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# INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **CHAYEI SARAH** - 5787

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Adapted from
**Oznayim LaTorah** by **Rav Zalman Sorotzkin** (1881-1966)

**What Does the Torah Call Life?**

The parsha that begins with Sarah's death is called *Chayei Sarah* - the life of Sarah. That itself seems strange. ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים - *The life of Sarah was one hundred years, twenty years and seven years*, and immediately afterward the Torah tells us ותמת שרה - *Sarah died*. Why is the parsha of her death introduced as her life? There is another difficulty. After giving Sarah's age, the Torah concludes שני חיי שרה - *the years of Sarah's life*. Once the Torah has already told us that she lived 127 years, what does this repetition add?

**Years That Were Truly Lived**

The *Oznayim LaTorah* explains that the Torah is not merely telling us how long Sarah lived, but what kind of life she lived. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 58:1) applies to Sarah the pasuk יודע ה' ימי תמימים - *Hashem knows the days of the perfect* (Tehillim 37:18), and explains כשם שהם תמימים כך שנותיהם תמימות - *Just as they were complete, so were their years complete*. Avraham and Sarah devoted their lives to spreading knowledge of Hashem and performing chesed. Their days were not simply filled with activity. Each day was used for the purpose for which Hashem had given it to them.

The Torah makes a similar point when recording Avraham's age: ואלה ימי שני חיי אברהם אשר חי - *These are the days of the years of Avraham's life that he lived* (Chayei Sarah 25:7). The additional words אשר חי emphasize that his years were truly lived. From the time Avraham recognized his Creator, he did not allow a day to pass without purpose. This is also the meaning of שני חיי שרה. All 127 years were years that deserved to be called חיים.

The *Oznayim LaTorah* develops this idea through a Tefillah recited before Tehillim, asking Hashem not to take us from this world קודם זמננו עד מלאת שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה - *before our time, until we complete our seventy years*. The *Mishnah Berurah* recommends omitting the words בהם שבעים שנה. But the *Oznayim LaTorah* suggests a deeper understanding of the prayer. Even a person who has already lived a hundred years may still ask for seventy years of genuine life. If he were to count only the days and hours devoted to Torah, Tefillah, mitzvos and chesed, how many years would he actually have lived?

This, he explains, is the meaning of Dovid HaMelech's Tefillah: ימי שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה ... ורהבם עמל ואון ... למנות ימינו כן הודע ונבא לבב חכמה - *The days of our years are seventy ... yet their pride is toil and trouble ... Teach us to count our days, that we may acquire a heart of wisdom* (Tehillim 90:10-12). We do not need wisdom merely to count the number of days we have lived. We need wisdom to understand the value of our days, to recognize how much time has been wasted, and to ensure that the days remaining will be used properly.

**A Higher Meaning of Life**

The *Oznayim LaTorah* then brings an explanation he heard from his brother-in-law, Rav Yosef Yehudah Bloch, the Telzer Rosh Yeshivah. There are different levels of life. A plant grows and draws nourishment. An animal has movement and instinct. A human being possesses intellect and speech. Each has a higher form of life than the level beneath it. But the Torah reveals a form of life beyond ordinary human existence: לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת ... כי הוא חייכם - *To perform all the words of this Torah ... for it is your life* (Haazinu 32:46-47).

Torah and mitzvos are not merely things that a living person performs. They constitute a higher form of life. Without that dimension, even human existence, with all its intellectual accomplishments, does not attain what the Torah calls חיים.

But the *Oznayim LaTorah* adds that even within חיי תורה there are different levels. The Gemara (Kesubos 17a) distinguishes between the honor accorded at the funeral of one who studied Torah and one who taught Torah to others. Teaching Torah is greater than acquiring knowledge for oneself, because it extends the life of Torah to other people.

There is, however, an even higher level: bringing Torah to someone who has never learned it, or bringing knowledge of Hashem to people who did not previously recognize Him. This was the greatness of R' Chiya, concerning whom Rebbi declared כמה גדולים מעשי חייא - *How great are the deeds of Chiya* (Bava Metzia 85b). R' Chiya described how he prepared parchment, wrote the Chumash, taught children and arranged for them to teach one another, so that Torah

would not be forgotten from Klal Yisrael. His greatness lay not merely in transmitting what he knew, but in establishing Torah where it otherwise might not have existed.

