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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON CHAYEI SARAH - 5786

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Thoughts on the Parasha with Rav Moshe Taragin  
Chayei Sara | **Ger VeToshav: Unfinished Belonging**  
**Rav Moshe Taragin**

Bereishit is more than a record of the past. The lives of our ancestors set patterns that continue to shape Jewish history. Their experiences became models that repeat across generations. This concept — *ma'aseh avot siman la-banim* — teaches that the stories of our founders are not only moral lessons but blueprints for our national journey.

One such historical blueprint unfolds as Avraham arrives in Chevron seeking a burial site for Sara. He introduces himself with a striking phrase: "*Ger vetoshav anokhi imakhem*" — a stranger and a resident among you. He had lived for many years in the Land of Israel, often near Chevron — yet he still calls himself a stranger. In part, he remains an outsider, having never purchased land and relying on the goodwill of others who hosted him. In part, this phrase reflects his humility. Despite his reputation and growing influence, Avraham assumes no privilege. He signals that he will negotiate in good faith and offer full payment for the field.

Patience as an Act of Faith

However, Avraham's use of the word *ger* carries deeper historical meaning. When Hashem forged His covenant with Avraham, He foretold that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land and ultimately enslaved in Egypt. That prophecy of estrangement begins even as Avraham lives in the Land of Israel. Though promised the land by divine decree, he finds himself a guest within it — living among others who still hold rightful claim. Even when finally given the chance to acquire property, it is limited to a small burial plot — obtained only after long, painful negotiations.

This moment tests Avraham's *emuna*: promised the land by Hashem, he now confronts the reality that others still hold rightful claim to it. Avraham does not force his claim or demand immediate ownership. He respects the current residents and accepts the slow pace of divine promises. His faith is deep enough to remain calm when the fulfillment of *nevu'a* seems delayed. He trusts that the land will one day belong to his descendants and that Hashem's word will unfold in its proper time.

He also understood his mission: to model moral conduct in a land bereft of it. He had witnessed societies that degraded women and watched as Sedom, steeped in corruption, was destroyed. Surrounded by moral decay, Avraham

sought to model compassion and kindness. He welcomed guests, rescued his nephew, refused spoils of war, and preferred peace treaties to coercion. To act unjustly would betray his moral mission. Confident in divine prophecy and committed to moral integrity, he does not seize the land but acquires it honorably, paying full price.

The Long View

Avraham's struggle — to wait faithfully for divine promises while acting morally in a corrupt world — echoes in our generation. We too see our return to this land as rooted in a divine promise and as part of a redemptive process foretold to our ancestors.

I was recently interviewed by a journalist from the United States who asked why some people react so strongly against Messianists. "Isn't messianism," he wondered, "synonymous with aggression toward others who live in the land?"

I explained quietly that it is precisely my messianic belief — my confidence in the fulfillment of Hashem's promise — that allows me to respect the rights of others who also live here. Because I am certain that history's end is guided by Hashem, I can afford to take the long view. I labor to settle our homeland, yet I do so with the quiet confidence that its destiny is already written. That certainty enables me to act with patience and restraint. The term messianic should not carry a pejorative tone; it reflects faith in ancient prophecies and trust in their unfolding within history.

Sadly, many of our neighbors refuse to live peacefully alongside us, making it harder to safeguard the rights of those who do seek coexistence. Our first responsibility is to protect our people. Yet conceptually, there is no contradiction between messianic belief and respect for the rights of others. Like Avraham, we are striving to become *toshavim* and to settle the land promised to us. Yet for now, we remain in an intermediate *ger*-like state — blessed with sovereignty but not yet complete settlement.

Avraham's story becomes our own. We walk in his shadow — longing for completion, yet living with faith and restraint amid what remains unfinished.  
Strangers

The tension Avraham lived — between promise and incompleteness — shapes Jewish life, both in Israel and throughout the Diaspora. The *Rov*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, saw this same duality — the longing to be *toshavim* while remaining *gerim* — as the essence of Jewish identity in exile. We yearn to contribute to the societies around us and to be accepted as full citizens. Still, we remain distinct — guarding the inner core of our identity even as we engage with the world. *Ger ve-toshav* thus describes not only our unfinished settlement in the Land of Israel but also the enduring tension of Jewish life in foreign lands.

No matter how deeply we integrate or how loyal we are to our host countries, history reminds us — often painfully — that we are still seen as different.  
Shattered Illusions

History has often reminded us of this truth in harsh ways. We once believed we had become *toshavim*, only to discover how fragile that acceptance could be. The first example was in medieval Spain. Jews had lived there for nearly seven centuries, deeply woven into Spanish culture and instrumental in its ascent as a global power. Yet a wave of violence in the late 14th century shattered that fragile acceptance and was followed, a century later, by expulsion. Centuries of belonging vanished in an instant, reminding us that we were always just *gerim* in the land of Spain.

Four and a half centuries later, we were reminded once again of our *ger* status. For nearly two hundred years, Jews had helped build modern Europe — advancing science, culture, and liberty. Yet Hitler revived Europe's oldest hatreds and turned them into a movement of annihilation. After generations of striving to become full *toshavim*, European Jews were cruelly shown that in the eyes of their hosts, they were still *gerim*.

A Fragile Haven

Today, American Jewry may be confronting its own *ger ve-toshav* moment. Over the last century and a half, Jews in the United States have lived with a freedom and opportunity unmatched in our history.

New York City in particular has long been intertwined with the Jewish experience in America. It is home to the largest Jewish population outside

Israel, and the city itself has been profoundly shaped by Jewish life, culture, and values.

The election of a New York City mayor who expresses hostility toward Israel is a troubling development, reflecting a possible shift in America's political climate. No one can know where this will lead. Despite our deep longing for every Jew to return to Israel, we never wish hardship upon our brothers and sisters as a means of prompting aliya. We hope that Jewish life in America remains stable and secure, so that Jews may choose to come home out of faith and love, not fear or compulsion.

This latest election marks a *ger ve-toshav* moment for American Jewry — a stark and sobering reminder that even in the safest of lands, we remain *gerim*.

History's lessons return, reminding us that the tension between *ger* and *toshav* still defines our story. Until our people are gathered and the land is restored, we remain wanderers yearning for wholeness.

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Parshas Chayei Sarah

Efron Loses A Vov From His Name

These *divrei Torah* were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion:

#1356 – The Kallah Whose Bridal Veil Was So Thick The Witnesses Couldn't See Who She Was. Good Shabbos

Parshas Chayei Sarah begins with the selling of a burial plot to Avraham Avinu. Avraham goes to the Bnei Cheis and wants to buy what is today known as the Ma'aras Hamachpeila. The owner of this property was Efron the Chiti. Efron initially claimed that he was willing to give the field to Avraham for free. Avraham said that he wants to pay for it. Efron responded, "What is the matter of a four hundred silver-shekel field between you and me?" This was apparently a very high price for the field that he initially offered to give to Avraham for free. The narration ends by stating that Avraham paid the price mentioned by Efron – four hundred silver shekels, with the type of coins that were readily exchanged (over la'socher).

If we carefully look at this *pasuk* (where Efron suddenly raises the price of the plot of land from zero to four hundred silver shekels), we notice that the word Efron is first spelled "malei" (full – including the letter vov). Then when we look at the words "Avraham paid to Efron," the name Efron is spelled "chaser" (lacking – without the vov). Sometimes the Torah does spell the same word with a vov and also without a vov. However, it is exceedingly rare for the Torah to use two different spellings of the same word in one *pasuk*!

The Medrash Rabbah comments on this anomaly and references a *pasuk* in Mishlei: "One overeager for wealth has an evil eye; he does not know what may befall him." (Mishlei 28:22). The Medrash calls Efron a man who became all excited by the possibility of making a ton of money, however, he failed to realize that this windfall would cause something to be deducted from him (i.e., the extra vov in his name).

Now it is quite likely that Efron does not care how his name is spelled in the Torah. Obviously, this is not supposed to be a lesson for Efron, but rather for us. So, what is the lesson? The Alter from Kelm once said a *schmooze*, which he preceded by relating an incident that actually occurred. (It is alleged that the incident happened with Rav Yonoson Eibshitz, although there is some controversy about whether it happened to him or to another famous personage.)

The incident involved a debate that took place between the "wise men of the world" and this famous Jewish personage. The wise men were of the opinion that with enough training, an animal could be trained to be just like a human being and could change its entire nature. The Rabbi denied the claim, insisting that an animal remains an animal, and no matter how intelligent the animal is, a dog remains a dog and a horse remains a horse.

The wise men of the world took a cat and trained it to walk on its hind legs and carry a tray with its paws. Ultimately, they trained the cat to become a proficient waiter. They arranged a large banquet in which the cat would

perform like a waiter and serve all the guests. The Rabbi was invited to the banquet to defend his position that an animal's nature cannot be changed. He took his snuff container with him, as he typically did. While he wasn't looking, a little mouse jumped into his snuff container.

