mourner know that you understand correctly what has been said and that you are listening with interest. The mourner may tend to contradict or even repeat himself because he is in the process of working through difficult emotions. When you reflect back, you make it permissible for the mourner to revisit and clarify his thoughts and feelings once again. It is a way of showing respect for the process of grieving and consoling. Paraphrasing a mourner's most important comments lends them importance while checking them for accuracy.

Some emotions exhibited while grieving can be overwhelming and frightening to both the mourner and the listener. When a rabbi is able to "mirror feelings" and reflect back a sense that the emotions are significant, he makes it safe for the mourner to express all that he is feeling. A mourner might say, "I don't know what to do," and you might reply, "It sounds like you are feeling a bit lost right now."

It is important to ask questions rather than to toss out stock answers. Mourners do not want to hear theological insights, justifications, apologetics, comparative war stories, or even your personal approach on how to make peace with tragedy. Empathy and understanding are what is called for - active listening and mirrored feelings, not long discourses on why bad things happen to good people.

* * *

There are also things that shouldn't be said, because they show insensitivity and a lack of empathy. Don't say, for example: "It could've been worse," "You need to get on with your life," "You'll have other children," "Don't take it so hard," or "Other people have lost their beloved." Remember, too, that the word "beloved" may not be appropriate. The deceased may not have in fact been loved.

Handle memories deftly. Screened memories, those that are not remembered accurately but as the individual wants or needs them to be, are common for mourners. These memories may not be objectively accurate, but they are often comforting to the person who is telling them. We unconsciously choose what we can handle and avoid that which is too threatening, primarily because it hurts too much. Sometimes good memories become paramount to the exclusion of other memories that might threaten how the mourner wants to remember the deceased. It is not necessary to correct those memories. Again, we are there just to listen.

There are several other important considerations to be mindful of when consoling the bereaved. Narrative, for example, is the quintessential agenda of all consolation strategies. This means that mourners should be encouraged to speak of their loss. Perhaps the most helpful words of consolation are: "Tell me what she was like." The mourner's repeating of this narrative, sometimes with a new twist or emphasis (depending on the listeners and the person's own new insights) brings him closer to closure. By the end of a successful shiva, the mourner has packaged a cogent story, with a beginning and an end and a logical progression of events to store in his mind for safekeeping. Slowly it dawns on him that he now understands what happened and that he can place it in its proper proportion. He is, of course, still bereaved.

Encourage the retelling of stories -- about the deceased, about his death, about his final days -- and the feelings that accompanied these events. The more one tells the story, the more one is able to make the death more real. Telling the story with all its pain is a partner to the healing process.

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Section: Chumash Category: Quick VortParshas Chayei Sarah: Eliezer's Secret Desire The pasuk states, Eliezer told Lavan and Besuel - "Ulay Lo Saylech Halshah Acharay" - "Perhaps the woman won't go after me" - Maybe she won't want to come back with me to Eretz Canaan. Rashi notes that the word "Ulay" - "Perhaps" is spelled here without a "Vov" - it is spelled like "Aylay" - "to me". Eliezer had a daughter and hoped that Yitzchok would marry his own daughter. He therefore said, - "Perhaps the woman won't go after me" - his intention was "Aylay" - and then you will come to me and let Yitzchok marry my daughter. The Meforshim ask, why is the missing letter stated the second time this story is mentioned? The story of Eliezer going to find a Shidduch for Rivka is repeated twice in the Torah - once as it happens, and a second time when Eliezer relates the story to Lavan and Besuel. Why is "Aylay" first said in the repetition and not the first time? The **Kotzker** answers, sometimes while a person does a certain action he can't really know what his true intentions are. He might have ulterior motives, but doesn't realize it while he is in the midst of the act. It is only after he takes a step back that he realizes his true motives. When the episode occurred, Eliezer really thought that his question was LiShem Shamayim - What if Rivka does not want to come? What should I do then? When he related the story to Lavan and Besuel, it then hit him what his real motive for the question was... To get Yitzchok for his own daughter!