This was the level of Avraham and Sarah. ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן - *The souls that they made in Charan* (Lech Lecha 12:5). Chazal explain that Avraham brought the men under the wings of the Shechinah, while Sarah brought the women. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 39:14) explains that one who brings another person to recognize Hashem is regarded as though he created that person. Avraham and Sarah did not merely live lives of Torah themselves. They brought spiritual life to others.

**The Life of Sarah**

This gives שני חיי שרה a deeper meaning. The Torah is not simply repeating Sarah's age. It is testifying to the nature of her years. They were not years of ordinary existence, nor even merely years of personal righteousness. Sarah devoted her life to bringing other people closer to Hashem, giving them a higher form of life.

We can now better understand why the parsha of Sarah's death is called *Chayei Sarah*. Physical life comes to an end, but a life spent bringing Torah and knowledge of Hashem into the world continues through those who were influenced by it. Bereishis Rabbah (58:1) itself teaches that the repetition of חיי שרה reflects how precious the lives of tzaddikim are before Hashem, both in this world and in the World to Come.

Sarah lived 127 years, but the Torah tells us something far more important than the number. שני חיי שרה - every year was truly a year of life, and through the lives she helped create, her influence continued beyond her own lifetime.

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**Sarah at One Hundred, Twenty and Seven**
**Chaim O. Shulman**

The Torah begins Parshas Chayei Sarah: ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים שני חיי שרה - *Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years and seven years, the years of Sarah's life* (Chayei Sarah 23:1). Rashi explains that the word שנה is written with each number to teach us that each number is expounded on its own. בת מאה כבת עשרים לחטא מה בת עשרים לא חטאה שהרי אינה בת עונשין אף בת מאה בלא חטא - *at one hundred she was like twenty with respect to sin; just as at twenty she did not sin, since she was not yet subject to punishment, so at one hundred she was without sin*. ובת עשרים כבת שבע ליופי - *and at twenty she was like seven in beauty*. Rashi then says שני חיי שרה כולן שוין לטובה - *the years of Sarah's life were all equally good*.

Many ask, how being twenty proves that Sarah did not sin? It is true that there is a special rule that Heavenly punishment does not begin until twenty, but a person of twenty is certainly capable of sinning.

What is also difficult is the comparison to seven in beauty. If the Torah is praising Sarah's beauty, why compare her to a seven-year-old? A twenty-year-old would seem to be the more natural comparison. Rav Soloveitchik therefore suggested that perhaps the two phrases were switched, and the original reading was בת מאה כבת עשרים לנוי ובת עשרים כבת שבע לחטא - *at one hundred she was like twenty in beauty, and at twenty she was like seven with respect to sin*.

In truth, this is not just a suggested correction. Midrash Lekach Tov (Pesikta Zutrasa) quoted in the Chizkuni has this version: *בת מאה שנה היתה כבת עשרים לנוי ובת עשרים כבת ז' לחטא* - *at one hundred she was like twenty in beauty and at twenty she was like seven with respect to sin*.

The Yalkut on Tehillim also has this reading, on the pasuk יודע ה' ימי תמימים - *Hashem knows the days of the wholehearted* (Tehillim 37:18). This is not a coincidence. The Midrash on our parsha in Bereishis Rabbah (58:1) opens with this very pasuk, so the Yalkut is really quoting the same Midrash, just with a different nusach.

It is interesting to note that the printed Bereishis Rabbah has the same comparisons as our Rashi, but the commentary on Bereishis Rabbah attributed to Rashi has the other reading. The Maharzu also quotes the Yalkut Tehillim version and says וגי' זו עיקר - *this is the correct version*. So Rav Soloveitchik's suggestion had already been preserved, and even preferred, in earlier sources.

With this nusach both questions are answered. בת עשרים כבת שבע לחטא means that at twenty Sarah was like a seven-year-old with respect to sin. A seven-year-old is not just free from punishment; he is not yet obligated in mitzvos at all. בת מאה כבת עשרים לנוי means that at one hundred she was like twenty in beauty, and twenty is the age one would naturally use to describe beauty. So each comparison is to the age that really has that quality. Sarah became an adult without losing the innocence she had as a child, and she became old without losing the vitality she had when she was young.

With this we can also understand Rashi's conclusion, שני חיי שרה כולן שוין לטובה. It does not mean that every period of Sarah's life was the same. Her life had many different experiences and many difficult challenges. Rather, each stage stayed with her, and that is why all of her years were equally good. So the Torah is not just telling us how long Sarah lived. It is telling us that she continued to grow without losing what was best in the years that came before.