They were at this banquet. The cat was doing its thing – carrying a little tray of wine and serving the people. The wise men said to the Rabbi, "Nu! You see!" The Rabbi pondered how to respond and while doing so, he took out his snuff container to smell a whiff of the aroma. Suddenly, the mouse jumped out and started running around. As soon as the cat saw the mouse running, the cat did what cats do. The cat dropped the tray and ran after the mouse to catch it. The Rabbi told the wise men, "My point has been proven." How did the Alter from Kelm apply this story? He said as follows: Efron can dress up as the nicest and most respectable fellow in the world. He can talk the talk of generosity and magnanimity. "For sure, I will give you this land for free." However, this is all an act. That was not the real Efron. Efron was characterized – as are many people – by the attribute mentioned in the previously cited *pasuk* in Mishlei: "nivhal la'hon" (overeager for wealth). When he realized that he could make money, the act ended and the true Efron came out. The true Efron was a person who lusted money. That is why the same *pasuk* also contains the "full Efron" (with the vov), the civilized and generous person, to emphasize that he is not the real Efron.

Ironically, Efron is not the only character in this week's parsha who we see was afflicted by lust for money. There is another such fellow in this parsha who suffered from the same disease.

There is an old debate of "nurture versus nature." What dominates the development of a human personality, the way the person was raised or the way the person was born? However, sometimes we see that it is neither nurture nor nature. Parshas Chayei Sarah contains siblings – a brother and a sister – who are diametrically different in their personalities. Lavan Ha'arami wants to wipe out Klal Yisrael. His sister is our Matriarch, Rivka. How do we define the difference between these two siblings, who are polar opposites of one another?

The central point of Lavan's nature was also about this lust for money. When Eliezer first came, Lavan ran towards him. Rashi explains why he was running: "When he saw the ten loaded camels that Eliezer brought, he assumed this fellow must be rich!" Later on, when Yaakov came, Lavan also ran out to him. He figured, if even the slave from this household was so rich, how much wealthier must be the offspring! Rashi explains that Lavan hugged Yaakov, because when he didn't see any jewelry on his person, he thought it might be hidden in his chest or even his mouth! In short, when Lavan sensed wealth, that became his entire interest and focus. That is why he eventually cheated Yaakov Avinu left and right for all the years of Yaakov's servitude to him.

The Ari z"l writes that Lavan has three *gilgulim* (soul transmigrations) in this world, alluded to by the three letters of his name (Lamed Beis Nun). The three *gilgulim* were Lavan, Bilaam, and Naval Hakarmeli. Bilaam had this exact same lust for money. When Balak wanted to hire him, his response was "If Balak gives me his full warehouse of silver and gold..." (Bamidbar 22:18). The third iteration of Lavan was the infamous Naval Hakarmeli, about whom the Tanach comments "Naval was his name and naval (despicable) was he." (Shmuel I 25:25) He too, as described there, was extremely tight with his money. The common denominator that runs through Lavan, through Bilaam, and through Naval was this lust for money, with which so many people are afflicted.

Lavan was a taker. Rivka was the polar opposite. Rivka was a giver. Even though a case could be made that she shouldn't have given water to Eliezer (and his camels), she does so graciously. Eliezer was standing by the well. He could have easily taken a drink for himself. It was *chutzpah* on his part to ask for this young girl to draw the water for him. But that was Rivka.

This was a tale of two siblings: One was the ultimate taker and one was the ultimate giver. Lavan's *neshama* ends up as Bilaam and then Naval Hakarmeli. Rivka becomes Rivka Imeinu.

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Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter

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### **Parshas Chayei Sarah**

#### **Rav Pam on Chumash**

#### **Priorities in Shidduchim**

[The most popular and widely anticipated of Rav Pam's many shiurim was his annual Parashas Chayei Sarah shmuesh. He would offer his profound and yet highly practical insights into the topic of shidduchim, marriage and shalom bayis. The following is based on various points of his shmuesen from 1982-1989.]

The major topic of this parashah is the lengthy description of the shidduch between Yitzchak and Rivkah. In the spirit of the famous rule of Maaseh Avos Siman Li'Banim it is important to carefully analyze this chapter and glean the practical lessons the Torah conveys on how to accomplish life's most important task.

The very first step in shidduchim is tefillah — heartfelt prayer. This is clearly illustrated in Avraham's instructions to Eliezer, when he appealed to "HASHEM, God of Heaven, Who took me from the house of my father and from the land of my birth," to bless Eliezer's mission with success by "sending His angel before you" (24:7).

Eliezer, too, began his mission with tefillah, saying, "HASHEM, God of my master Avraham, may You arrange it for me this day that You do kindness with my master, Avraham" (24:12). Thus, we see that one must devote great effort to tefillah and daven to Hashem, the Mezavag Zivugim, to send one's true helpmate.

In the search for a shidduch the first factor to consider is: What am I looking for in a wife? Avraham knew exactly what he required in a shidduch for Yitzchak. He sought a girl who was outstanding in the character trait of chesed — which Avraham himself exemplified.

She would help Yitzchak perpetuate Avraham's lifework of spreading the midah of loving-kindness and thereby bringing people to belief in a Creator.

Avraham was a famous personality as well as a very rich man. He could have sought a girl who had great wealth or yichus, but these matters meant nothing to him. His only priorities were midos tovos and ahavas chesed.

We can learn from Avraham that when a person knows what he is looking for, the search for a shidduch is much easier. Once Eliezer realized that Rivkah had the qualifications Avraham required, he quickly concluded the match. Why? What was the rush for Yitzchak to marry the first girl? Why didn't Eliezer "shop around" to see if he could find "something better"? The answer is that Eliezer knew what Avraham wanted, and if, through Hashem's kindness, he found the shidduch quickly, there was no purpose in searching for "something better." Someone who "shops around" for a shidduch, with an attitude of "Let's see what's available," usually doesn't know what he is looking for. Often there is no end to the "shopping." All that happens is that months and years pass without his finding a shidduch. He is always hesitant to come to a decision because he may find "something better."

Rav Pam would often quote his mother, Rebbetzin Rochel Leah Pam A"H who would say that one reason a chassan and kallah fast on their wedding day is to atone for the unnecessary pain and embarrassment they caused by rejecting other boys and girls due to their unrealistic expectations.

The prerequisite for finding one's shidduch is that one must know clearly what his purpose and goals in life are. If these are clear to him, then he knows what to look for in a wife. A wife is an Ezer Kinegdo, a helpmate. How can someone look for a helpmate if he doesn't know what he needs help with? This lack of focus causes many problems. It accounts for the many dates necessary before a bachur reaches a decision. It accounts for long six to eight-hour dates which are unnecessary and improper. Many parents

complain about the impropriety of a bachur bringing a girl home from a date well past midnight. This is very far from the Darchei Hatzinuis guidelines of modesty. Furthermore, the girl's parents often wait up for her to return and then review the date with her. The girl herself will need time to unwind from the lengthy outing. How will she be able to function at her job the next day after a nearly sleepless night? The Gemara (Taanis 24a) says, "As long as a kallah's eyes are beautiful, the rest of her body need not be checked." Kli Yakar (Bereishis 24:14) questions the validity of this generalization; there are many young women with beautiful eyes who have flaws elsewhere. He explains that Chazal are not referring to physical features, but to an Ayin Tov, a "good eye" with which she looks at others. If she always sees the inherent goodness of others, seeking out their positive attributes rather than harping on their faults, this shows that she possesses beautiful midos. This is a clear, indisputable sign that she has the Kedushas Hanefesh to be a true eishes Chayil who will become an Atarah Li'Baila, a crown to her husband. There are some people who have difficulty finding a shidduch because their priorities are well off the mark. They search for a match that will be "the talk of the town" and earn them the respect and envy of their friends, causing them to place great importance on famous lineage or great wealth. Others seek beauty that will impress others. Such behavior is akin to Achashveirosh's conduct; he desired to show off to the people and officials her beauty (Esther 1:11).

Another common misconception is that one should seek a girl who is extremely intelligent so that her husband can discuss lofty philosophical Torah concepts with her. This is a gross error. A bachur looking for this should go to the beis midrash and search for a chavrusa.

While the highest priority in a shidduch is the girl herself, the characters of the prospective match's family cannot be overlooked. At times it is the parents who can cause a breach in the couple's shalom bayis. Therefore it is important to ascertain what kind of people the girl's parents are. Sometimes the in-laws are kapdanim (contentious) who must always have things their way. This can certainly present difficulties to the couple. In-laws who are flexible, easy going, understanding, and desirous of making others comfortable will certainly be an asset to the couple.

In the search for a shidduch for Yitzchak, Eliezer was not concerned about Rivkah's family. He had ironclad instructions from Avraham forbidding him to return my son to there (24:6). Thus he did not have to fear the influence of Lavan on Rivkah after her marriage. In our times, when the world is so "small" — travel and communications are cheaper and easier than ever before — a bachur must take the girl's family into consideration when contemplating a shidduch. As noted above, the effects of in-laws on a marriage can be very great — for good or bad.

