

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Chayei Sarah 5771

published as a Zchus Lerefuah Sheleima of Bayla Bas Gelah betoch shaar choley yisrael.

Jerusalem Post :: Friday, October 29, 2010
JUDAISM WITHOUT JEWS? :: Rabbi Berel Wein

One of the more amazing predictions regarding the Jewish people that appears in the Torah is that numerically speaking we will always be a small nation. That certainly has been the case over our long history. At the time of the destruction of the Second Temple the Chinese were twice our numbers. Almost two millennia later the Chinese are approximately one hundred times our numbers.

In 1939 on the eve of World War II there were nineteen million Jews in the world. Today, seventy years later, we are at least four million under that number. There should be, simply by natural growth, sixty million Jews in the world but there is not nearly that number extant. This has been the price of what the modern world has inflicted upon us - from the Holocaust and its attendant generational impact, assimilation, intermarriage, the reduction of marriage and family which are viewed as subservient to other so-called life values, a very diminished birth rate outside of the Orthodox community, a general tendency to avoid marriage or to marry later in life, and the accepted practices and lifestyles of homosexuality.

All of this means that there are less Jews and less Jews means a weakening of Judaism and Judaic values. Tragically many Jews are more interested in saving the planet (whatever that may mean) than in creating a family themselves and insuring Jewish survival for the future.

Karl Marx, the apostate self-hating Jew, wrote a vicious anti-Semitic pamphlet entitled "A World Without Jews." He predicted that such a world would be utopia incarnate. Unfortunately much of the world, including a significant number of Jews as well, took him seriously.

We read in the Torah and Midrash that immediately after the near death of Isaac, Abraham immediately concentrates on finding a proper mate for Isaac - to marry him off and thus produce the continuity of Abraham's great ideals and message for humanity. Ideals and ideas are wonderful but in the abstract they eventually lose sway. Only people, real live human beings, can propagate and translate noble thoughts into practical human behavior.

Without Isaac marrying and having children, Abraham fears that the time and events will bury his hopes and accomplishments. There will be no one who will continue to raise his banner and proclaim monotheism and morality in a world that is always on the brink of depraved and violent behavior, paganism, and distorted ideals and values.

I thought that after the Holocaust the Jewish world would also think in that fashion. The greatest tribute to the memory of our martyrs and the ultimate revenge upon those that murdered them is a Jewish people risen from the ashes and numerically and spiritually and physically stronger than before.

The State of Israel has accomplished some of these goals but in terms of our numbers we are woefully deficient. Modern society scoffs at those who have large families and our superior intellectuals look down at them from their self-proclaimed lofty perches with disdain and contempt. This attitude is self-destructive to all true Jewish interests and to our future survival.

When I was a rabbi in Miami Beach forty years ago the great sainted Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kaheneman, the Ponivezher Rav, visited our community for a few months in the winter to raise funds for his yeshiva, orphan homes and other projects. I had the great privilege of becoming close to him.

One day he called me and asked me to arrange a meeting in my home with all of the younger couples affiliated with my congregation. I told him that I would do so but I cautioned him that I did not think that he would raise much money from them, what with their tuition and household expense

struggles. He gently told me that he was not going to speak to them about money or donations at all.

At that meeting which was very well attended, since I assured everyone that no requests for donations would take place, he arose and said to them: "My beloved children, the souls of a million and a half Jewish children under the age of twelve who were murdered in the Holocaust, are floating in the air above us. Our task is to give those souls bodies to live within. You are the only ones that can provide those bodies." As he sat down after his few words, the shock in the room was palpable.

But that year twenty children were born into our community. Many of those children are even grandparents today. Without Jews there is no Judaism. That is the message of Abraham and Isaac, Sarah and Rebecca to us as well today.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: CHAYEI SARAH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The death of a parent at any stage of life and at any age is a tragic and traumatic experience. I find that the grief is more profound for the surviving spouse than even for the surviving children. Children somehow find a way to move on with their lives. They factored in the inevitability of the death of a parent into their subconscious and thus usually were and are able to deal with their loss. Not so with the surviving spouse who never imagined being left alone and bereft especially in old age.

Abraham remarries Hagar/Keturah and even fathers children from her. But his concern and fatherly love is concentrated on his son Yitzchak, the son of his beloved Sarah. Through Yitzchak, Sarah is still alive and present in the life of Abraham. Abraham's concern regarding his son's being unmarried is somehow reinforced by the continuing subconscious presence of Sarah in his life.

The rabbis teach us that when Rebecca arrived at the home of Abraham and Isaac, the 'presence' of Sarah returned with her. Her candles became lit again, her bread was once again blessed in her home and her spirit of holiness and Godliness hovered once more in the tent of Abraham and Isaac. Rebecca was Sarah incarnate.

People say that men, so to speak, always seek to marry their mother. Rebecca becomes Sarah to both her husband Yitzchak and her father-in-law Abraham. This is one of the more amazing insights that this week's parsha offers for our consideration and education.

All of this is implicit in Abraham's instructions to his trusted servant and agent Eliezer. He tells him to find a wife for Yitzchak but she needs be descended from Sarah's family. Eliezer is not to take a woman from other genetic stock to be considered for marriage to Yitzchak. There are many explanations to these instructions given to Eliezer. But certainly the simple explanation and obvious insight is that Abraham is committed to find another Sarah through whom the Jewish people will be built and preserved. Eliezer is apparently unaware of this insight, so he concocts an elaborate scheme as to which woman he will choose to bring back as a wife for Yitzchak. He is not looking for Sarah as much as he is placing his mission in the hands of God to send him the proper woman. The Lord complies, so to speak, but it appears that Eliezer is never conscious that he is really looking for a Sarah.

That is why, according to Midrash, Eliezer harbors within himself hope that perhaps his own daughter, who is not Sarah by any stretch of the imagination, could be a potential bride for Yitzchak. It is the Lord, so to speak, that is in on the secret of Abraham's wishes and provides Yitzchak with a wife who brings him solace and closure after the death of his mother.

She is able to do so because of her uncanny Godly ability to be Sarah in a spiritual and emotional sense. Perhaps this is why the parsha begins "these are the lives (plural) of Sarah" for Sarah lives on through Rebecca and through all Jewish women throughout the ages who emulate her and live by her value system and way of life.

Shabat shalom.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly

For the week ending 30 October 2010 / 21 Heshvan 5771

Parshat Chayei Sara

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Overview Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avrahams family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

Insights

Faith And Kindness

"When she finished giving him (Eliezer) to drink, she said, 'I will draw water even for your camels until they have finished drinking'." (24:19)

If Orthodox Judaism required you to travel the world eating in all the best treif restaurants, a lot more people would be religious.

The ultimate barrier to faith in G-d is not logical but psychological.

Subconsciously, a person knows that if he accepts that the order in Creation logically implies an 'Orderer', this may eventually mean that he is going to have to stop driving to the golf club on Saturday morning. More than that, he's going to have to stop seeing himself as the center of the universe; having been brought up in the 'Me' generation, the thought that the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment may not be the ultimate purpose of life, strikes at the very foundations of our cultural orientation.

How much more comfortable to pay lip service to a Creator who is not interested in me in the slightest; then I can carry on doing exactly as I want!

This is a bribe that most people find irresistible. The desires of the heart blind the intellect and the truth becomes its first victim. As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch put it 'Belief is not the knowledge that there is a G-d, but rather the acknowledgment.'

When Eliezer tested Rivka as a wife for Yitzchak, he sought only to find out if she had a love of kindness. Why didn't he check that she also had the unshakeable faith in G-d that was necessary as the future mother of the Jewish People?

The answer is that kindness and faith are inextricably linked. Only one who is selflessly involved in the needs of others can free himself from the bribes of his own selfish desires. Only one who loves kindness for its own sake has the objectivity to recognize the Creator.

When Eliezer saw that Rivka loved kindness for its own sake — like Avraham — he knew she also had the objectivity needed for true faith, and that she was fit to be the mother of the Jewish People.