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Adapted by CS from
**Iyunim B'Sefer Bereishis** by **Nechama Leibowitz** and **Hagos B'Parshiyos HaTorah** by **Rabbi Yehuda Nachshoni**

**A Stranger in the Land Hashem Promised Him**
**Why Does the Torah Record the Entire Purchase?**

The Torah devotes an extraordinary amount of space to Avraham's purchase of Me'aras HaMachpelah. It records his request to the Bnei Cheis, their response, Avraham's repeated bows, Ephron's offer, Avraham's insistence on paying, the price of four hundred shekels, and finally the formal transfer of the field, the cave and all the trees within its borders. Chazal attach unusual importance to these details, observing עשר פעמים כתיב בני חת כנגד עשרת הדברות - *the Bnei Cheis are mentioned ten times, corresponding to the Aseres HaDibros*, and praising those who helped establish the purchase of a *tzaddik* (Bereishis Rabbah 58:8). But why does the Torah consider this transaction so important?

Ancient legal customs may explain some of the formalities. But even if this is precisely how a land transaction was conducted, that does not answer the more fundamental question: why did the Torah consider it necessary to record the negotiations at such extraordinary length?

One explanation is that this was Avraham's first acquisition in Eretz Yisrael. The Midrash identifies Me'aras HaMachpelah as one of three places concerning which אין אומות העולם יכולין להונות את ישראל לומר גזולים הם בידכם - *the nations cannot accuse Israel and say that they are stolen property*, because each was openly purchased (Bereishis Rabbah 79:7). Ibn Ezra (Chayei Sarah 23:19) likewise sees in the parsha an expression of מעלת ארץ ישראל לחיים ולמתים - *the special importance of Eretz Yisrael for the living and for the dead*.

He also connects the purchase with Hashem's promise that the land would ultimately become Avraham's inheritance.

Ramban (23:19) questions these explanations. What particular praise of Eretz Yisrael is demonstrated merely by the fact that Sarah was buried there rather than being taken elsewhere? Nor could the purchase of one burial plot represent the fulfillment of Hashem's promise to give Avraham the entire land, a promise that would be realized only through his descendants. Ramban instead emphasizes חסדי ה׳ toward Avraham. Although he entered the land as a stranger, its inhabitants now called him נשיא אלקים - *a prince of Hashem* (23:6). Hashem's promise ואגדלה שמך - *I will make your name great* (Lech Lecha 12:2) had already been fulfilled. Sarah was buried בנחלת ה׳, and the Torah also wished to preserve the location of קבורת אבותינו הקדושים - *the burial place of our holy forefathers*. Ramban further notes that Chazal regarded the difficulty Avraham encountered in purchasing Sarah's grave as one of his *nisyonos*.

**The Contradiction Between Promise and Reality**

But Nechama Leibowitz asks us to look again at the scene itself. Can this really be described as the beginning of the glorious fulfillment of Hashem's promises?

Hashem had told Avraham קום התהלך בארץ לארכה ולרחבה כי לך אתננה - *arise, walk through the land, its length and its breadth, for I will give it to you* (Lech Lecha 13:17). He later promised ונתתי לך ולזרעך אחריך את ארץ מגריך את כל ארץ כנען לאחזת עולם - *I will give to you and to your descendants after you the entire land of Canaan as an everlasting possession* (Lech Lecha 17:8). Yet when Sarah dies, Avraham does not possess even enough land in which to bury her. He must approach the people who presently control the land and ask תנו לי אחזת קבר עמכם - *give me a burial possession among you* (Chayei Sarah 23:4).

The Bnei Cheis respond with apparently generous words: במבחר קברינו קבר את מתך - *bury your dead in the choicest of our graves* (23:6). Radak explains that they had burial chambers used by individual families. But Avraham wants more than permission to use a grave belonging to someone else. He seeks his own אחוזת קבר, a permanent burial possession. The Bnei Cheis are offering him a place among them; Avraham seeks a place that will belong to him and his family.

Even that requires the cooperation of others. Chizkuni (23:7) explains that although Ephron owned the field, Avraham needed the consent of the other inhabitants to establish a burial place there. This gives the repeated bows a practical explanation, but they also emphasize the contrast between Hashem's promise and Avraham's circumstances. The man to whom Hashem promised all of Eretz Yisrael must rise and bow before its inhabitants because he needs their permission to bury his wife. He is not acting as the master of the land, but as someone dependent upon those who presently possess it.