Rema (in his glosses to Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 240:25) rules that a son is not obligated to break off the shidduch if his father disapproves of his choice of a wife. Yet as a practical matter, he should try his utmost to choose a wife of whom his parents will approve. It is a very good sign when everyone is happy with a shidduch.

It is important to remember that after the chasunah, the courtship must continue. The husband must treat his wife with the utmost courtesy and respect. The most common cause for the breakdown of shalom bayis is a lack of proper speech. Words can work wonders . . . and words can work horrors. During the dating process, both sides invest great care and forethought into what they say and how they say it. After the date, they review in their minds the conversations that took place and make a careful analysis: "What did she mean when she said that?" or "What did he have in mind with that remark?" One realizes that a poor impression made by a wrong word or inference might negatively affect the outcome of the shidduch. Yet, unfortunately, often this Zehiras Hadibur (care in speech) does not continue after the wedding. Speaking without thinking causes great breaches in shalom bayis.

In every marriage there are times of disagreement, but a wise spouse will avoid the temptation to get in the last word or emerge victorious from the argument. One will simply cause an escalation of the argument by responding to every comment or criticism.

The Chofetz Chaim (Hilchos Lashon Hara 8:10) writes, “Many people err in this matter; they tell their wives about everything that happened to them in their interaction with others at work or in the beis midrash. Aside from the sin of lashon hara, this will eventually lead to machlokes, because the wife will defend her husband and react in kind, and encourage him to defend himself from those bothering him. Additionally, when she sees how her husband is treated with disrespect, she too will lose her inherent esteem for him.”

Thus, while open communication between husband and wife is crucial to a successful marriage, this does not justify the violation of many serious Torah commandments. By studying the laws of lashon hara, one will know what is and what is not permitted to be shared with one’s spouse.

At times, a wife loses respect for her husband when she sees that he takes lightly his obligations to learn Torah or daven with a minyan. R’ Baruch Epstein (author of Torah Temimah and the nephew of R’ Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, the Netziv) writes in Mekor Baruch that his uncle was once approached by a fabulously wealthy man who complained that, despite being respected and feared by his employees and business associates, his wife treated him with contempt. The Netziv asked about his daily schedule, and the man admitted that due to his many business concerns he rarely had time to study Torah.

The Netziv understood that although the man was powerful in the business sector and considered master in many circles, his wife looked down at him because she perceived him as a slave to his own ambitions and desire for still more money. The Netziv advised the man to set aside time for Torah study, assuring him that it would have a beneficial effect on his marriage — and so it was. Once his wife perceived that he had a purpose in life other than amassing money, her respect for him returned and their shalom bayis improved.

Shalom bayis requires lifelong effort. This is clearly illustrated by the Torah’s description of Sarah’s reaction to the news that she would have a son: And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have withered will I again have delicate skin? And my husband is old!” (Bereishis 18:12). Hashem told Avraham that she had laughed with incredulity that at her advanced age she would bear a child. Rashi says that in order to preserve harmony between Avraham and Sarah, Hashem changed the uncomplimentary reference from Avraham (my husband is old) to Sarah (I am old).

Could it be that Avraham, the epitome of chesed, would take offense at Sarah’s remark that he was old? He would be the first to agree that at age 99 he was not a young man; would her remark truly be upsetting to him? The answer must be that anything which could cause even a slight breach in shalom bayis must be avoided at all costs.

The third berachah of the Sheva Berachos mentions that the purpose of marriage is to be a Binyan Adei Ad, a building for eternity. How can marriage be for eternity if man’s life span on earth is so short? The explanation may be that a couple’s shidduch affects all future generations to come. Building a bayis ne’eman b’Yisrael is the very purpose of marriage. It will lead to the greatest blessing in life, which is to produce righteous children who will themselves perpetuate the eternity of Klal Yisrael. Thus, in choosing a mate for life, one must consider the everlasting nature of marriage. With fervent prayer, a person will be zocheh to find his true zivug with whom he will build his own bayis ne’eman b’Yisrael. ---

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<https://tinyurl.com/Rav-Pam-Chayei-Sarah-Audio> --- for the link to several shiurim on Parshas Chayei Sara. We thank R’ Shmuel Glassman who compiled the shiurim into an mp3 format for easier accessibility. May we all be zoche to yeshuos in shidduchim and hatzlacha with all! Rabbi Yitzchok Gottdiener Executive Director ryg@torahvodaath.org 718-941-8000x210 --

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YUTORAH IN PRINT • Chayei Sarah 5786

**Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh** (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid, with AI assistance, from a YUTorah shiur presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on November 13, 2014)

In this week’s Parshah, in the process of purchasing Ma’aras Hamachpeila, Avraham tells Ephron, Nasati kesef ha-sadeh kach mi-meni. And he used the word kicha in reference to kesef, and the Gemara at the beginning of Kidushin learns from here that isha nikneis be-shlosa drachim—be- kesef, shtar, u-via. When a chosson gives a kallah a ring of certain monetary value, that’s a valid kiddushin. How do we learn that? One pasuk says, Ki yikach ish isha, and another says, Nasati kesef ha-sadeh, kach mimeni. And, therefore, we see that kicha is done with kesef. But on a simple pshat level, this connection seems very strange. Does this mean a groom buys his wife with money, like any other commodity?

The meforshim note that this pasuk is about more than just your typical purchase. Why did Avraham pay for Ma’aras Hamachpeila? He didn’t have to. Ephron said you can have it for free, and Bnei Cheis agreed. He insisted on buying it because he wanted Ma’aras Hamachpeila to be a place where the Jews would have a permanent connection to our eternal yerusha in Eretz Yisrael. And he knew that if you receive something for free, it’s not as meaningful. Your connection to something you don’t invest in is weak. You create a strong connection that lasts forever when you pay or sacrifice for something. That’s why ha-isha nikneis be- kesef—a wife is acquired with money. Otherwise, why wouldn’t a chosson marry his kallah for free just because they love each other? This halachah teaches that a chosson must start his marriage by investing. He must offer something. Just like Avraham’s purchase of Ma’aras Hamachpeila, the payment reminds us what makes this relationship meaningful and valuable. In marriage, to make it special, one must sacrifice and give. Additionally, Rav Hirsch points out that Avraham wasn’t just buying a future achuzah of Am Yisrael. There was also another aspect. He was buying a proper place to bury Sarah. And he showed his matrimonial dedication by burying her in one of the most special, holiest places on earth. As the medrash says, Ma’aras Hamachpeila was a makom kevuras Adam and Chava, and it had other unique aspects—such as being the portal to Gan Eiden. He didn’t compromise for second best. Avraham’s dedication to Sarah was not diminished in the slightest, even after she assed away. And maybe that’s the lesson of ki yikach ish isha. Avraham was committed to making any sacrifice to honor Sarah properly—even a costly one. And perhaps that’s also why the chosson grants the kallah something of value to begin their marriage. Kesef kiddushin demonstrates the husband’s commitment to respecting his wife by properly providing all her needs. He must be a giver and not just a taker. And that’s why Avraham said to Ephron, Nasati kesef ha-sadeh kach mimeni.

The Brisker Rav, at the back of Chiddushei Ha- Griz al ha-Rambam, discusses the conceptual nature of kiddushei kesef — kesef shel hana’ah. In a typical kinyan kesef, when buying a field, it’s enough to simply give money. However, when it comes to kidushei isha, that’s insufficient. It must be kesef shel hana’ah. In addition to the formal monetary transfer, the chosson must give his kalah hana’ah. The chosson must provide something to improve his kalah’s life. He must supply her needs— something that’ll benefit her. And ultimately, that’s the best way to start a marriage. It’s not like a typical monetary transaction That’s why the husband initiates his marriage by referencing Nasati kesef ha-sadeh kach mimeni. Avraham took the money out of his pocket, and he did everything necessary to respect Sarah and her needs— even after she was in the Olam ha-Emes. There was no quid pro quo, and he wasn’t getting anything from her in exchange. He just wanted to take care of Sarah in the best possible way. And therefore, we start off our marriage on the right foot by emulating Avraham Avinu.

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Chayei Sarah: Is it Acceptable to Test Your Dates?

**Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

he test that Eliezer devised to discover a proper match for Isaac must be considered one of the most successful creative strategies of all history (Gen.ch. 24). Charged by the first founding father of the Jewish people, Abraham, with finding a match for the second, Yitzchak, Eliezer prays to God for a “chesed” that his mission will be successful based on the following plan: Having travelled to the area of Abraham’s family, he will wait by the wells that provide water to the locals; when the women come out to draw water, he will approach one and ask to be given water; one who not only provides water for him, but also offers to give water to his camels, will show herself to be the appropriate match. Apparently granted the Divine assistance he requested, Eliezer’s plan introduces him to Rebecca, an exquisitely qualified candidate who becomes one of the matriarchs of the Jewish people and thus a key builder of the moral and spiritual foundation of the Chosen People.

So, does this mean that Eliezer has found a successful model for the generations? Should contemporary Jews put their dates through tests to see if they are the match they are looking for?