Sources: Based on Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, zatzal, and Rabbi Nota Schiller, shlita, and Rabbi Zev Leff, shlita

© 1995-2010 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

Penim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Chayei Sarah

And Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her. (23:2)

Rashi comments that the death of Sara Imeinu is juxtaposed onto the story of Akeidas Yitzchak because our Matriarch's death was connected with the Akeidah. In an attempt to frighten Sarah, Satan told her the news that Avraham Avinu was about to slaughter Yitzchak. Before she could hear that nothing had yet transpired and, Yitzchak was still alive, her soul flew from her body and she died. Clearly, it was Sarah's time to leave the world. It just so happened that this designated time coincided with the Akeidah. This does not prevent people from laying blame, harm, and second-guessing their decisions. "If only I would have - or would not have - done this, then he would be alive;" "If only Avraham would not have taken Yitzchak to the Akeidah..." Life is replete with "what ifs." This is the normal reaction of people to tragedy, to the unknown. It is so much easier to blame someone, or even oneself, than to concede that what occurred was destined according to Hashem's decree.

In his sefer, Dudaei Yitzchak, Horav David Nebentzhal, zl, writes that the above juxtaposition, which connects Sarah's death with Avraham's ready acquiescence to slaughter Yitzchak, teaches us a powerful lesson concerning Avraham's righteousness and unequivocal faith in the Almighty. According to Rashi, Sarah died as a result of hearing the news that Yitzchak was about to be killed - not killed yet - but about to be killed. It was sufficient to frighten her literally to death. This indicates the incredible love that our Matriarch manifested for her only child. They were inseparable. The thought of something bad happening to Yitzchak was enough to kill Sarah.

Undoubtedly, Avraham was fully aware of his wife's love for their son. This verity must have been weighing heavily on his mind as he traveled to the site of the Akeidah. He was acutely aware that the Akeidah would net two victims: Yitzchak and Sarah. Avraham would be responsible for both of their deaths. Yet, despite all of this, Avraham readily accepted Hashem's command and proceeded on to the Akeidah.

Furthermore, if Sarah had lived, Avraham could always hope that Hashem would bless them with another son - sort of a "replacement." With Sarah's death, however, everything - all avenues of hope for progeny - came to a complete halt. He no longer harbored any hope. No Yitzchak, no Sarah, no future Klal Yisrael. Avraham's present mission meant putting an end to Klal Yisrael. Nonetheless, Avraham's conviction was unshakeable. He forged on in his quest to perform the word of G-d.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, takes this idea a bit further. Let us picture Avraham following the Akeidah. He had successfully negotiated the emunah issues and challenges that the Akeidah had presented. Satan's challenges were quite difficult, but he emerged triumphant - and this is how he was returning home. He was a hero. He bested Satan. As he neared his home, he heard cries, weeping and other manifestations of grief and mourning. He then realized the terrible tragedy that had struck him. Yitzchak was alive - but Sarah, his life's partner, was dead. Can we imagine what must have been going through our Patriarch's mind? Certainly, he had questions. Is this the way one who shows faith at its apex should be rewarded? To succeed at the Akeidah, only to bury Sarah - is that success? Is that reward?

One would not be taken aback if Avraham's reaction to this devastating tragedy would have been "slightly" negative. At least, he would have had some serious questions. Indeed, even Satan accused him of "causing Sarah's premature death." This was Satan speaking after the fact, in an attempt to detract from the success of the Akeidah. Perhaps, Avraham would regret his conviction, be rueful of his commitment.

Not Avraham Avinu! Our Patriarch stood firm and resolute; with fortitude and mettle, he repulsed all obstacles and challenges. He understood that all

that Hashem does is good. Thus, Sarah's death at the time that it occurred, under that set of circumstances, was an act of G-d and, therefore, inherently good. True, he could at present neither see the good nor understand it, but his conviction remained strong and unshakeable.

This is why the Torah emphasizes that Avraham "rose up from the presence of his dead." The father of emunah in Hashem rose above all those who would take him down to disbelief in Hashem. He distanced himself from any form of negativity, knowing fully well that Sarah's designated time of death had arrived. It just happened to coincide with the Akeidah.

One question still needs to be addressed. Sarah Imeinu knew nothing of Hashem's command to Avraham concerning slaughtering Yitzchak. Thus, when Satan frightened her with the news, she reacted terribly. Did it have to be this way? Why could not Avraham simply have gone to his wife and shared with her the details of Hashem's command? After all, Yitzchak was also her son. Did she not have a right to know that he was going to be slaughtered? Rav Zilberstein writes that he once visited his father-in-law, Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Shlita, when someone brought up this question.

The venerable poseik ha'dor, Halachic arbiter of our generation, responded: "Who gave Avraham permission to seek Sarah's counsel? Hashem commanded Avraham. He instructed him neither to share the command with Sarah nor to seek her advice. If Hashem had wanted Sarah's input, He would have turned to her as He did to Avraham." This was our Patriarch's greatness. He understood that if Hashem spoke to him, it was meant only for him. We do not second-guess or try to understand the Almighty. Emunah must be unequivocal.

Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead. (23:3)

Avraham Avinu turned from his personal grief to attend to the burial of his beloved wife, Sarah Imeinu. When we think about it, our matriarch Sarah was the only "victim" of the Akeidah. Avraham and Yitzchak returned safely. Sarah, who was not even present, died as a "result" of the Akeidah. Well, not really. She died because her time had come. Her "time" Provisionally coincided with the Akeidah. Satan brought her the grim news that Avraham was about to slaughter their only son. This shocking news, presented under such circumstances, was too much for the elderly Matriarch to manage.

In his commentary to Chumash, Minchas Ani, Horav Yaakov Ettlinger, zl, explains what is meant by the Torah's statement, "Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead." He explains that while our Patriarch was overcome by the death of his life's partner, the experience did not leave him spiritually traumatized. Having returned from the Akeidah, and having passed the ultimate test administered by Hashem, Avraham had reached his spiritual zenith. He was on top of the world. Suddenly, he discovered that, as a result of his spiritual advancement, his wife had died. It would have been understandable for him to have slipped somewhat spiritually, to have been set back emotionally, temporarily - or even permanently. Suddenly, the Akeidah was not the apex of his spiritual development, but rather, the cause of his wife's premature demise.

The Torah attests to Avraham's spiritual resilience. He was devastated, but he immediately bounced back, as he "got up" from the presence of his dead. He did not allow the experience to take him down, to remove him from his elevated spiritual perch. Despite the trauma, his inner strength gave him the fortitude to "get up," "brush himself off," and take on the world. The situation was not going to control him.

After all is said and done, we wonder how Avraham did it! This was a trauma of the highest order. It dealt a serious blow to everything in which the Patriarch had believed. From where did he garner the strength to triumph over this latest challenge? Perhaps it was the Akeidah itself that buttressed his faith. Death does not end a person's influence of life. Death is very much a part of life. Judaism is the story of the continuum of generations. One generation moves on; the other one assumes its position

based upon - and influenced by - the lives and lessons of the previous generation.

The living generation perpetuates the past generations. Our ancestors who perished in the fires of the Auto de Fe, who succumbed to pogroms, who gave their lives al Kiddush Hashem during the European Holocaust, are all very much alive in us! By our adherence to the traditions and way of life of generations past, we affirm their achievements and attribute greater meaning to their lives.

The generation that views itself as free-standing, as having no connection to the past and no responsibility to the future, is a generation in which death is final. It is permanent. It creates utter desolation. Avraham "rose up from the presence of the dead," because life goes on and the next generation was establishing itself upon the foundation which Sarah Imeinu had prepared. This is the "life of Sarah."