Nor do Ephron's generous words eliminate that dependence. Ephron publicly declares השדה נתתי לך והמערה אשר בו לך נתתיה - *I give you the field and the cave within it* (23:11). Yet the negotiations end with Avraham paying four hundred shekels of silver. Chazal describe Ephron as one who אמר הרבה ואפילו מעט לא עשה - *promised much and did not even do a little* (Bava Metzia 87a). Rashi (23:16) connects this with the defective spelling עפרן, without a *vav*. Ephron's expressions of generosity cannot obscure the actual circumstances in which Avraham finds himself.

Indeed, the contrast between גר ותושב אנכי עמכם - *I am a stranger and a resident among you* (23:4) and נשיא אלקים אתה בתוכנו - *you are a prince of Hashem among us* (23:6) captures Avraham's peculiar position. Nachshoni emphasizes that Avraham is wealthy, honored and apparently established. But he knows that all this recognition does not make him the owner of the land. They call him נשיא אלקים, yet he describes himself as גר ותושב because that is his actual position.

Nachshoni also cites Chizkuni concerning ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולבכתה - *Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her* (23:2). Avraham had an additional reason for sorrow: he did not even have a prepared burial place in the land. Sarah's death exposed in the most painful way what it still meant for Avraham to be a *ger* in the very land Hashem had promised him.

**The Nisayon of Emunah**

The central meaning of the episode thus lies precisely in the contradiction between Hashem's promise and the reality before Avraham. The greater the distance between what Hashem has promised and the actual circumstances a person encounters, the greater the *nisayon*. When everything visible seems to contradict what Hashem has said, the temptation is to question, complain or even rebel.

A similar difficulty appears in the experience of Gideon. When he sees the suffering of Klal Yisrael, Gideon asks ויש ה׳ עמנו ולמה מצאתנו כל זאת - *if Hashem is with us, why has all this happened to us?* (Sefer Shoftim 6:13). The promises and the reality seem irreconcilable.

Avraham faces that same contradiction. Hashem has promised him Eretz Yisrael, yet every social, economic and political fact tells him that the land belongs to others. He cannot even bury Sarah without obtaining their agreement.

Nevertheless, Avraham does not question Hashem. The *Midrash HaGadol* emphasizes both his *emunah* and his humility. Hashem had promised him the land, yet when Sarah died he could find no burial place without paying a substantial sum. ולא הרהר אחר מדותיו של הקב״ה ולא קרא תגר - *he did not question the ways of Hashem and did not protest*. Nor does he respond to the contradiction by asserting his promised rights against the Bnei Cheis. Instead, he approaches them with humility and says גר ותושב אנכי עמכם - *I am a stranger and a resident among you*.

That combination is important. Avraham's *emunah* does not cause him to deny the world as it presently exists. He knows what Hashem has promised, but also recognizes that the land is presently controlled by others. He neither questions the promise nor uses it as an excuse to disregard reality. He bows, negotiates and pays.

Chazal make the point even more forcefully by comparing Avraham with the other Avos. Hashem promised Avraham the land, yet he had to purchase Sarah's grave. Yitzchak was told גור בארץ הזאת - *dwell in this land* (Toldos 26:3), yet the shepherds of Gerar fought with him over his wells. Yaakov was promised the land, yet he had to purchase the place where he pitched his tent for מאה קשיטה - *one hundred kesitos* (Vayishlach 33:19). Nevertheless, Chazal say, ולא הרהרו על מדותי - *they did not question My ways* (Sanhedrin 111a).

Only then does the Gemara contrast Moshe, who complained to Hashem ומאז באתי אל פרעה לדבר בשמך הרע לעם הזה - *from the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has harmed this people* (Shemos 5:23). The lives of the Avos repeatedly contained this pattern: Hashem gives a promise, yet the next stage of history may

appear not to fulfill it but to contradict it. Their greatness was to remain faithful during the contradiction itself.

This is why the Torah records the entire story of Me'aras HaMachpelah. Had it simply stated that Avraham purchased a burial place for Sarah, the *nisayon* would not be apparent. The reader must see Avraham standing before the Bnei Cheis, bowing, requesting, negotiating and paying. The enormous distance between כי לך אתננה - *I will give it to you* and תנו לי אחזת קבר עמכם - *give me a burial possession among you* is what gives the episode its significance.