There is a literature regarding the overall question of putting people through tests in other contexts. For example, the issue of testing employees was taken up by R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg in his *Responsa Seridei Eish* (I, OC, 57:2). He considered the question of an employer who wanted to ascertain whether or not his worker was honest, and therefore left a large sum of money in his presence, and waited to see if he would steal it. Rabbi Weinberg cited in this regard a Talmudic passage (Bava Metzia 75b) that seems to explicitly forbid such a tactic, due to the biblical injunction of “do not place this stumbling block in front of the blind”, or *lifnei iver*, which the Rabbis explain has a spiritual dimension that prohibits enabling or causing others to regress. More specifically, the Talmud applies this to one who would lend money without witnesses, because, as Rashi explains, the borrower will immediately realize that he can later deny having taken the loan and keep the money. Apparently, even the enabling of the plotting of the theft, regardless of whether or not it actually takes place, constitutes a violation of this prohibition.

However, one complicating source is another Talmudic passage (Kiddushin 32a), which also discusses the *lifnei iver* injunction. In this one, testing is the context. Rav Huna wanted to confirm that his son was properly respectful. To find out, he tore up silk in front of him to gauge his reaction. The Talmud poses the question: what if indeed he had responded disrespectfully? Wouldn't that have placed Rav Huna in violation of *lifnei iver*? We are then told that he had preemptively waived his honor in this case, and thus removed the possibility of a transgression on the part of either of them. The *Tosafot*, however, are unsatisfied with this answer. Wouldn't it be bad enough that the son would think that he was doing something wrong, which, the Rabbis teach, also stains the soul? They suggest in response that the son must have been informed in advance that the father had waived his honor. If so, one wonders just how effective an experiment this could have been (see *Resp. Chatam Sofer*, YD, 229).

Notably, the *Ritva* asks the same question and answers differently. He suggests that the *lifnei iver* concern here is minor compared to the benefits, which would have been to identify weaknesses in the son's development and thereby correct them. R. Shmuel Vosner (*Resp. Shevet HaLevi*, II, 101:5) found this approach unsatisfactory, as even if one were to minimize the *lifnei iver* factor, the concern at hand is the violation of parental respect, which is being transgressed in spirit, even if it had been technically accounted for. However, there is another issue at stake besides violating the prohibition of disrespecting one's parents. As the passage explicitly mentions, there was the possibility that the son would become enraged. Losing one's temper is quite possibly considered its own prohibition, and is compared to idolatry (see *Hil. Deot* 2:3). At a minimum, it is a character flaw. Are we to assume that the *lifnei Iver* prohibition does not cover shortcomings of character?

The *Chida* (*Birkei Yosef* YD 240:13) poses this question and offers that perhaps Rav Huna was so confident that his son would not get angry enough to reach a level deserving of such condemnation.

The *lifnei iver* question is particularly relevant given that many authorities felt that there is a prohibition connected with character deficiencies. Indeed, Maimonides rules that one is obligated to repent for such shortcomings. As such, it must be considered whether *lifnei iver* applies to character violations as well.

In this vein, R. Yitzchak Zilberstein (*Chashukei Chemed* to *Kiddushin*) considers the question of a business owner who wishes to see if applicants for a position will treat customers with patience. To accomplish this, he set up a test. He invited twenty applicants to come for an interview but intentionally kept them waiting for about two hours. During that time, he planted a confederate who was capable of acting like a “*nudnik*” with the express goal of annoying them, while the boss himself observed through a hidden camera to see how each would react.

As a result of this ordeal, most of the applicants indeed lost their composure, with one exception. That worthy individual was granted the job on the spot. All the other applicants reacted angrily, asserting that he had arrived last. At that point, the boss emerged and explained that while they thought the interview had not yet begun, it had been taking place all along. The main qualification for the job was patience, and they had all exposed themselves as unworthy. Was it permissible for him to provoke anger in all of these applicants in order to test their qualifications?

The *Resp. Torah L'Shemah* (#370) discusses the general question of whether somebody who causes another to get angry is in violation of *lifnei iver*, and adduces a proof from Rav Huna that it is not. Notably, the questioner seems to be discussing asking about something less than this - one who is not intentionally angering the other, but pursuing other purposes with his behavior; he remarks that a prohibition here would make normal daily interaction impossible. It would seem that intentional provocation would be in a different category.

Rabbi Eliezer Papo, author of the *Pela Yoetz*, asserts in a few places in his writings (*Orot Eilim*, *Eiruv* 18b, *Ya'aloz Chasidim* 15) that there is a prohibition of *lifnei iver* regarding character traits, while Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, who was famous for founding the *Mussar* movement that focused on character development, is quoted by R. Chaim Kanievsky as saying that the prohibition does not apply to character traits (*Derekh Tzlechah*, page 369). That may seem surprising coming from one who directed so much attention in this area. One suggestion is that the character traits are already present in the individual, and all the other person can do is provoke a manifestation of what is there, not cause them to exist. However, this is difficult to say, particularly regarding anger, as the Talmud does convey condemnation specifically of expressions of rage.

Beyond the technicalities, there is the simple golden rule. It is a fair assumption that no one would appreciate being put in a position where their worst attributes are being provoked to emerge.

However, perhaps it should be maintained that Eliezer's actions were in a different category and could indeed be a model for contemporary daters. The above discussions involved trying to test for negative qualities and behaviors. In that context, fears of *lifnei iver*, entrapment, and unfair treatment of others are present. Eliezer, by contrast, was looking for unusual positive behavior. Those who did not pass the test were none the wiser and suffered no embarrassment or negative consequences. Can it be said, then, that Eliezer's plan was impeccable and to be recommended without hesitation?

Not necessarily. It may come as a surprise to learn that the Rabbis seem to maintain a somewhat critical attitude towards Eliezer's methods, as expressed in at least two Talmudic statements. (It should be noted, however, that some statements in rabbinic literature are more positively inclined toward Eliezer's plan; see, for example, *Kallah Rabati*, end of ch. 3). In one (*Ta'anit* 4a; see also *Bereishit Rabbah* 60:3), Eliezer is described as one who asked “improperly” (*bikesh she-lo ke-hogen*), and was nonetheless answered “properly”.

More striking is a second passage (*Chullin* 95b) which appears to allege a halakhic violation. In discussing the prohibition of *neichush* (*Lev.* 19:26.), which might loosely be translated as superstitious behavior, the Talmud

asserts, in the name of Rav, the following standard: “Any ‘nachash’ that is not as Eliezer the servant of Avraham ... is not nachash”. In other words, it seems that Eliezer’s behavior serves as the baseline to determine when one is in violation of this Biblical prohibition.

This assertion is shocking. The nature of the objection to superstition is that it is irrational, and involves living one’s life based on meaningless signs. No one would maintain that one cannot make decisions based on rational, relevant factors; that is the essence of intelligent living. In the case of Eliezer, he was seeking, most appropriately, a paragon of kindness, of chesed. Accordingly, he devised a rational test to identify one who would act in a manner displaying chesed. How could that plan be considered in any way connected to the transgression of neichush?

This issue underlies a primary debate. Maimonides (Hilkhot Avodat Kohavim 11:4.), in delineating the prohibition, gives several examples of proscribed practice, and closes with the words, “...like Eliezer the servant of Avraham – and so too all things like this are prohibited...”. The Ra’avad takes sharp issue with this formulation, maintaining that Eliezer’s behavior was permissible, that questioning it is unthinkable, and that Maimonides was confused by the Talmud’s choice of language.

Indeed, other authorities maintain that Eliezer was innocent of any sin in this case. Rather, these views, represented by the Ran, assert that the Talmud invokes Eliezer not to allege any impropriety, but to focus on one isolated detail: Eliezer’s absolute commitment to his test. Indeed, Eliezer’s test was a rational one, not at all subject to the prohibition. However, if one is utilizing an irrational indicator, he would violate neichush if he relied on this sign with a commitment equal to that of Eliezer to his permissible test.

Thus, it emerges from the Talmud that in order to violate neichush, two conditions must be present: a) the basis for the decision must be irrational, and not actually relevant to the issues involved; b) the decision must be made as a result of complete commitment to the irrational sign, and not be the result of a combination of factors. Apparently, according to the second view in the, the relevance of Eliezer is only to condition (b); as his condition was rational, it is instructive only in its level of commitment. It remains somewhat startling then, that Eliezer, acting rationally and innocently, should be held up as a negative role model.

While this second view exonerates Eliezer of any guilt, perhaps it might nonetheless be suggested that the tinge of disapproval exhibited by the Rabbis is rooted in this very approach.

True, it was rational and appropriate for Eliezer to devise a test to ascertain if Rebecca was a person of chesed. Where the test merited criticism, however, was in its absolute quality – the assumption that if Rebecca passed, she was a person of chesed, and if she didn’t, she wasn’t (it should be noted that not all commentaries agree with the underlying assumptions here of the facts of the narrative). In other words, the test assumed a perfect correlation between an attribute and an action. While clearly a relationship between the two must exist, it is not the case that an action always accurately displays the attribute from which it is assumed to emanate. The observer might misjudge the source of a discrete action or inaction; or it may simply not be representative, colored by some other factor of which the observer is unaware. A kind person may not help out a person in need because of preoccupation or justifiable distraction; while an unkind person may help because of an ulterior, selfish motive.