Our gedolim, Torah leaders, placed the needs of Klal Yisrael before their own needs. Hardship and travail were often their lot, yet they picked themselves up and worked tirelessly for the Klal. Apathy was a word that did not exist in their lexicon. The Klausenberger Rebbe never thought about his personal needs. The needs of Klal Yisrael were his needs. Despite suffering serious personal trauma during the Holocaust, followed by the murder of his wife and eleven children, the Rebbe did not cry, for fear that others would think that he was critical of the derech Hashem, ways of the Almighty. Indeed, as a result of his own tragic losses, the Rebbe understood the survivors' needs. He was concerned with restoring their emunah, faith, in Hashem. He labored relentlessly to provide the survivors with basic religious necessities - kosher kitchens, Tefillin, printing presses for seforim, and Torah literature for learning. He raised the funds for the first yeshivos after the war, transforming the D.P. camps from hopelessness to hope. He arranged marriages and even provided the women with sheitlach, wigs. He traveled all over raising money to ease the plight of the survivors. During all of this, he never once thought of his own dismal circumstances. He "rose up from the presence of his dead."

Now, Ephron was sitting in the midst of the Bnei Ches. (23:10)

Rashi cites the Midrash that relates that, on that day, Ephron was elevated to a position of leadership. The people realized that a dignitary such as Avraham Avinu could not negotiate with a common citizen. Thus, out of respect for Avraham's position in world society, Ephron was promoted to leadership. The Bnei Ches demonstrated great respect for our Patriarch, going out of their way to treat him as royalty. It is, therefore, strange that Avraham exhibited such negative feelings towards them. He enjoined his trusted servant, Eliezer, not to take a wife for Yitzchak from among these people. He sent Eliezer to a distant country to procure a wife for him. Why not Bnei Ches? They seemed to be decent, respectable people.

Horav Moshe Tzvi Nariah, zl, comments that Rashi's words, *oso ha'yom me'tenuhu l'shofeit aleihem*, "That day they appointed him as an official over them," reveals to us the reason that Avraham feared having any kind of relationship with them. Shlomo HaMelech says in Mishlei 27:21, "A refining pot is for silver and a crucible for gold, and a man according to his praises." In his Shaarei Teshuvah, Rabbeinu Yonah explains that if one wants to recognize an individual's true essence, he should look around at who offers his praises, who lauds him, who are his followers. Ephron was promoted due to his financial "acumen." As Shlomo HaMelech says in Mishlei 28:22, "One over-eager for wealth, has an evil eye." Ephron would be able to get the most out of Avraham for the parcel of land that the Patriarch sought. A wheeler dealer to whom money was a god, Ephron was selected for the ultimate profit he would generate for the Bnei Ches.

A person is judged by whom he lauds, whom he admires, whose attention he thrives on. Ephron was a money-hungry, base individual. The mere fact that he was promoted to leadership indicates the true character of the Bnei Ches. They did not respect Avraham. They only sought his wealth. Their choice in whom to praise reflected their own shortcomings.

What a telling lesson for us. We are defined by whom we praise, with whom we associate, who are our friends, who are members of our inner

circle. Not only can their questionable character traits influence us negatively, just being in their vicinity and lauding them have deleterious effects on our own reputation. We are whom we praise.

And Avraham weighed out to Ephron...four hundred silver shekalim in negotiable currency. (23:15)

The Torah refers to the "field that was purchased by Avraham" a number of times. Likewise, Yosef tells Pharaoh that his father, Yaakov Avinu, asked to be buried "in my grave, which I have hewn for myself in the land of Canaan" (Bereishis 50:5).

The parcel of land, the gravesite, was prepared and paid for while they were alive. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, derives from here the significance of paying for a gravesite. It should not be granted as a gift. In fact, when his son-in-law, Horav Tzvi Levenson, zl, passed away, the Chevra Kadisha, Jewish Burial Society, was only too eager to give the family a prime site befitting an individual of his distinguished stature. The Chafetz Chaim refused, insisting instead upon paying full price for the plot of land. He substantiated his actions with the Torah's emphasis on the land which Avraham "bought." This teaches that one must purchase the land.

Horav Shmuel Greineman explains the Chafetz Chaim's position. In Pirkei Avos 4:21, Chazal teach us, "This world is like a lobby before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall." Men of culture and breeding understand that when they are about to present themselves before a distinguished leader, they dress in their finest garb. This is especially true when they are summoned before the king of the land. The preparation for the meeting will often take some time, so that they are sure that everything is perfect.

The Tanna is telling us that life on this world is a preparation for meeting the King of Kings, Hashem. Seventy, eighty years and more are spent preparing ourselves in the lobby, so that we look good and presentable when we enter into the banquet hall.

The modern, secular world has no concept of this reality. They live by the rule, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we will die." Their thoughts are not of the future, because they live for the present.

The saintly Chafetz Chaim decried those who spend large amounts of money to provide an impressive tombstone for their parents' gravesite. They plant entire gardens to beautify the grave, while neglecting what is really important. The purpose of a stone is to perpetuate the memory of the deceased, to provide a marker, to remember where he is buried, and to remember the person that he was. The amount of money one "sinks" into beautifying the gravesite will not serve as a source of pleasure for the soul of the departed. The mitzvos and good deeds that the children perform earn merit for the parents. Since they can no longer help themselves, the children should show their appreciation to their parents for all that they did for them by reciprocating their acts of love and devotion. That is really all they require of us

And he loved her; and thus was Yitzchak consoled after his mother. (24:67)

Translating lashon kodesh, the holy tongue or Biblical Hebrew, into English or any other foreign language is dangerous. It is almost impossible to always find the correct foreign word which best coincides with the holy words of the Torah. Biblical Hebrew is like no other language, since it is Hashem's creation. It is His language. Human-created words cannot do justice to Divine vernacular. Having said this, we are able to understand that "love" is a poor translation of the word ahavah. To say that Yitzchak Avinu "loved" Rivkah Imeinu in modern-day vernacular is an insult to the Patriarch and a misinformed interpretation.

The word ahavah, loosely translated as love, originates from hav, which means to give. Thus, "love" in lashon kodesh should be defined as giving to one another in complete devotion to one another. Love between two people is the phenomenon of two individuals who want to give to each other. The relationship is not about taking - but about giving. Therefore, Yitzchak was consoled after the death of his mother. He finally had someone who would be devoted completely to him, a devotion which he

could reciprocate. Yitzchak's relationship with Rivkah had nothing to do with the relationship that contemporary society defines as love. It was not about romance. It was about giving all of oneself to another person who has the same feeling for you.

And Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzchak...But to the concubine children who were Avraham's, Avraham gave gifts. (25:5,6)

The Malbim distinguishes between the inheritance Avraham Avinu bequeathed Yitzchak and that which he gave to the concubine children. He gave Yitzchak his father's physical and spiritual possessions. To the Bnei Keturah, he gave gifts. Avraham Avinu's true legacy was his spirituality. This was bequeathed to Yitzchak who would carry on and transmit the Abrahamatic legacy. In light of the above, I would like to expand upon the ideas concerning what we should leave our children.

What are a man's real possessions? What can be designated as really belonging to him? The story is told that Mayer Anshel Rothchild was once asked, "What is the extent of your wealth?" In response to this question, R' Meir looked up the charity receipts he had in his record. He said, "My real enduring wealth is what I have given away to tzedakah. The rest is not enduring. At any time, a stroke of misfortune can wipe out my entire future, but nothing can erase the record of my charities."

We are concerned about what we will leave our children, but do we even stop to think about what really belongs to us? Material possessions are wonderful things, especially if one knows how to properly use them. Is that what should really be primary in considering the life legacy that we bequeath to our children? It is the spiritual legacy that will accompany us in the World of Truth that is our most precious treasure. Last, there is something which we often forget to consider, which occurs on a constant basis: the memories of ourselves and the images of our lives and activities that will be etched into the minds of our children.

Memories are our most significant, yet fragile, and often misunderstood legacy. We look back at the lives our parents led and attempt to encapsulate it. There were acts they did that make us proud, and, regrettably, there are activities that - in our mind - in retrospect - are viewed negatively. We do not know why they behaved as they did, so why not give them the benefit of the doubt. Parents have to be aware that their actions are being preserved through the eyes of their children and will ultimately serve as their most sustaining legacy. The question remains: How will we be remembered?