**The First אחוזה**

Nachshoni adds another dimension without eliminating that tension. Avraham does not accept permission to use someone else's grave. He insists upon acquiring the property בכסף מלא - *for its full price* (23:9). The negotiations end with unusually formal language: ויקם שדה עפרון אשר במכפלה - *the field of Ephron in Machpelah was established*, followed by the specification of the field, the cave and the trees, all transferred לאברהם למקנה - *to Avraham as a possession* (23:17–20). Nachshoni suggests that an ancestral burial place had a significance beyond the grave itself. A traveler may live in a place temporarily, but a family whose dead are buried there has permanent roots in the soil. Avraham therefore asks not merely for a קבר, but for an אחזת קבר. In that sense, Sarah's burial begins to establish a lasting connection between Avraham's family and Eretz Yisrael. The Torah records the formal acquisition of the property because this is not merely permission to bury Sarah. It is a permanent possession.

This does not diminish Nechama's point. The purchase of Machpelah was hardly the grand fulfillment of לך אתננה. Indeed, the necessity of purchasing it demonstrated how distant that fulfillment still seemed. But Nachshoni allows another aspect of the same event to emerge. The transaction that most dramatically exposed how little of the land Avraham possessed also became the first small piece that was permanently his.

Nachshoni cites the Chasam Sofer, who sharpens the paradox. Avraham's first acquisition in Eretz Yisrael was not a home or a field in which to begin a new life, but a burial place. His first permanent foothold in the promised land came through Sarah's death. The Chasam Sofer connects this with the prayer ותוליכנו קוממיות לארצנו - *bring us upright to our land*. The aspiration is to return to Eretz Yisrael alive and upright, rather than first reaching it through burial. Avraham, however, had to endure the pain of establishing his family's first permanent possession through the death of Sarah.

**Conclusion**

The two descriptions גר ותושב and נשיא אלקים capture the tension that runs through the entire parsha. Avraham is already a נשיא אלקים in stature, but still a גר in possession. Hashem's promise is certain, yet its realization remains largely in the future. Avraham does not demand that the future arrive immediately. He does not deny what his eyes see, nor does he allow what his eyes see to weaken what Hashem has told him.

Me'aras HaMachpelah does not eliminate the contradiction between promise and reality. It preserves it. Avraham stands in the land Hashem has promised him, without even a grave of his own, and remains faithful. From within that *nisayon* comes the first permanent אחוזה in Eretz Yisrael. The field, the cave and the trees now belong to Avraham, but the promise of an entire land still lies ahead. His greatness was not that he already saw Hashem's promise fulfilled, but that he remained certain of its truth when everything before him seemed to say otherwise.

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Adapted from

**Dorash Dovid** by **Rav Dovid Hofstedter**

**Parshas Chayei Sarah: A Perfect Shidduch**

When Eliezer recounts his mission to the family of Besuel, he repeats what he said to Avraham before setting out: ואמר אל אדני אלי לא תלך האשה אחרי - *I said to my master, perhaps the woman will not follow me* (Chayei Sarah 24:39). Rashi notes that the word אלי, *perhaps*, is written here without a vav, so that it can also be read as *to me*: אלי כתיב, בת היתה לו לאליעזר והיה מחזר למצוא עילה שיאמר לו אברהם לפנות אליו להשיאו בתו - *Eliezer had a daughter, and he was looking for a pretext so that Avraham would turn to him and marry Yitzchak to his daughter*. Avraham's answer was decisive: בני ברוך ואתה ארור, ואין ארור מדבק בברוך - *my son is blessed and you are cursed, and the cursed cannot cleave to the blessed*. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 59:9) adds that Eliezer would sit and weigh his daughter's qualities, ראויה היא או אינה ראויה - *is she fit for Yitzchak or not*.

**Eliezer's Greatness.** What is difficult to understand is why Avraham rejected Eliezer's daughter out of hand. Eliezer was no ordinary servant. The Torah describes him as המושל בכל אשר לו - *who ruled over all that was his* (Chayei Sarah 24:2), and the Gemara (Yoma 28b) explains שמושל בתורת רבו - *he had mastery over his master's Torah*. Similarly, the name דמשק אליעזר (Lech Lecha 15:2) is expounded as דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו לאחרים - *he draws from his master's Torah and gives others to drink*. Nor was his greatness limited to learning. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 59:8) reads the same words המושל בכל אשר לו as שהיה שליט ביצרו כמותו - *he ruled over his yetzer hara just as Avraham did*. Eliezer was one of the few who entered Gan Eden alive (Kallah Rabbasi ch. 3; Derech Eretz Zuta ch. 1), and the Gemara (Bava Basra 58a) relates that to this day he stands guard at the entrance to Me'aras Hamachpelah.

Besuel and his son Lavan, on the other hand, were wicked men steeped in avodah zarah. Why would Avraham prefer to bring a girl from such a home into his family rather than the daughter of the great talmid chacham and tzaddik Eliezer?