The automatic linking of attribute and action is the source of much of human conflict: “if he was a really nice guy, he would do what I need”; “if she really loved me, she wouldn’t do such and such”. All too often, the interpretation is artificial or incomplete, and the other party forms a completely inaccurate impression. This is related to what is now identified by psychologists as the “fundamental attribution error”, a reference to the human tendency to see the actions of others as wholly representative of their character, while the one evaluating readily minimizes such interpretations when applied to his own actions. If he fails to do the “kind” thing, he is unkind; if I fail to do that same thing, I am generally kind but at the moment attending to other priorities.

It might be suggested that this tendency is one reason for the prohibition of lashon hara, which forbids the relating of derogatory information, even when it is true. Unfortunately, human nature is such that it is very difficult not to form a character judgment after hearing of an incident that, while factually true, may be isolated or otherwise unrepresentative. As such, we are required to refrain from relating such facts, as their technical accuracy do not prevent the violation of “do not bear [or transmit] a false report (Ex 23:2; see Pesachim 118a).”

It seems, then, that the tests we devise, even if they do not trigger negative qualities, may still be misleading in very harmful ways that are all too easy to miss.

The question then becomes, if Eliezer indeed acted improperly in his request, why was he so gloriously successful? Why did God reward an unseemly request with a perfect response?

Perhaps this was one instance where the test specifically asked for an absolute correlation, for a quality that expressed itself constantly, without exception. As Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Abraham’s Journey pp. 195-196): “What key virtue did the members of this household possess that made them fit for and worthy of joining the covenant? The answer is hesed, kindness expressed through hakhnasat orechim, hospitality...hakhnasat orechim may have its source in one of two human qualities: either genuine kindness or civility and courtesy. A polite person quite often conveys the impression of being charitable and good, but inwardly he is completely indifferent and detached. The act of the polite person is related to an etiquette, the act of the kind person to an ethic.

“The criterion that enables us to distinguish between politeness and kindness is quite obvious. The element of perseverance and patience is to be found in the kind person but not in the merely polite person. The kind person has unlimited patience. The needy may call on a kind person for help over a long period of time, for years and years. The appeal will always be heard and acted upon. The polite person’s patience is limited. If repeatedly approached, he will stop extending help. Any illogical plea for help, any exaggeration or crossing the borderline of decency, will be harshly rejected and condemned if the helper is merely acting in accordance with etiquette. But in the case of kindness, there is no limit to the benefactor’s perseverance and tolerance. He helps even people who are vulgar and coarse. He takes abuse. Nothing can alienate him from the person in need.

“Eliezer wanted to find out what motivated Rebecca’s actions. Was it spiritual nobility and kindness, or good manners and civility? He asked her to do things that were outrageous. He said, “Let me sip a little water from your pitcher”. (Gen. 24:17), as opposed to asking her to hand him the pitcher. In other words, he told her that he would do nothing; she was to draw water from the well and pour it into his mouth. Isn’t this distasteful and tasteless? Had she just been polite, she would have splashed the water in his face. Why did he ask a young girl to water the camels, something women did not do in antiquity? Couldn’t one of his servants have taken the pitcher down to the well, brought up the water, and taken care of the animals?

“The answer is that Eliezer was testing her patience. She passed the test with flying colors. She did not feel hurt; she was not repulsed by the newcomer’s primitive bluntness and lack of good manners. She practiced hospitality even though the traveler was coarse and rude. The quality of erekh appayim prevailed, and Rebecca became the mother of the nation.”

Rav Soloveitchik’s comments appear to be stating that the test was not just for chesed in any basic sense, but specifically in an absolute sense; that only one who would express kindness without exception and in all circumstances would qualify. As such, it is understandable that actions could, in this unusual case, be equated absolutely with attributes; the unique demand of the situation called for it. Further, it seems that the very nature of Rebecca’s chesed was itself one of transcending the “action-based judgment” toward others.

Without a doubt, Rebecca’s behavior is extraordinary, and can hardly represent the expectation placed upon the average person. Nonetheless, perhaps there is a valuable lesson to be learned from this episode for all human relationships, marriage and otherwise. This lesson is the benefit of

living life by a double standard: when evaluating others' actions, one should recognize the frequent lack of correlation between these actions and their actual attributes; understand that they can be kind people even if not always displaying the actions we would identify with kindness. When one is considering one's own actions, however, one should act with the opposite mentality, recognizing that one's own positive attributes are often only perceived by others through the actions that usually display them; accordingly, one would try to manifest his quality of chesed (for example) as unilaterally and absolutely as possible. In other words, harmony is best served by attitudes that are the reverse of the more instinctive "fundamental attribution error".

Indeed, this approach, this "double standard", is far from instinctive. To separate the behavior that we see from the sweeping evaluations that we are inclined to make is profoundly challenging. Likewise, to strive to avoid relying on exceptions in our own actions – to express positive traits as consistently as possible, regardless of the circumstances – requires a discipline and a commitment evocative of our foremother Rebecca.

Nonetheless, it is a test worth taking on.

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From: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>

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What Comes First: Love or Marriage?

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: The Morning, Dusk, and Night of Judaism

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

#### **Isaac and Rebecca**

The first marital ceremony described in the Torah is the one between Isaac and Rebecca, in this week's portion, Chayei Sarah. It is also the first time the Torah depicts the love between a man and a woman: "And Isaac took Rebecca, she became his wife, and he loved her." [1]

In the beginning of Genesis, after creating the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, G-d says: [2] "Therefore man should leave his father and mother and cleave (v'davak) to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Yet this implies primarily a physical relationship, as the verse concludes, "they shall become one flesh." Love, on the other hand, is an intense emotional bond. It is mentioned for the first time not by Adam and Eve, not by Abraham and Sarah, but by Isaac and Rebecca.

Of course, Abraham and Sarah enjoyed a profoundly loving relationship. Married for many decades without children, they trailblazed together a new trail in history. They heeded the voice of G-d to leave behind their families and chart a new path to change the world. Sarah risked her life twice for Abraham when she maintained she was his sister, not his wife. Abraham refused to cohabit with her maid Hagar, but after she insisted that he does, "Abraham heeded the voice of Sarai." [3] Abraham listened to Sarah's advice to expel Ishmael from their home, even when he personally disagreed. [4] After Sarah's death, one senses the depth of Abraham's grief and his intricate negotiations to grant his wife her final honor by burying her in the cave where he too would one day be interred.

Yet the Torah's first usage of the term love between spouses is reserved for Isaac and Rebecca: "And Isaac took Rebecca, she became his wife, and he loved her." [5]

What is unique about their marriage? And why is this sort of description never repeated in the Torah?

Jacob loves Rachel, the Torah tells us. [6] But that's before he married her: "And Jacob Loved Rachel, and he said [to her father]: 'I will work for you for seven years for your youngest daughter Rachel.'" With Jacob and Rachel, the love precedes the marriage. With Isaac and Rebecca, the love follows the marriage. Why the difference?

#### **No Friction**

What is more, with our other patriarchs and matriarchs we observe moments of tension (of course relative to their lofty and sacred stature). Sarah tells

Abraham, "I am angry at you." [7] Rachel too complains to Jacob about her childlessness; "and Jacob became angry at Rachel, saying, 'Am I in the place of G-d?'" [8]

In contrast, between Isaac and Rebecca, no friction is ever recorded.

This was not because they never disagreed. To the contrary, the Torah states, that Rebecca loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esau. While Isaac wishes to bless Esau, Rebecca instructs Jacob to dress up like his brother and obtain the blessings for himself. [9] That could have easily resulted in a quarrel—but it did not.

#### **Dawn and Darkness**

The sages in the Talmud present a fascinating tradition about the three daily prayers in Judaism. [10] Abraham instituted the morning prayer, shacharis; Isaac instituted the afternoon prayer—mincha; and Jacob initiated the evening prayer, maariv. [11]

The Talmud derives this from the biblical verses. But what is the thematic connection between our three forefathers and these particular prayers? And why do we have three daily prayers? (Mohammed instituted five daily prayers for Muslims, mimicking our Yom Kippur model; yet on a daily basis we have three.)

Morning brings with it a fresh and exhilarating energy. As a new day emerges, we have this sense (at least till we check our phone) that new possibilities are beacond upon us. As the first rays of light cast their glow on our horizon, a new dawn also triggers our imagination. Morning brings with it new frontiers to conquer and fresh glimmers of hope. [12] One of the great spiritual masters, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) writes, that when a person awakes, he or she feels instinctively a sense of happiness and promise. [13] Dawn is when G-d presses the restart button.