In a recent article, Jonathan Rosenblum writes about his friend, who still speaks with amazing reverence about his father whenever he mentions him, although his friend's father has been gone for quite some time. Apparently, he left an enduring impact on his son's psyche. What an incredible inheritance he bequeathed his son! When we reflect on the model we set for our children, how they will remember us, it should have a powerful effect on the way we behave.

In the article, Mr. Rosenblum tells about an observant attorney in North Miami Beach who took down a ponzi scheme run by a crooked attorney in Fort Lauderdale. The whistle blower weighed heavily on his mind concerning his actions. It was dangerous. The last person to have been involved in exposing the crime met with a premature death. He had his family to consider. This had to be carried out in a most discreet and sagacious manner.

It never occurred to him not to take action and just keep his suspicions to himself - something most people would do. It did not involve him directly. He was not losing any money, but that was not what his parents had taught him. Well, not in words, but their actions over the years spoke volumes about their beliefs.

One powerful memory was of a family vacation in Mexico, during which the family witnessed a young man being pummeled by a gang of ruffians. The lawyer's father could not tolerate such behavior. When he ran over to help the victim, the gang took flight, and the man was spared. When he asked his father why he had put his life in danger for a stranger, his response was, "Unless today is well-lived, tomorrow is not important."

This is how his father lived his life: intolerant of injustice, unable to bear deception.

His mother was similar in her attitude. Moving to the south, she was repulsed by the separate facilities for Caucasian and people of color. She insisted on drinking from the same water fountain as "colored people." Years later, when Florida schools were desegregated and many white teachers refused to teach, his mother, though a housewife with young children at home, became a teacher in a particularly hostile neighborhood. When she noticed that many of her students arrived at school hungry, she started bringing little snacks for the kids.

When the lawyer/whistle-blower contemplated the selfless lives lived by his parents, he knew what his goal in life must be. What a beautiful legacy to impart. Can we say the same? As long as one is alive, it is never too late

Va'ani Tefillah

Va'yar Yisrael es Mitzrayim meis al sefas ha'yam.

We find that when Hashem destroyed Sodom, while sparing Lot from inclusion in that destruction, Hashem instructed Lot not to turn around and look at their downfall. According to Rashi, Hashem told Lot, "'You are undeserving of witnessing their downfall, while you are being saved.'" In other words, it is one thing for Lot to be spared; it is a totally different thing for him to watch the others die. He was not that perfect himself. When Klal Yisrael stood at the banks of the Sea of Reeds, they were not much more spiritually advanced than their Egyptian pursuers. In fact, there was a dispute with the angels, who questioned Klal Yisrael's salvation. Were they not also idol worshippers? If so, why were they allowed to see the bodies of their Egyptian captors?

The Sefas Emes explains that even when Klal Yisrael was being "judged" at the Yam Suf, the issue was never concerning their being destroyed along with the Egyptians. The question was: How would Hashem continue sustaining them? Until now, He employed the Middas Ha'Chesed, Attribute of Kindness, to grant them life, despite their failings. Were they now ready to be given over to the Middas Ha'Din, Attribute of Strict Justice, and be judged thoroughly, and, afterwards, after emerging triumphant, would they be returned to the purview of chesed? One should be aware, that even when Hashem utilizes the middah of chesed, it is a product of din. Going beyond the measure of din is in itself an aspect of din which obligates one to go beyond the strictures of din to act with chesed.

Sponsored l'zchus u'lerefuah sheleima for Baruch ben Sara Chasia b'soch she'or cholei yisrael

Rabbi Yissocher Frand Parshas Chayei Sarah

Sarah Had It All Together – Throughout Her Life

Rather than simply stating that Sara our Matriarch died at the age of 127, the Torah says that Sarah lived 100 years and 20 years and 7 years. Rashi on this pasuk [verse] states that she was as free from sin at 100 as she was at 20 (there is no liability for divine punishment until 20) and she was as beautiful at age 20 as at age 7. The pasuk concludes "shnei chayei Sarah" – these are the years of the Matriarch Sarah. Here Rashi comments – all equally good (kulan shavim l'Tova).

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt"l, commented that a person goes through different stages of life – infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and old age. In general, when we finish one stage of life and move onto the next stage, we leave the earlier stage behind. We may have fond memories, but that period of our life is closed. When a person is 100 years old, they have already acquired great wisdom, wisdom that only comes with life's experience. At 20, a person is in the stage when they are full of energy, vitality, and idealism. The age of 7 represents an age of innocence and purity.

Rav Soloveitchik said that Chazal are trying to tell us that regardless of how old Sarah was at any point in her life, Sarah had within her the attributes of a seven year old (purity and innocence), the attributes of a

twenty year old (vitality and idealism) and the attributes of a 100 year old (wisdom and experience).

Seven year olds have a wonderful and pure understanding of the Ribono shel Olam. G-d is a reality to them. When you want something, you ask Hashem for it and most of the time, you are answered. Their prayers are pure. Unfortunately, most of us no longer have that innocence when we daven. We have already become jaded by the vagaries of life in this world. The 20 year old is full of idealism and the 100 year old is full of wisdom.

"They were all equally good" means that when Sarah was 45, she had the purity and innocence of a 7 year old – her belief in the Almighty was real and untainted. At that same age (and at every other age), she had the youthful idealism and energy of a 20 year old. Throughout her life, she was wise beyond her years – even in her youth and even in her middle age, she had the wisdom of an old lady. She never left behind the stages of life that she "outgrew", but rather took the positive attributes of each stage in life along with her while she aged.

Seeing The Silver Lining Of A Challenging Situation: A Great Accomplishment

The Ramba"n writes that the Torah elaborates on all the details of Avraham's purchase of the burial plot for Sarah "In order to inform us of the mercies of G-d (Chasdei Hashem) with Avraham, who became a Prince of the Land in the land into which he came to live." The Chitites treated Avraham with great respect and were honored to give his family a prime burial spot in the finest part of their territory. The entire populace gave him the title Adoni [master] such that yet in his lifetime we witness fulfillment of the blessing "I will Bless you and I will make your name great". [Bereshis 12:2]

The Ramba"n continues in the very same paragraph: And our Rabbis say that this was one of Avraham's tests - that he sought a burial place for his own wife in the land that he was promised by G-d and yet he was not able to acquire the land until he purchased it at a great price with great effort. He did not question G-d about this and thus passed his final nisayon [test]. Are these two comments of the Ramba"n not self-contradictory? The Ramba"n begins the comment by saying that the parsha is written to tell us that the story illustrates the great respect everyone had for Avraham. But then the Ramba"n says that the parsha documents a test that Avraham endured – expending great effort and great expense to find a burial spot for his wife!

Furthermore, how can there be another "test" after the test at the end of last week's parsha – the nisayon of Akeidas Yitzchak [the binding of Yitzchak]? The events in this week's parsha may be upsetting and difficult, but as a test, they are very anti-climactic. Is this an appropriate climax to the tests that Avraham endured during his life of devotion to the Almighty? Rav Simcha Zissel Brody says that there is no contradiction in the Ramba"n and in fact the Ramba"n coming to answer this very question of why the purchase of a burial plot was considered a "test".

The tests presented contradictions to Avraham.

Avraham was told to go to the Land of Canaan and good things would happen to him. But as soon as Avraham arrived, "there was a famine in the land". This was an apparent contradiction to G-d's promise.

G-d told Avraham he would have a son who would be the founder of the Jewish people. Then G-d told Avraham to take the son and slaughter him. This was an apparent contradiction to G-d's promise.

The burial of Sarah contains that element as well. Avraham was promised that the entire land would be his and now he has difficulty even buying a plot for his beloved wife. This too is a contradiction. However, this test has an added element. The test was whether, while undergoing stress and distress of nisyanos, Avraham would also simultaneously be able to perceive the great mercies and kindnesses that G-d had wrought for him.

There are 3 ways that a person can handle life's tragedies. He can suffer troubles and tragedy and then throw away religion. Alternatively, he can suffer these fates and stoically accept it all as punishment. Finally, he can

see the trouble and tragedy, but even within the tragedy, he is able to see the Mercy. This is the ultimate test of a human being's faith.