The Baalei Tosafos (24:39) sharpen the question further. Eliezer's daughter, they write, would have been a worse choice than even the daughters of Aner, Eshkol and Mamrei. Although they too descended from Canaan, Avraham would have accepted a daughter-in-law from one of their families had no suitable girl been found in Charan. Eliezer had two things against him: he was a descendant of Cham, and he was a slave. The Ran (Drashos, drush 5) writes that the people of Canaan were born with wicked character traits which they passed on to their children, almost as an inherited illness. It is apparent from Chazal that all of Eliezer's Torah and righteousness could not overcome these flaws. But this is exactly what remains to be understood. What is it about slavery that all of Eliezer's Torah and yiras Shamayim could not overcome it?

**Two Further Questions.** The parsha opens with another puzzling statement: ואברהם זקן בא בימים וה' ברך את אברהם בכל - *Avraham was old, advanced in days, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything* (Chayei Sarah 24:1). Rashi comments: בכל עולה בגימטריא בן, וכיון שהיה לו בן היה צריך להשיאו אשה - *bakol has the numerical value of ben, son, and since he had a son he needed to find him a wife*. The

Torah has already told us that Avraham had a son. Why does it need to hint at this through a gematria?

What is also troublesome is the timing. The Torah states clearly ויהי יצחק בן ארבעים שנה בקחתו את רבקה - *Yitzchak was forty years old when he married Rivkah* (Toldos 25:20). Why did Avraham put off this important task for so many years? The Maharam Shick (Teshuvos, Even Ha'ezer 1) strengthens the question. Avraham excelled in the middah of *zerizus*, performing every mitzvah quickly and without delay, yet he seemingly left the mitzvah of marrying off his son unfulfilled for years.

The Mizrachi, Gur Aryeh and Ohr Hachaim (25:20) answer that Yitzchak could not have married any earlier, since he had to wait until Rivkah was three years old. This answer does not suffice according to the Ramban, however. The Ramban (24:7) apparently understood that Avraham did not know Rivkah was Yitzchak's intended bride, for had he known, he would have sent Eliezer to Charan specifically to bring her. If Avraham did not know about Rivkah, he certainly was not waiting for her.

**Brachah Means Increase.** The key to all of these questions lies in the meaning of the word ברוך. Rav Chaim of Volozhin (Nefesh Hachaim 2:2) writes that ברוך is not an expression of praise, as is commonly thought. Its true meaning is increase and addition. When Yaakov offered his gift to Eisav, he said קח נא את ברכתי - *please take my brachah* (Vayishlach 33:11), meaning a gift that would add to Eisav's wealth. Hashem promises וברך את לחמך - *He will bless your bread* (Mishpatim 23:25), meaning He will increase our sustenance, and וברך פרי בטנך - *He will bless the fruit of your womb* (Eikev 7:13), meaning He will increase the number of our children. In these and countless other places, brachah cannot mean praise. It can only mean increase.

With this, the difference between Yitzchak and Eliezer becomes clear. Yitzchak learned from his father and followed his ways as a talmid, but he also brought the quality of ברוך into his avodas Hashem. After mastering his father's teachings, he went on to forge his own path, becoming a source of new ways of serving Hashem. This is the meaning of Chazal's teaching (Berachos 26b) that אברהם תקן תפלת שחרית - *Avraham instituted Shacharis*, while יצחק תקן תפלת מנחה - *Yitzchak instituted Minchah*. Rabbeinu Menachem Rekanati (Noach 11:26) explains that Avraham served Hashem through the middah of chessed, while Yitzchak, who received everything from his father, served Hashem through an entirely different middah, gevurah.

This ability to build new structures of Torah and avodas Hashem is what set Yitzchak apart from Eliezer. Eliezer mastered his master's Torah, but he could not create a Torah path of his own. The very drasha that praises him says it precisely: דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו, he drew from his master's Torah and passed it on to others, without adding any insight of his own. He gained control over his yetzer hara, but the Midrash says כמותו, just like Avraham. His strength was a duplicate of Avraham's strength, and he did not have the spiritual tools to go beyond it.

**The Curse of Slavery.** The limitation on Eliezer's greatness was a direct result of his being a slave. It was rooted in the curse Noach placed upon his ancestor: ארור כנען עבד עבדים יהיה לאחיו - *cursed is Canaan, a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers* (Noach 9:25). The Ohr Hatzafun (essay Hasheleimus Tamid Bereishisah) writes that as a result of what Cham did to Noach, his descendants were forever marked with the lowly nature of slaves. It became so deeply ingrained in them that even the fire of Torah study could not remove it, and this can be seen in Eliezer, Avraham's faithful servant. A slave's entire being is subordinate to his master, and he has no independent existence of his own.