This is the story of Abraham. He embodied the morning of Judaism, bringing the dawn of a new era to earth. He opened humanity to a new reality, a new vision of earth. He heralded a novel message. The world is not a hopeless jungle; it is a Divine palace. We are not an insignificant speck of dust on the surface of infinity; we matter. Humanity is not a helpless folk subjected to the whims of competing gods, but part of a single narrative, united in the image of a moral and loving Creator. Abraham taught that there was purpose in history and meaning in life.

Who was Abraham? "Abraham woke up early in the morning to the place where he stood previously," the Torah states. [14] Then again, when he is instructed to bring his son to Mt. Moriah, "Abraham woke up in the morning." The Torah rarely presents the details of daily life, unless they convey an important theme. Following a long and dark night, Abraham ushers in the morning for civilization. [15] Abraham instituted the morning (shacharis) prayer, topping into the unique spiritual energy of daybreak, when you stretch out your arms and embrace a new day. Jacob, in contrast, embodies the night of Judaism. The kingdom of night is full of mystique, solitude, darkness, drama, and romance. Jacob's life is riddled with darkness, uncertainty, loneliness, and struggle, fraught with drama and mystery. Already emerging from the womb he struggles with his twin brother; later he wrestles with a mysterious adversary, and in the process he receives a new name, Israel, which means struggling with G-d. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: [16] "Why do you say, O Jacob, why declare, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is ignored by my G-d'?"

No personality in the Torah is so connected with night as Jacob. In the middle of the night, the Torah relates, "Jacob remained alone, and a man fought with him till dawn broke." [17] Jacob tells his father-in-law Laban: "Twenty years I have been with you... scorching heat ravaged me by day, and frost by night; sleep eluded my eyes." [18] Jacob, says the Torah, "came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place." [19] He then dreams of a "ladder standing on the ground, but its top reaches heaven." [20]

Jacob taught the Jewish people and the world how to encounter the Divine during the turbulence and obscurity of night. "And Jacob woke up from his sleep and he said, 'Indeed! G-d is present in this space, even if I did not



know it.”[21] Jacob feels the presence of G-d even in a space of darkness and adversity, even if his brain can’t always figure out how. Jacob created the evening prayer—the connection to G-d amidst the mystery and drama of nightfall. As the sun set again and yet again in his life, he traveled internally to discover the source of light from within.

#### The Monotony of Afternoons

How about the vibe of the afternoon? Smack in the middle of a long and arduous day, lacking the freshness of the morning and the mystery of night, afternoons are often characterized by monotony. The day in the office is dragging on, and I am drained. If I am lucky enough to be a house mom or dad, the afternoon comes with its own stress: The children are returning from school, dinner is not made, the house is a mess, and I am tired; it’s been a long day.

What is the energy that beacons to us during those dull afternoons? What is the spiritual heartbeat of the flat hours in the day, when I’m just waiting to go home?

It is the story of Isaac.

Isaac’s life was—superficially speaking—not as colorful as his father’s or son’s life. Unlike his father Abraham he did not wage and win wars, nor did he did not travel extensively and change the vocabulary of humanity.[22] He was never a world celebrity, titled by the Hittites as “a prince of G-d.”[23] He was not a founder of a new religion, or the progenitor of a new nation. He was not the “revolutionary” that his father was.

Nor did his life contain the drama of his son Jacob. Isaac did not flee his brother’s wrath; he did not fight in the middle of the night; he did not fall in love with Rachel, and then experience deceit; he did not lose his son to a wild animal only to discover 22 years later that his beloved child became the Prime Minister of the superpower of the time. He did not relocate his entire family to a new country at an old ripe age.

Isaac lived in one location, and he never left it. His was more of a simple life. The only thing the Torah tells us about his vocation is that he grew grain and dug many a well.[24] Isaac represents the long[25] and seemingly tedious “afternoon” of Jewish history.

Therein lies his singular uniqueness.

Isaac’s life might seemingly lack the grandeur, excitement, challenge, and mystique of Abraham and Jacob, yet he embodies the essence and foundation of Judaism: The daily consistent and unwavering commitment to G-d and His work. Abraham was a revolutionary; he cast a new light on the world, but it was Isaac who created the vessels to contain and internalize the light. Isaac dug the wells of Judaism: he went deeply into himself and the world around him and revealed the subterranean living wellsprings of faith and commitment, ensuring that the flow never ceases. Isaac’s relative silence in the book of Genesis ought not to be confused with passivity; it was rather a silence that comes with internalization. Isaac knew that revolutions can last for a few decades, but if you do not create solid containers for the energy (represented by the wells in the ground) the energy will fade away.

Isaac at one point of his life lay on an altar, ready to become an offering for G-d. This became the hallmark of his life: He embodied absolute dedication and resilience, consistent, unwavering, and unbending.

Isaac is the founder of the afternoon prayer, the “mincha” of Judaism. “And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at dusk,” the Torah states in this week’s portion.[26] Isaac tapped into the spiritual energy of the “afternoons”, showing us that a relationship with G-d does not consist only of the spontaneous exuberant morning inspiration, or of the drama and romance of the night. A relationship with G-d is expressed even more profoundly in the daily commitment and sacrifices we make for truth, love, goodness, and holiness. He bequeathed us with the internal resilience and strength to bring G-d into the dull and tedious journeys of life.

It is afternoon in your office. You need to respond to dozens of emails, catch the bank, return many a call, and still field a few annoying appointments. But you stand up to daven “mincha,” to connect with G-d. You are busy, stressed, and tired; yet you leave everything behind, and you take time out and try to break out of the routine to focus on truth, on G-d, on eternity. Here

is where the power of Isaac lay, the still voice of dedication that never falters.[27]

#### A Tale of Three Marriages

Marriage, too, has three components: the morning, the night—and the period of afternoon and dusk.

When we meet our soulmate, a new dawn overwhelms our heart’s horizon.

We are overtaken by the newness and freshness of the experience. We are excited, inspired, full of hope of what our joined future might look like. This is the “Abraham” of marriage, the morning—shacharis— of a relationship. Marriage also has those special moments of moonlight mystery and drama. The passion and electricity that comes from the unknown, from discovering the untold layers of depth in our spouse’s soul; the special awareness that is born from dealing with struggle and uncertainty. This is the “Jacob” element of marriage, the evening—“maariv”—of a relationship.

But then there is the “mincha” of marriage—the simple, unromantic, non-dramatic, commitment of two people to each other, during the boring and flat days of life. Two souls holding hands together through the vicissitudes of life, in difficult times, in serene times, in monotonous moments, and in thrilling moments. It is the loyalty and trust built over years of supporting each other, day by day, hour by hour, in buying tomatoes, taking the kid to the doctor, and fixing the leak in the basement.

This creates a unique type of love. There is the love born out of thrill, drama, and exhilaration. This is the love that precedes marriage. You fall in love with your new partner, you are swept off your feet by the sunrise in your life. But there is another type of love that is born out of the daily commitment and dedication to each other. This love can never be experienced before marriage, only afterward.

This was Isaac’s love. It’s the “mincha” love, the one that comes from an ongoing, consistent bond in the daily grind of life. It is why the Torah states: “And Isaac took Rebecca, she became his wife, and he loved her.” First Isaac marries her, and only then does he come to love her.

#### A Tale of Two Loves

What is the difference between the two loves?

In the first love, born out of the ecstasy of a new passionate relationship, the shorter we are married, the more the love; the longer we are married, the more difficult to love. As the thrill wanes, boredom sets in, and we sometimes grow disinterested. In the latter Isaac-type love, it is the reverse: the longer we are married, the deeper we grow in love. We don’t fall in love; we climb in love. The love becomes like a deep well, discovered in the depths of the earth, and its life-sustaining waters never cease to flow. This is not a “boring” marriage. Rather, its intensity is profound and enduring, because it is contained and integrated into the fabric of daily life, and into the experiences of two human beings confronting the full spectrum of our emotions and circumstances.

The first marriage described in Torah is the one of Isaac and Rebecca, in order to teach us one of the most important principles in marriage: Passion and romance are awesome, and we can all use a nice dose of them, but as our circumstances change, they can fade away. A marriage must be built on good judgment, sound reason, an appreciation of the inner, enduring qualities and values of the other person, and it must possess the enduring commitment of a couple to each other, day-in, day-out, in a bond of steadfast, and simple faithfulness and trust. It is the capacity to hold your boundaries while connecting to the other person as a mature adult.

This is the reason Jewish law insists on no physical relations before marriage. This ensures that the couple decides to get married not based on physical attraction alone, because this may change with time, but with an appreciation of the character traits, inner personality, and values of the other person, for these will not change. Often, when men or women get physically involved, they become intoxicated by the pleasure and their blind spots cause them to overlook crucial information that might come to the surface a few years down the line and sadly sever the connection.

Our culture knows, perhaps, how to pray “shacharis” and “maariv.” We desperately need the discover the enduring secret of “mincha.”