This is why the test of Sarah's burial was even greater than the previous tests. It contained the element of contradiction that was also present in the previous nisyonos, but it also contained another element. It contained the challenge to be impressed by the way the Bnei Ches treated him (even while they were giving him a hard time) and the challenge to recognize the Divine Providence which allowed him to be valued and treated as a "Prince of the L-rd in their midst."

Seeing the Chessed and the Favors of G-d while in the midst of one's troubles is a tremendous attribute and indeed amounted to the pinnacle of Avraham's spiritual accomplishments.

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

RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yisrocher Frاند and Torah.org.

פרשת השבוע - פרשת חיי שרה

מאמרו של הגאון רבי זכדיה הכהן שליט"א, חבר בית הדין הרבני בתל אביב, עבור הלכה יומית

השבת נקרא, על אברהם אבינו ששלח את אליעזר להביא כלה ליצחק, לכל אורך הדרך אנו רואים כי הנקודה שהנתתה את אברהם ואליעזר, היא האמונה בקדוש ברוך הוא, אשר כל עניין מציאת האשה תלוי בו ובברכתו לדבר. את זאת אנו רואים בדברי אברהם לאליעזר: "ה' אלוהי השמים וכו' ישלח מלאכו לפניך ולקחת אשה לבני יצחק". גם אליעזר, בבואו לבאר המים, מתפלל לה' ואומר: "ה' אלוהי אדוני אברהם, הקרא נא לפני היום ועשה חסד עם אדוני אברהם". ובהמשך, "והאיש משתאה לה, מחריש לדעת ההצליח ה' דרכו". וכשאליעזר בא לבית לבן הוא אומר, "ואקוד ואשתחוה לה' ואברך את ה' אלוהי אדוני אברהם אשר הנחני בדרך אמת". ואפילו לבן ובתואל אומרים לאליעזר, "מה יצא הדבר לא נוכל דבר אליך רע או טוב". מכל זה אנו למדים, כי בכל חיי האדם בכלל, ובתקופה שבא אדם עומד לבנות את ביתו ומחפש את בת זוגו, יסוד ההצלחה לדבר הוא האמונה והתפילה לה' כי יצליח דרכו, וכל שאר הדברים שאנו חושבים שהם העיקר, הרי הם טפלים לאמונה ולתפילה לה' יתברך לקבל את ברכתו לבנין עדי עד

האמונה כאלוקים ובהשגחתו לכל פרט ופרט אינה יכולה להיות לחצאין. או שאדם מאמין, או חלילה להיפך. הבעיה היא שכאשר מגיע האדם למצב שבו הוא נצרך לאמונה כאוויר לנשימה, דווקא אז הוא יתלה בדברים אחרים וחושב שיש דרכי הצלה אחרות, וחבל

ואם אמונה, או תקופת השידוכין של הילדים היא התקופה בה' א' הידיעה הנצרכת לאמונה. ואי להם להורים שלא מנהלים את ענייני השידוכין של ילדיהם מתוך אמונה צרופה וזכה בבורא עולם. רק אלה שהאמונה חרוטה עמוק בליבם עוברים את התקופה הזו מתוך שקט נפשי מוחלט

בספר "ברכי נפשך", מספר הרב יצחק זילברשטיין שליט"א. באו אליו זוג הורים וספרו שיש להם בן "תקוע" במשך תקופה ארוכה בשידוכין והעניינים לא זזים. עד כדי כך, שאפילו השדכנים הגדולים כבר "התייאשו" מהם ועזבו אותם ולא מציעים להם הצעות. כתוצאה מכך, התעוררה מחלוקת בין בני הזוג בדבר מסוים. הם סיפרו שכאשר שאלו את השדכן העיקרי איתו עבדו במשך כל התקופה מדוע אין הוא ממשיך להציע, השיב להם השדכן, שלדעתו הבן שלהם לא מצליח למצוא את בת זוגו משום שהוא לומד בישיבה לא כל כך מפורסמת... ואם יעבירו אותו לישיבה אחרת בעלת שם יוקרתית יותר, או העניינים ירוצו

שמעתם? לשדכן הזה יש מן הסתם מהלכים במחוזות שאינם ידועים לאף אחד והוא יודע שאם הבחור יעבור לישיבה מפורסמת, וכוו המוכרת בעולם הישיבות "כשישיבה חזקה" גם השידוכין שלו יזווג יותר מהר

וכי האירוסין תלויים בכך

בנקודה זו חלוקים היו האב והאם. האב לא ניחן כנראה באמונה גדולה מדי, והוא טען שיש לעשות כעצתו של השדכן, ויש לו אפילו תוכנית מפורטת כיצד לעשות זאת... שהרי הדברים אינם פשוטים כלל ועיקר. הכל ידועים שלהעביר בחור בגיל כזה לישיבה בעלת שם אין זו משימה קלה. לכן ישב האב והגה תוכנית מדוקדקת כיצד לממש את הדברים. ברם, האמא, כאישה יהודיה אמיתית, שגודלה על ברכי האמונה, יודעת שלא יעלה על הדעת ששאלת האירוסין תלויה בוהותה של הישיבה, והיא טענה בפני, סיפר הרב זילברשטיין, שכיוון שהבן

לומד בישיבה בה הוא נמצא אין שום סיבה להעבירו לישיבה אחרת והיא מתנגדת בתוקף לתכנית

כל בר דעת מבין שהצדק הוא עם האמא, ומי שחושב שאם יעבירו את הבן לישיבה אחרת גם השידוכין שלו יעברו הסבה, טועה טעות חמורה, ואין שמץ של אמונה בליבו

כדי להמחיש את הדברים, הביא להם הרב משל נמרץ על אדם הנוהג במכונות ישנה ומוצא את עצמו תקוע בפקק על אם הדרך. במשך שעות ארוכות מתנהלת המכונות הישנה יחד עם אלפי מכונות נוספות במהירות מוערית של 5 ק"מ לשעה, והפקק אינו חושב להשתחרר. הנהג שלנו היה צריך להגיע לפגישה חשובה והפקק הזה מרט את עצביו עד לאימה. בשלב מסוים פקעה סבלנותו עד שעלה בלבו רעיון. הוא יחנה את המכונות הישנה בצידו הדרך ויתדפק על דלתו של אוטובוס מפואר שרק לפני חודש חודשים יצא מפס יצור ויבקש להימנות על נוסעיו

אם אסע באוטובוס כה מפואר אגיע הרבה יותר מהר למחוז היעד שלי", אמר לעצמו החלמאי " הלוח. והוא אינו מבין שכדי להשתחרר מפקק, אין זה משנה כלל באיזה רכב הוא נוסע, כי הפקק הרי נוצר מן העומס בכביש, שנוצר מסיבה כלשהיא, או תאונה חלילה, או שטן שנשפך על הכביש וגורם לכל המכונות להאט את מהירות נסיעתן, וכדי לשחרר את הפקק צריך לשחרר את הסיבה שגרמה להיווצרותו. עד שלא יעשו זאת, הרי כל המכונות, וגם החדישות ביותר, תמשכנה להיות תקועות

המשל הזה דומה במדויק למצב שבו הינכם מצויים, אמר הרב לאבא, הרי הבן שלך תקוע בפקק השידוכין ובוודאי שיש דבר מה שתקע אותו, ועד שלא תשחרר את הסיבה, לא ישתחרר הפקק

!! והאם הינך מעלה בדעתך שהסיבה נעוצה בישיבה שבה לומד הבן

נוכח תמיד כי סוד ההצלחה הוא אך ורק בברכת ה' ובתפילה אליו מעומק הלב לכל אורך הדרך וכמאמר הפסוק "על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו"

שבת שלום

**Rav Kook List
Rav Kook on the Torah Portion
Psalm 72: Prayer at Sunrise**

Tefilat Keva
The Sages instituted a fixed text for prayer, so that all would be able to pray eloquently and for appropriate objectives. Yet the Sages also warned against prayer that is keva - literally 'fixed' or 'set.'