This explains Avraham's words, בני ברוך ואתה ארור. Yitzchak was ברוך in the fullest sense, possessing the potential for unlimited growth in avodas Hashem, while Eliezer was ארור, bound by the curse of Canaan to be a servant to his master. A *ben bayis* of Avraham might have been suitable for a son who would only preserve Avraham's ways, but not for a son who would build upon them. Despite all her fine qualities, Eliezer's daughter was not fit to be Yitzchak's wife. To continue the path Avraham had forged, the next generation needed the same quality of independent growth that Avraham and Yitzchak possessed. This also explains why the Baalei Tosafos joined Eliezer's descent from Cham together with his being a slave. They are really one flaw, since the slavery itself is the curse of Canaan.

So Avraham sent Eliezer to his family in Charan. Although they did not excel in yiras Shamayim or righteousness, they were free of the stifling nature of slavery. There was nothing inherently flawed in their souls that would prevent them from growing independently in avodas Hashem. Eliezer carried out his mission faithfully, and Hashem led him to Rivkah. She was devoted to chessed and had fine middos, but she also did more than what was asked of her. Eliezer asked only for a little water, and she added on her own, גם לגמליך אשאב - *I will draw for your camels too* (Chayei Sarah 24:19). This is the very quality of ברוך, adding beyond what one is given. Eliezer realized she was the ideal choice, and with her the foundation of Klal Yisrael was laid.

**Akeidas Yitzchak, the Proving Ground.** Now the other questions can be answered as well. Avraham could not choose a wife for Yitzchak until it was clear what direction Yitzchak's avodas Hashem would take and how great he would become. That was revealed at Akeidas Yitzchak, when his enormous power of *mesirus nefesh* came to the fore, and only then could Avraham look for a partner who would complement it.

It was at the Akeidah that Yitzchak showed he was truly ברוך, that his avodas Hashem was his own and went beyond what he had received from his father. He did not passively submit to being brought on Avraham's mizbeach. Chazal (Yalkut Shimoni 101) relate that he took an active part in all the preparations. Father and son gathered the stones together, prepared the fire together, and gathered the wood together. Avraham acted as if he were preparing his son's wedding, and Yitzchak acted as if he were building his own chuppah. In a sense, the Akeidah was Yitzchak's chuppah, and only after it could Avraham turn to the real one. Yitzchak also showed his eagerness to fulfill the mitzvah in the most complete way. Abba, he said, tie my hands and feet well, lest I flinch when the knife touches me and ruin the shechitah, making me unfit to be a korban. Be careful not to make me blemished. Abba, act quickly to fulfill the will of the Creator (compare Tanchuma Vayeira 13 and Bereishis Rabbah 56:8). This is what the Torah teaches with the gematria of בכל and בן. It is not telling us that Avraham had a son, which is already known. It is telling us what kind of son he was. Yitzchak was the embodiment of בכל, complete and perfected in every aspect of avodas Hashem. Once Avraham saw this at the Akeidah, he knew it was time to find him a

wife. This is why the gematria is connected specifically to finding Yitzchak a wife, וכיון שהיה לו בן היה צריך להשיאו אשה. This also answers the question of the Maharam Shick. Avraham did not delay the mitzvah. Before Yitzchak's greatness was revealed, the mitzvah could not be fulfilled properly, and once it was revealed, Avraham acted immediately.

This fits in nicely with Rashi (Vayeira 22:20), who writes that it was on his return from Har Hamoriah that Avraham first began to think about marrying off Yitzchak, considering even the daughters of Aner, Eshkol and Mamrei. Rashi gives a different reason for the thought, that Avraham realized Yitzchak could have died without children, but the turning point is the same. The shidduch began with the Akeidah.

**One Last Thought.** This is where Eliezer's reckoning fell short. He sat and weighed his daughter's virtues, ראויה היא או אינה ראויה, as if a shidduch were a matter of tallying good qualities. Avraham first asked a different question, whether her nature could match the path of growth Yitzchak was destined to take. The same holds for anyone building a home. The first thing to understand is the other person's nature and life goals, and whether they match one's own. Other qualities and talents matter, but only as enhancements of what is already there.