[1] Genesis 24:67 [2] Ibid. 2:24 [3] Genesis 16:2 [4] Genesis chapter 21 [5] Genesis 24:67 [6] Ibid. 29:18 [7] Ibid. 16:5 [8] Ibid. 30:2 [9] Ibid. 25:28, and chapter 27. [10]





“And Sarah died in Kiryas Arba, which is Hebron, in the Land of Canaan. And Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry over her.” This is the earliest of many verses the Gemara cites when discussing the mitzvah of eulogizing. People often avoid writing halachic articles about hespedim in favor of more exciting or popular topics, leaving many unaware that there is much halachah on the subject. Are there rules to follow when organizing or delivering hespedim? Indeed, there are many, as we will soon see.

#### The Mitzvah

Most authorities do not count performing eulogies as one of the 613 mitzvos of the Torah. Indeed, most consider it only a rabbinic mitzvah. Nonetheless, the hesped accomplishes the Torah mitzvah of *ve'ahavta le'rei'acha komocha*, loving one's fellow as oneself, since a properly delivered hesped is a very great chesed. To quote the Rambam: “It is a positive mitzvah of the Sages to check on the ill, to console mourners... to be involved in all aspects of the burial... to eulogize... Even though all of these mitzvos are rabbinic, they are all included in the mitzvah that one should love one's fellow as oneself. Anything that you want someone to do for you, you should do to someone else who also keeps Torah and observes mitzvos” (Hilchos Aveil 14:1). Our Sages strongly emphasized the importance of performing this mitzvah properly.

What is a proper hesped?

“It is a great mitzvah to eulogize the deceased appropriately. The mitzvah is to raise one's voice, saying about him things that break the heart, in order to increase crying and to commemorate his praise. However, it is prohibited to exaggerate his praise excessively. One mentions his good qualities and adds a little... If the person had no positive qualities, say nothing about him (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 444:1).” The eulogy should be appropriate to the purpose and extent of the tragedy. For example, one should eulogize more intensely for someone who died young than for an older person, and more for someone who left no surviving descendants than for someone who had children (Meiri, Moed Katan 27b). In summation, we see that the purpose of a hesped is to cause people to cry over the loss of a Jew who observed mitzvos properly.

Exaggerate a little

The hesped should be appropriate to the deceased; one may exaggerate very slightly (Rosh, Moed Katan 3:63). You might ask, how can any exaggerating be permitted? Isn't the smallest exaggeration an untruth? What difference is there between a small lie and a big one? (See Taz, Yoreh Deah 344:1) The answer is that there is usually a bit more to praise about the person than we necessarily know, so that, on the contrary, adding a bit makes the tribute closer to the truth (based on Taz, Yoreh Deah 344:1).

Ignoring a Request

I mentioned above that the Gemara concludes that if the deceased requested no eulogies, we honor his/her request. However, this ruling is not always followed. When the Penei Yehoshua, one of the greatest Torah scholars of the mid-Eighteenth Century, passed away, the Noda BeYehudah eulogized him, even though the Penei Yehoshua had expressly requested that no eulogies be said. How could the Noda BeYehudah ignore the Penei Yehoshua's express request?

The answer, as explained by the Noda BeYehudah's disciple, is that for a gadol hador to be buried without proper eulogy is not simply a lack of the deceased's honor, which he has a right to forgo, but also a disgrace to the Torah. Even though a talmid chacham may (in general) forgo the honor due him as a Torah scholar (talmid chacham shemachal al kevodo, kevodo machul [Kiddushin 32b]), this applies only to forgoing honor. He cannot allow himself to be disgraced, since this disgraces not only him but also the Torah itself (Shu"t Teshuvah Mei'Ahavah, Volume I #174; see also Pischei Teshuvah 444:1). We now understand why there are times when one obeys the request of a person to omit his hesped, and times when one may ignore it. Usually, we obey his/her request because of the general principle *retzono shel adam zehu kevodo*, the fulfillment of someone's desire is his honor. However, if a gadol hador requests omission of eulogies, and major authorities consider this a breach of respect for the Torah itself; they may overrule the gadol's request out of *kavod* for the Torah. (Of course, this

implies that the departed gadol felt that the absence of hesped would not be a disgrace to the Torah, and that his halachic opinion is being overruled.)

At this point, we can address the second question raised above: Is it true that one may not schedule a hesped within thirty days of a Yom Tov?

Hesped before Yom Tov

The Mishnah (Moed Katan 8a) forbids scheduling a hesped within thirty days before Yom Tov, which the Rosh explains means for someone who died more than thirty days before Yom Tov (Rosh ad loc. and Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 447:1). What is wrong with scheduling this hesped, particularly since performing a proper hesped is such a big mitzvah? The Gemara cites two approaches to explain this ruling, both explaining that some form of Yom Tov desecration may result from such a eulogy. Rav (according to our version of the text) explained the reason with an anecdote: “A man once saved money in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *aliyah la'regel*, traveling to the Beis HaMikdash for Yom Tov. A professional eulogizer then showed up at the man's door and convinced his wife that her recently departed relative deserved another eulogy. She took the money her husband had saved for *aliyah la'regel* and gave them to the eulogizer. (This indicates that ambulance chasing is a time-hallowed profession.) At that time, Chazal decreed that one should not make a post-funeral hesped during the thirty day period before Yom Tov.”

The Gemara then quotes Shemuel, who cited a different reason for the ban: Usually, thirty days after someone's death, he or she is sufficiently forgotten for people to not discuss the death during Yom Tov, which would diminish the festival joy. However, performing a eulogy during these thirty days refreshes people's memories, and as a result, they discuss the passing during Yom Tov and disturb the Yom Tov joy (Moed Katan 8b). The Gemara notes that there is a practical difference between the two approaches. According to the first approach, our concern only applies if someone hires a professional speaker and there is no stricture against conducting voluntary eulogies. However, according to Shemuel, one may not conduct even an unpaid eulogy since this may revive the loss for the close family and result in a desecration of Yom Tov.

Contemporary Problem or Not?

Some raise the following question: Why doesn't the Gemara point out yet another difference that results from the dispute: According to the first approach, the prohibition would only exist when the Beis HaMikdash stood and there was a mitzvah of *aliyah la'regel*. Today, however, when we unfortunately cannot fulfill this mitzvah, one should be permitted to hire a professional speaker to eulogize within a month of Yom Tov, even after the funeral (Ritz Gayus, quoted by Ramban and Rosh)? Obviously, according to Shemuel's approach the same concern exists today that existed when the Beis HaMikdash still stood. Yet the Gemara does not mention such a halachic difference between the two opinions.

The Ramban explains that, indeed, even the first opinion agrees that the prohibition exists today. Since the story mentioned in the Gemara happened during the time of the Beis HaMikdash, the Gemara cites a case of someone saving up for *aliyah la'regel*. But, even though we have no Beis HaMikdash, the reason for the prohibition still applies, since celebrating Yom Tov in general is an expense that people save for in advance. Thus, the concern still exists that in order to pay for the eulogy one might dip into one's Yom Tov savings.

Does this law apply even within thirty days of Rosh Hashanah, or only before the festivals of Sukkos, Pesach, and Shavuot?

Since the Gemara mentions that the person spent the money set aside for *aliyah la'regel*, a mitzvah that applies only for Sukkos, Pesach, and Shavuot, this implies that our concern is only about the special Yom Tov expenses associated with the three regalim festivities, and not Rosh Hashanah (Yeshuos Yaakov, Orach Chayim 547:1).

Eulogizing Children Does one recite eulogies for children? Theoretically, one could argue that since the purpose of a hesped is to honor the deceased, perhaps children do not require this type of honor. Nevertheless, the Gemara states that one does perform a eulogy for children of a certain age. For which age does one perform a hesped?

“Rabbi Meir, quoting Rabbi Yishmael, said that the children of poor people should be eulogized when they are only three years old, whereas the children of wealthy people are eulogized only if they are five. Rabbi Yehudah quoted Rabbi Yishmael differently: the children of poor people at five, and the children of wealthy people at six. The halachah is according to the last opinion quoted (Moed Katan 24b).

Both opinions agree that the age is earlier for the child of a poor family than for the child of a wealthy family. What is the reason for this difference?

Rashi explains that a poor person, who has nothing in the world but his children, suffers the loss of his children more intensely and the need for a hesped is greater. One might challenge that answer because the hesped is for the honor of the departed, and therefore what difference does it make if the family suffers more? The hesped is not for their benefit, but for the honor of the departed. I have not found this question discussed anywhere, although one later authority notes that the custom (at least in his time and place) was not to eulogize children at all (Beis Hillel to Yoreh Deah 444:4).

#### Conclusion

The Torah begins and ends by describing acts of chesed that Hashem performed, the last one entailing His burying of Moshe Rabbeinu. Our purpose in life is to imitate Hashem in all activities until our personality develops so that we instinctively act with mercy and compassion. Fulfilling the mitzvah of hesped correctly, whether as a speaker or as a listener, develops our personality appropriately, and thus fulfills another highly important role in our Jewish lives.