What exactly is this keva prayer that one should avoid?
The Talmud quotes a number of explanations. The simplest definition is that keva is a prayer consisting solely of the prescribed text, without any personal or individual requests. Others explain keva to mean a dry, sterile prayer, lacking heartfelt petitions.
And a third explanation is that keva refers to a basic outlook that looks at prayer as a burden. Instead of viewing prayer as fulfilling a natural spiritual need, it is seen as a religious duty that must be discharged.

Sunrise, Sunset
While most of these explanations speak of some quality of spontaneity and personal connection to prayer, the final opinion quoted in the Talmud is much different. This opinion maintains that we should make an effort to pray at the optimal hour for prayer. By making this effort, we demonstrate that we pray not just to fulfill an obligation, but that we aspire to pray at a special time of ratzon, Divine favor.
And when is the best time to pray? This may be ascertained from the words of the psalm:

"They will revere You at sun[rise], and before the moon, for all generations." (Ps. 72:5)
The best time for the Shacharit prayer is the first opportunity of the day to pray - "with sunrise." And optimal time for the Minchah prayer is at the end of the day, as the sun is setting - "before the moon."

Witnessing the Splendor of Creation

According to Rav Kook, there is more to this than making the effort to pray at the optimal hour. By timing our prayer to coincide with the transition between day and night, our prayer is no longer a reflection of only our own personal needs and wants. It is no longer keva, bound and limited to our private world.

Rather, prayer at sunrise/sunset reaches beyond the boundaries of the inner self and touches the splendor of the universe. It reflects how God's kindness fills the world. Prayer at sunrise and sunset awakens within us a sensitivity to the majesty of creation. "The heavens recite God's glory, and the sky declares His handiwork" (Ps. 19:2).

Therefore the psalmist counseled to 'revere God at sunrise.' Witnessing the constancy of the laws of nature helps instill an awareness of the underlying wisdom in God's creation.

It is fitting that we should draw feelings of awe and reverence from the wellsprings of creation, a universe where every detail articulates the wisdom of its Maker. For those who disregard God's handiwork, these feelings become deadened. Rather, we should follow Isaiah's advice:

"Lift up your eyes on high and contemplate. Who created these? Who takes out their host by number?" (Isaiah 40:26)

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I on Berachot 29, IV:49)

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

Parshat HaShavua - Chayei Sara 5771

Where's the Beef?

Rabbi Yossef Carmel

Dedicated to the memory of Simcha bat Chana

This week's haftara deals with David's son, Adoniya's, failed attempt to seize the throne during his father's last days and Bat Sheva's successful bid to secure the kingship for her son, Shlomo, to whom it was promised. While there is much to explore behind the scenes of this struggle, we want to highlight one apparently small but actually important point.

During his attempted coronation, Adoniya is said to have slaughtered (vayizbach) a variety of animals at a place called Even Hazochelet before his supporters (Melachim I, 1:9). During the subsequent coronation of Shlomo, which David initiated, there is no mention of the slaughtering of animals (see *ibid.* 33-34). Why is it that the same apparent activity in the same family for the same purpose would be different in regard to the slaughter of animals as part of the ceremony/celebration? For whatever reason, the classical commentators do not discuss the matter. First we must try to determine what the nature of this zevicha (slaughter) is, as it is found in the Torah in two different contexts, as we will discuss.

The Torah (Devarim 12:21) does use the word zevicha in reference to the simple halachic slaughter of animals in a manner that makes them fit for normal consumption. If this is the intention, then the people were simply taking part in a festive celebratory meal in honor of Adoniya's ascension to the throne. However, this is difficult because the term is predominantly used in reference to the slaughter of animals as sacrifices. It is also difficult because then what is the significance of their slaughter that it should be stressed, as opposed to just saying that they were eaten. Is it a surprise that David's son kept kosher?

We will therefore suggest that the decision of whether to slaughter sacrifices was at the heart of the issues behind the "political" struggle. When David declared Yerushalayim as the place of the future Temple, the rule that sacrifices could be offered only there became pertinent, even though it was technically permitted to bring sacrifices anywhere until the Temple was actually erected. David stopped all public sacrifices in non-central locations as of the time he bought the plot upon which the Temple would be built, as can be inferred from Divrei Hayamim I, 22:1. This was actually a major rallying cry behind Avshalom's outright rebellion against his father, as the people were unwilling to give up their perceived right to

"serve" Hashem wherever they pleased. As is stressed many times in Melachim, the people never overcame this desire to bring sacrifices on unauthorized altars (bamot).

By publicly bringing sacrifices on a bama, Adoniya was trying to "ride a wave" of support by his convenient stand on the above grassroots issue. It was as if to say: "Under my rule, sacrificing will be a matter of personal choice." Of course, David, as the promulgator of the centralized only policy, arranged a coronation for Shlomo without zevicha. It is ironic that after taking power, Shlomo himself was apparently influenced by the nation's desire and, while serving Hashem, did offer sacrifices on bamot (before the Temple was built).

May we merit the rebuilding of the House of David, which was and will be built on the basis of justice

From "Chemdat Yamim" Parsha Sheet (www.erezhemdah.org)

Mussar and the 12 Steps

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski (The TorahWeb Foundation)

I found it interesting that on several occasions, the prophets reprimanded the people by comparing their errant behavior to that of alcoholics, e.g. "they were drunk, albeit not with wine; they staggered, albeit not with ale" (Isaiah 29:9). People sinned, giving in to the temptation for immediate pleasure, ignoring the long-term destructive consequences. This is typical of the alcoholic. All the rationalizations and psychological defense mechanisms that people use for committing a sin are similar to those used by the alcoholic.

Mussar begins with Moshe Rabenu, and is followed up in the Talmud. It is expanded by the classical sifre mussar, namely Reishis Chochma, Chovas Halevavos, Orchos Tzaddikim and Mesilas Yesharim. Rebbe Yisrael of Salant established the school of mussar, requiring formal courses on the subject, and his disciples greatly enriched the field. Contemporary mussar works, Michtav Eliyahu by Harav Dessler and Alei Shur by Harav Wolbe are of particular value, since they speak to our generation.

All the suggestions by the mussar authorities are valuable. However, people's efforts to improve their spirituality are generally private affairs. We are not privy to what mistakes people have made, what are their character defects, and what techniques they have used to improve themselves. In 40 years of working with alcoholics, I have had the opportunity to observe how people can successfully change their errant behavior.

The 12-step programs have been a very effective method of overcoming the scourge of a variety of addictions - alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, sex - and several others. Some opinions have been voiced regarding the propriety of these programs for Torah-observant Jews, and I'd like to bring some clarity to the issues.

Inasmuch as most of the meetings are of mixed genders, this has been raised as an objection. This is not an inherent fault of the program, but rather a logistic problem, and can be resolved by forming separate meetings for men and women.

Since the majority of meetings are held in church basements or social halls, some feel that these are Christian programs. The sad fact is that very few synagogues have made themselves available to program meetings. Inasmuch as the various addictions have seriously affected many Jews, it would be a mitzvah for synagogues to open their doors to meetings.

It may be argued that the first of the 12-step programs, Alcoholics Anonymous, was the outgrowth of a Christian group. This is true. However, as we shall see, the content of the 12-step programs is not only compatible with Torah, but actually seems to have been adopted from Torah sources. I cannot understand how the founder of AA, Bill Wilson, had access to concepts that we find in the Talmud and the mussar writings. The fact that they were adopted by a Christian group hardly disqualifies them, just as the kedusha in the amidah was not disqualified by its adoption into the Lord's Prayer.

Some people mistakenly thought the 5th step to be like the Catholic confession. As we will see, it is not. Let us now look at the 12 steps.

Step #1: We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step #2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

This is essentially the Talmudic statement (Kedushin 30b) that one's yetzer hara (evil inclination) increases in strength every day, and were it not for the help of G-d, one would not be able to withstand it. In other words, without the help of G-d, we are powerless over the yetzer hara. Indeed, the Talmud relates that two of our greatest tzaddikim were tempted by Satan and were actually in the process of submitting to the sin, and were saved only by the intervention of G-d. (Kedushin 81a).

The Talmud refers to sin as due to temporary insanity (Sotah 3a). Thus, just as we are powerless to resist the temptation to sin without G-d's help, so the alcoholic is powerless to resist the temptation to drink, and only a Power greater than oneself (which we define as G-d) can prevent the insane behavior.

Our powerlessness over sin is primarily due to two factors. (1) The overwhelming power of the yetzer hara. This is well described in what I consider a frightening essay by Rebbe Yeruchem, "The Land is Given Over to Evil," in which he describes the extraordinary powers of the Satan (Daas Chochama Umussar, vol.2 p.139). This essay was written in 1928, long before Satan greatly expanded his already formidable powers by means of the internet and television!

(2) Our vulnerability to self-deception. Like a judge who takes a bribe, our judgment is seriously compromised by our desires, which are powerful bribes. Harav Dessler addresses this in his essay on "The Perspective of Truth (Michtav M'Eliahahu vol. 1).

Without siyattya dishmaya (Divine assistance) we are helpless.

Step #3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of G-d as we understood Him.

The phrase "G-d as we understood Him" has been a source of confusion. It was meant to avoid reference to the deity of any religion. The Jew should say, "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of Hashem." This step expresses two Torah concepts. (1) Set aside your own will in favor of the will of Hashem (Ethics of the Fathers 2:4) and (2) "Cast upon G-d your burden, and He will sustain you" (Psalms 55:23).

Moshe Rabenu warns us not to assume that we are in control of our fate. "Lest you say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth.' Then you shall remember Hashem, that it is He Who gives you strength to make wealth." (Deuteronomy 9-17).

Step #4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

All sifrei mussar repeatedly stress the importance of chesbon hanefesh, a personal accounting which could not be expressed any better than "a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." This must indeed be fearless, because it takes great courage to honestly search oneself and confront parts of our character and personality whose existence we may be reluctant to acknowledge. King Solomon says, "Every way of a person is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 21:2). It is so easy to rationalize and justify our actions.

In doing a moral inventory, we must list our assets as well as our liabilities, our merits as well as our faults, because only this way can we achieve a true self-awareness. The mussar authority, Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz said that if a person is unaware of one's faults, one does not know what one must correct. However, a person who is unaware of one's character strengths is even in a more sorry state, because one is unaware of the tools one has to live a proper life.

Step #5: Admitted to G-d, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

This step has been misconstrued as being the Catholic confession. This is not so. In his guide to proper living, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk says that a person should avail oneself of a trusted friend, to whom one can admit everything has done, and even the objectionable thoughts and desires one has harbored. Verbalizing these breaks the hold of the yetzer hara.

Private, moral offenses, should not be aired publicly, but we should share our interpersonal foibles. These are generally due to our acquisitive drives which lead to envy and dishonesty.

Step #6: Were entirely ready to have G-d remove all these defects of character.

Step #7: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

We generally can control our behavior, but we may have little or no control over some of our feelings. It is evident from the Talmud that we are born with some character traits, some of which we can sublimate and redirect to positive goals. We may not, by our own efforts, be able to extirpate some undesirable traits.

The saintly Chafetz Chaim was known to pray tearfully at the Ark of the Torah that G-d relieve him of his feelings of anger. The Chafetz Chaim never exhibited anger, because he was in control of his behavior, but he could not eliminate feeling angry, and he prayed that G-d remove these.

Obviously, we must do our homework to rid ourselves of objectionable traits, and this is how one becomes "ready to have G-d remove all these defects of character." Once one has done whatever is within one's power, one can then "ask G-d to remove our shortcomings."

Step #8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

The Talmud says that whereas a person's sins are forgiven on Yom Kippur, this does not apply to offenses committed against another person. Divine forgiveness is granted only if one has genuinely sought forgiveness from the person one harmed or offended.

Step #9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

It is of interest that there is a difference of opinion between ethicists whether a person should seek to make amends if doing so would be displeasing to the victim. A man asked me to forgive him for having spread a bad rumor about me. I did forgive him, but I wished that he had not told me about this, because now I was worried about what bad rumors might be circulating about me.

In such cases, Rabbi Yisrael of Salant said that one would be better off not asking for forgiveness, because this aggravates the person. The Chafetz Chaim, however, said that one must ask forgiveness nevertheless. I was amused that Bill Wilson had gravitated to the opinion of Rabbi Yisrael of Salant.

"Made direct amends to such people wherever possible." The latter is an interesting qualification. What can you do when the person whom you offended has moved to another country and there is no way you can find and reach him? Siduro Shel Shabbos says that when you genuinely regret your action and have exhausted every possibility at personally contacting the person you offended, you may assume that Hashem will put it in his heart to forgive you.

Step #10: Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

In Alei Shur, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe says that one should carry a notebook and record occurrences of a moral or ethical nature, and review them at the end of the day. We may so easily forget things we don't like to remember,

but it is precisely these things that require our attention. Keeping a running chesbon hanefesh is the best way to identify mistakes and correct them

One cannot emphasize strongly enough "when we were wrong, promptly admitted it." The natural tendency is to defend a mistake and rationalize it. This is a gross error. Recent political events have proven that "cover-ups" do not work. One will have much better results if one overcomes the tendency to defend a mistake, and admit it promptly.

One of the Torah commentaries points out the greatness of the patriarch, Abraham. The Torah sharply condemns human sacrifice, "For everything that is an abomination of Hashem, that He hates, have they done to their gods; for even their sons and their daughters have they burned in the fire for their gods" (Deuteronomy 12:31). For decades Abraham had preached against this pagan worship, stating that G-d could never desire a human sacrifice.

Now, Abraham understood that Hashem wanted him to sacrifice Isaac, and he was actually eager to fulfill the Divine will. But how would he face the scores of people to whom he had so vehemently condemned human sacrifice? He would have to say, "For the past sixty or more years, what I told you was wrong." Abraham was willing to admit that all his life, he had been wrong. That was the greatness of Abraham.

Step #11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious with G-d, praying only for knowledge of His will and the power to carry it out.

The mussar and Chassidic literature is replete with this principle.

Rather than praying for personal needs, King David says, "One thing I ask of Hashem, that I shall seek; That I dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life (Psalms 27:4). When G-d appeared to King Solomon in a dream, and offered to grant him a wish, Solomon asked only for wisdom.

In his fervent Tefillah Kodem Hatfillah (Introductory prayer), Rebbe Elimelech pleads for Divine assistance in praying. He closes his prayer with, "If we lack the wisdom to direct our hearts to You, then You teach us that we should know in truth the intention of Your good will."

Step #12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Torah teaches us that we have a duty of arvus, of mutual responsibility for one another. There is a Scriptural mitzvah of tochacha, of giving reproof for improper behavior. Indeed, if one has the possibility of positively influencing another person and fails to do so, one is held responsible for the other person's misdeeds.

The Talmud says that there is one verse on which all of Torah depends: "Know G-d in all your ways" (Proverbs 3:6), Torah rejects the idea "Give unto G-d that which is His and unto Caesar that which is his." We do not have two standards, one for religion and the other for the secular. We are required to practice the principles of Torah "in all our affairs."

My book, Self-Improvement? I'm Jewish, was written at the request of a recovering alcoholic who wanted a program based on mussar. At the end of the book, I cited the 12-steps, pointing out that they essentially comprise a program based on mussar.

Let me share another insight with you.

Rambam says that true teshuvah is achieved when "Hashem, who knows the innermost secrets of one's heart, will testify that the person will never again commit this sin" (Laws of Teshuva 2:2). Commentaries ask (e.g. Lechem Mishnah), How can Rambam make that statement? A person always has bechira, the freedom to do good or to sin. If Hashem testifies that the person will never again commit that sin, then either he loses his bechira or Hashem's testimony was not correct. Neither of these is acceptable.

I attended a meeting of recovering alcoholics at which the speaker said, "The man I once was, drank. And the man I once was, will drink again. If I

ever go back to being the man I once was, I will drink again." Suddenly, the Rambam's words were clear.