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

Date: Nov 13, 2025, 8:57 PM

subject: Potomac Torah Study Center Devrei Torah for Shabbat Chayei Sarah 5786

We were very excited this week to receive an email from cousins that their oldest grandson, who is studying for Semikah at Yeshiva University, has just become engaged. Hannah and I are thrilled to be joining the family for the wedding soon in Lakewood. Our cousins, who divide their time between Los Angeles and Israel, are children of Holocaust survivors. My grandparents sponsored my cousin's family to immigrate and move to Los Angeles in the early 1950s, when my cousin and her three sisters were very young. I remember my parents taking us to meet my cousin, (who was a young girl at the time), her next younger sister, and their twin baby daughters (the latter two in a crib) – when I was probably around eight years old. These cousins have always been special to us. We shared numerous simchas growing up, attended their children's simchas (all their weddings), and normally stay with them for Shabbat when we travel to Los Angeles. Our cousins are a natural topic for this parsha. Last week was the anniversary of Kristallnacht, the beginning of the worst horrors of the Holocaust. Our cousins, with their large frum family and so far two Orthodox rabbis, are the best part of our revenge for Hitler. We Jews remember the horrors of the Nazis, encourage large families, study our holy texts, and encourage our children to make aliyah. Chayei Sarah is part of the story of Avraham Avinu (whose name I carry) and his efforts to purchase property in Israel (Canaan) and to establish a legacy for our people. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander explores the diverse legacies of Moshe, David, and Avraham. Moshe spent much of his adult life communicating with God, teaching His mitzvot to the people, judging issues that arose, and initiating an oral tradition to clarify issues that are not obvious in the written Torah. To be available to Hashem at any time of day or night, Moshe lived apart from his wife and children. After the Exodus, the Torah does not mention Moshe's children. His burial location is hidden, and no Jew attempts to visit and pay respects to Moshe. Rabbi Brander considers King David's relationship with his children to be passive. Others in David's environment must tell him when one of his sons is attempting to take over from their father's royal duties.

In contrast with Moshe and David, Avraham devotes considerable time and attention to his sons. Yitzhak learns enough from his father to repeat many of Avraham's experiences and approaches, including not telling foreign

rulers that he is married and redigging and giving up again some of the wells that his father had originally dug. Avraham directs his servant Eliezer how to find a wife for Yitzhak, and Yitzhak sends Yaakov to his same cousins in Haran to search for a wife. Even this Shabbat, nearly 3700 years later, many Jews spend Shabbat Chayei Sarah in Hebron, at the tombs of Avraham and Sarah, because of the close connection we Jews feel to their kever.

Rabbi Haim Ovadia explores Avraham's brilliant negotiation with the Hittites for a burial spot, a Kever Akhuzah (a permanent holding in the land).

Since the people of Canaan would not sell any land to a foreigner, Avraham could only purchase a permanent holding of land by shaming Ephron ben Zohar into selling a corner of his property for an extremely high price. The purchase of this first permanent holding is so important to the Jewish legacy in Israel that all the details are in the Torah.

Our connection to fellow Jews continues after thousands of years. Rabbi Mordechai Rhine writes beautifully to Avraham and Sarah, whom he feels are his parents, even after nearly 3700 years. We see this long connection of fellow Jews as our relatives in other contexts. This Shabbat marks seven years since a murderous anti-Semite broke into the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh and killed eleven congregants during morning services. In the past week, the Goldin family and Israel could finally remember and bury the remains of Lt. Hadar Goldin, whom Hamas murderers dragged into Gaza eleven years ago. Hamas finally returned his body, because IDF discovered the location and were a few feet away from reaching and returning his remains to Israel. IDF kept working to discover and recover Lt. Goldin's bones. Jews in Pittsburgh have kept alive the memories of the eleven members of the Tree of Life Congregation. These efforts demonstrate that we Jews continue to build and reinforce a legacy of B'Nai Yisrael, whom we consider all to be part of our family.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, reminds us of the immensely difficult task that Holocaust survivors had to rebuild a life after their horrific experiences. (Our hostages from Gaza and their families face a similar task.) Jews who survived the Nazi horrors frequently would not speak of their experiences for decades – some never would address the topic. I cannot imagine how I would have had the strength to get up in the morning and create a new life if I had been in either situation. Hashem promises that we shall endure, but with our enemies at our gates. I count my blessings that my grandparents made their way to America, that my parents were the first generation born in this country, and that my sisters and I could live in a free and protected period. Those who came before us, and those living now during a time of wicked anti-Semitism, have much more difficult tasks. I wish them koach – and may those of the current generation understand that they must be careful lest history repeat for them and their children.

We should always cherish those who make us aware of our legacy. I wrote the following words three years ago, and I cannot improve on them: A Rebbe is like a father, and my Rebbe/father figure for decades was Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, who earned my weekly dedication of these Devrei Torah to his memory – many times over during our friendship. He was my mentor for nearly fifty years. Rabbi Cahan and his beloved wife Elizabeth taught Hannah and me to find deeper appreciation for the many levels of insights in the Torah. Shabbas and Yom Tov with the Cahans was always special, something that we have tried to pass on to our children. Avraham and Sarah built a legacy that has lasted for more than 3500 years. Dedicated Jews like the Cahans renew and reinforce the Jewish legacy each generation – and that is why we Jews have survived so long and shall always be around, always fulfilling Hashem's promise to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov. May our children and grandchildren always appreciate this lesson.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

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from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Nov 13, 2025, 9:27 PM

subject: **Tidbits** • Chayei Sarah 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZT"L

Parashas Chayei Sarah • November 15th • 24 Cheshvan 5786

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Kislev. Rosh Chodesh is next Friday, November 21st. The molad is THURSDAY afternoon at 1:38 PM and 9 chalakim. As of Shacharis this past Tuesday, November 11th, Shemoneh Esrei has been recited ninety times with the inclusion of Mashiv HaRuach U'Morid HaGesheim. Therefore, after this point, one who is unsure if he added Mashiv HaRuach can halachically be presumed to have said it correctly, and need not repeat Shemoneh Esrei (this is applicable for Nusach Ashkenaz; Nusach Sefard mispallelim [who say Morid Hatal in the summer months] never need to correct). Note: One who served as a shaliach tzibbur during this period may count his chazaras hashatz towards his count of ninety. af Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Zevachim 62 • Yerushalmi: Yoma 23 • Mishnah Yomis: Chulin 8:1-2 • Oraysa (coming week): Chagigah 23b-25b • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 17:8-18:2 Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbe to wish them a good Shabbos.

Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Kislev is this Shabbos Parashas Chayei Sarah.

Rosh Chodesh Kislev is next Friday, November 21st. CHAYEI SARAH:

Sarah passes away • Avraham acquires the Me'aras Hamachpeilah from Efron and buries Sarah there • Avraham sends Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak • Eliezer prays to find a girl who excels in kindness • Rivka, daughter of Besuel, offers Eliezer and his camels water to drink • Eliezer gives her gifts of jewelry • Rivka's brother Lavan sees the gifts and invites Eliezer to stay with them • Eliezer relates the day's events to Rivka's family and proposes her marriage to Yitzchak • Lavan attempts to delay the marriage, but Rivka chooses to leave immediately • The blessings of Sarah's tent return upon Rivka's arrival • Avraham marries Keturah and bears six sons; they are sent away with gifts • Avraham passes away at the age of 175; Yitzchak and Yishmael bury him in the Me'aras Hamachpeilah • Yishmael's 12 children • Yishmael dies at the age of 137 Haftarah: By carefully selecting an appropriate soulmate for his son Yitzchak, Avraham Avinu sought to ensure the continuity of Klal Yisrael as well as its growth, both in numbers and in nobility. David Hamelech (Melachim Alef 1:1-31) sought continuity of his kingdom and the Jewish nation as well by designating his son Shlomo Hamelech as heir to the throne.

ואשאל אתה ואמר בת מי את ותואל בת בתואל בן נחור אשר ילדה לו מלכה ואשם הנזם על אפה והצמידים על ידיה

"And I asked her who's daughter she was...and I placed the nose ring on her nose..." (Berieishis 24:47) In recounting his encounter with Rivka, Eliezer tells her family that he first conversed with her and afterward gave her the jewelry. However, according to the preceding account in the Torah he gave her the jewelry, even before conversing with her. Rashi explains that he did so out of concern that they would take issue with the fact that he gave the jewelry without knowing her identity. One may question that Besuel had already stated that "mei'Hashem yatza hadavar" - this was brought forth by Hashem, and the hashgacha was obvious to all. If so, why would this minor inconsistency in Eliezer's approach derail the shidduch? Furthermore, Chazal say that with the help of divine intervention, Besuel was poisoned in order that he would not stop the shidduch. But did he not already agree that this match was heavenly ordained? Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock zt"l explains that negiyos (personal biases) and ulterior motives negatively affect other nations to a higher degree. Even though through logic they can see the truth, when it comes to taking action, these subconscious feelings take hold of their decisions and direction. Although it was obvious to all parties that this shidduch was destined to be, Eliezer's minor inconsistency may have caused them to move away from pursuing this marriage.