A sin does not occur in a vacuum. A sin occurs when a person is in a spiritual state that allows that sin to occur.

For example, a frum person would not eat treife. He is at a level of Torah observance where eating tereife is just not a possibility. Let us suppose that he discovered that he inadvertently had spoken lashon hara. He regrets this deeply and resolves, "I must now be more careful with my speech."

Good teshuva? No, says Rambam. Speaking lashon hara is a grievous sin, just as is eating tereife. Yet, although it was impossible that this person would inadvertently eat tereife, it was not impossible for him to inadvertently speak lashon hara. True teshuva, says Rambam, is when the person elevates himself to a level of kedusha where inadvertently speaking lashon hara is as impossible as eating tereife.

It is, of course, possible that a person may slip from that level of kedusha, in which case he may indeed repeat the act. Thus, Hashem does not testify that the person will never again commit the sin, but rather that he has succeeded in attaining a level of kedusha, where, at this level, that sin is not a possibility. That is why the Rambam, uncharacteristically, chose to refer to Hashem as, "who knows the innermost secrets of one's heart;" i.e., He knows that this person has achieved the level of spirituality.

This why the Rambam continues, that with this kind of teshuva, the person can say, "I am no longer the same person that committed that sin" (ibid. 2:4).

Copyright © 2010 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

Ohr Somayach :: TalmuDigest

For the week ending 30 October 2010 / 21 Heshvan 5771

Horiyot 2 - 7 by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

What Constitutes a Congregation * Horiyot 5b

As proof that a single tribe in Israel is considered a kahal – a congregation – the gemara cites the passage (Bereishet 48:4) in which the Patriarch Yaakov relates to his son Yosef the promise made to him by G-d on his way back to Eretz Yisrael from the house of Lavan.

"He said to me, 'Behold I will make you fruitful and numerous; I will make you a congregation of nations'."

Since only Binyamin was to be born after that promise, the conclusion is that the single tribe emanating from him would also be considered a congregation.

Tosefot raises the question as to why the gemara cites this recalling of the promise rather than the promise itself which appears earlier (Bereishet 35:11):

"Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a congregation of nations shall descend from you."

On closer examination we note that there is a subtle difference in the language of the two seemingly similar passages. Rashi cites the Midrash that the "nation" mentioned in the first passage refers to the birth of Binyamin, while the "congregation of nations" refers to the division of the Tribe of Yosef into the two tribes of Menashe and Ephraim. It is this separation between "nation" and "congregation of nations" which teaches us that the single term "congregation of nations" in the second passage is also to be understood as a reference to congregation (Binyamin) and nations (Menashe and Ephraim). Since the second passage is thus dependent on the first as proof that a single tribe constitutes a congregation, the gemara found it preferable to cite it as a reference to both.

What the Sages Say

"When G-d told Moshe that the elders he appointed to the first Sanhedrin should 'bear the burden of the people with you' (Bamidbar 11:17), it meant that they must be like Moshe devoid of any disqualifying features."

Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak - Horiyot 4b

© 1995-2010 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

The Gabbai

The gabbai's eyes moved rapidly across the familiar faces of the men packed into shul on this sunny Shabbos morning.

Shloime Kaufman, the gabbai, had been going through this routine for the past twenty years, looking out over the congregation and at his many friends and neighbors a world of warm-hearted people with whom he shared his life. Choosing a few each week for aliyos was a job that came with its difficulties, but it also gave him the weekly opportunity to count these blessings. This secure, contented world in which he found himself was all the more precious because, by any law of logic or probability, it should never have come into existence.

The world Mr. Kaufman had known as a child and young man in Poland had been erased. It had collapsed all around him, snuffing out the lives of his loved ones. At the time, he had thought that surely the few survivors who managed to emerge from the rubble alive would be left with nothing no yeshivos, no shuls, no gedolim to guide them.

And yet, here he was, the grandfather of a beautiful, Torah-observant family, the gabbai of a thriving shul, surrounded by friends and family. Better to relish the miracle of the present than think too much about the searing pain of the past.

Mr. Kaufman scanned the rows of men as the Torah was removed from the ark. His eyes rested upon an unfamiliar face, a man about his own age with a short grey beard. He hadn't seen him in shul before. He surmised that he must be a guest. But there was something very familiar about this face.

Suddenly, the man's features and expression jarred loose a powerful flash of recognition in Mr. Kaufman's mind. It was Menachem Reiner, his closest childhood friend. It was Menachem, the boy with whom he had grown up in their small Polish shtetl, with whom he had attended yeshivah in Bialystock. It was Menachem, the young man to whom he had clung, and who had clung to him, as they began their cattle-car journey into the fearsome blackness of Auschwitz. They had promised each other to stick together, they had given each other courage and hope. Bearing the numbers the Nazis had tattooed on their arms, they had found in each other the strength to hold onto their humanity and resist becoming only numbers. They had vowed to help each other survive, both in body and soul.

And they did survive, Boruch Hashem. But when the war ended, each went his own way, eager to begin anew. For sanity's sake, they each tucked the past away into a deep, locked box that would be opened only on rare occasions. Menachem had settled in Israel, and Shloime Kaufman had obtained a visa for America.

Consumed with creating a future and healing the wounds of the past, they had lost touch with each other. That was forty-two years ago. Now, with unbelieving eyes and trembling hands, Mr. Kaufman beheld the unmistakable face of his friend once again. Shlomie decided in his mind: Menachem Reiner would get the sixth aliyah.

As the Torah reading began, the gabbai felt as if his heart could not be contained in his chest. He wanted to leap across the rows of men and fall upon his friend in a mighty embrace. "This must be how Yosef felt when he finally saw his brother Binyamin," he thought to himself. "All these years!" Nevertheless, he clamped a tight lid on his emotions and performed his duty, calling up each aliyah with the traditional chant of "Ya'amod" followed by the honoree's Hebrew name. By the fifth aliyah, however, beads of sweat were sparkling on his forehead and tears were welling up in his eyes. He prayed that when the time came to call up number six, his voice would be able to break free of his tight throat.

There was no need to ask Menachem his name because he could never forget Menachem ben Yehoshua. For the first time, he began to wonder how would Menachem react when they came face to face? It was time to call him up, but Mr. Kaufman could not open his mouth. There were no words fit for this moment. All the suffering locked away in that figurative box was now out in the open, laid out before his eyes, and it was too much to bear.

The congregation began murmuring and looking toward Mr. Kaufman, fearing that the pale, trembling man was becoming ill. A deep cry rose up inside the gabbai a cry to Hashem that contained in its broken sound all of His children's cries of anguish. Mr. Kaufman turned in the direction of his friend and at last found his voice. "Yaamod, 57200148!" he called.

The baffled men in the shul did not understand what had happened. What was this number? What had become of Mr. Kaufman? But in the back of the room, one man understood completely. The number was Menachem's number, tattooed on his arm as a lifetime reminder of the darkest period of Jewish history, the epic tragedy of his people which he had witnessed with his own eyes.

The entire shul sat in stony silence as Menachem moved slowly toward the bimah. Finally, as they saw him approaching his long-lost brother, they understood the scene that was unfolding in front of them. Menachem needed no introduction. With tears coursing down his face, he cried out, "Shloimele! Shloimele! Is it really you?" "Yes, Menachem, it's really me!"

Mr. Kaufman answered, embracing his friend. They wept into each other's shoulders, rocking gently. "Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay," Mr. Kaufman breathed.

Words were powerless to carry his chaotic emotions.

The entire shul sat spellbound, witnessing a moment that could have melted a heart made of iron. As these two men stood together, living witnesses to the Jewish people's miraculous survival, it seemed that the Heavens had opened up to declare, through them, that Hashem would never forsake His people. Am Yisrael Chai! The Jewish nation is alive, and Torah has been rebuilt in America.

The Holocaust survivors who came to America planted the seeds, and it is up to us to reap the fruits of their labor and continue their legacy.

(ed note .. in America yes .. but even more so in Israel)