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**When Does Hadlakas Neiros Bring in Shabbos?**

By CS -- Based primarily on

**The Radiance of Shabbos** by **Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen**

When Yitzchak brought Rivkah into Sarah's tent, the Torah says ויבאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו - *Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother* (Chayei Sarah 24:67). Rashi, citing the Midrash, explains that while Sarah was alive there was נר דלוק מערב שבת לערב שבת - a candle burning from one Erev Shabbos to the next. The light ceased after Sarah's death and returned when Rivkah entered the tent.

Hadlakas Neiros remained a central part of the Jewish home. But beyond providing light for Shabbos, it ordinarily marks the moment when an Ashkenazic woman personally accepts Shabbos. Exactly when does that happen? May she extinguish the match after lighting? What if she still needs to daven Minchah, eat or travel? Can she light without accepting Shabbos, and does her acceptance affect the rest of the family?

**When Does She Accept Shabbos?**

Rav Moshe Isserles (c. 1530–1572), the Rema, writes והמנהג שאותה אשה המדלקת מקבלת שבת בהדלקה - the custom is that the woman who lights accepts Shabbos through Hadlakas Neiros (O.C. 263:10).

Under Ashkenazic practice, a woman first lights and then recites the berachah. Ordinarily, a berachah precedes a mitzvah, *oveir la'asiyasan*, but here reciting it first would mean accepting Shabbos before lighting the candles. The Rema therefore explains that she covers her eyes or the light after lighting, recites the berachah, and then uncovers her eyes to benefit from the light, so that the berachah still precedes the enjoyment of the candles (O.C. 263:5).

Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829–1908), the Aruch HaShulchan, explains that after lighting she may extinguish the match and then recite the berachah: שפיר יכולות לכבות ואחר כך יברכו - they may extinguish and afterward recite the berachah, because דזהו פשיטא דקודם הברכה לא הוי קבלת שבת עדיין - before the berachah she has clearly not yet accepted Shabbos (Aruch HaShulchan 263:13–14). Thus, she may also relight a candle that has gone out before reciting the berachah. After completing the lighting, when she recites the berachah, she accepts Shabbos and may no longer perform ordinary melachah.

This discussion follows Ashkenazic practice. Many Sephardic authorities, including Rav Ovadia Yosef, rule that the berachah precedes lighting, although Sephardic customs are not uniform (*Yabia Omer* II, O.C. 16).

**What May She Still Do After Accepting Shabbos?**

Her acceptance is effective immediately, even before sunset, and ordinary melachah becomes prohibited to her. There is, however, a narrower question concerning activities that Chazal permitted during *bein hashmashos*, the twilight period. For example, the Shulchan Aruch permits asking a non-Jew during *bein hashmashos* to perform certain activities needed for a mitzvah or an important Shabbos preparation (O.C. 261:1).

The Poskim disagree whether a woman who has accepted Shabbos early may rely on these leniencies. Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen concludes that in a case of need she may rely on the lenient position and perform an activity otherwise permitted during *bein hashmashos* (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, pp. 35–36). Thus, personal acceptance of Shabbos does not necessarily make every halacha identical to the situation after nightfall.

**Eating After Hadlakas Neiros**

Once a woman has lit, recited the berachah and accepted Shabbos, she generally may not eat or drink until she makes or hears Kiddush. The Shulchan Aruch states אסור לטעום כלום קודם שיקדש אפילו מים - one may not taste anything before Kiddush, even water (O.C. 271:4). Rav Cohen notes a limited exception: if she is very thirsty, she may drink water until sunset. If she knows beforehand that she will need to eat after lighting and does not intend to make Kiddush then, she should make a *tenai* before lighting that she is not yet accepting Shabbos. She may then eat until sunset (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 36).

**What If She Still Wants to Daven Minchah?**

For a woman who wishes to daven Minchah on Friday, the proper order is to daven before lighting. Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838–1933), the Mishnah Berurah, writes ותתפלל מנחה תחלה דהואיל דכבר קבלה שבת שוב א"א להתפלל תפלה של חול - she should first daven Minchah, because once she has accepted Shabbos she can no longer daven a weekday tefillah (Mishnah Berurah 263:43).

If she must light before davening Minchah, Rav Cohen explains that she may make a *tenai* that she is not accepting Shabbos through the lighting and then daven Minchah afterward (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 37). The Mishnah Berurah also discusses the alternative of davening Maariv twice, with the second Shemoneh Esrei serving as *tashlumin* for a missed Minchah.

**Can She Light Without Accepting Shabbos?**

The Rema expressly allows a woman to separate the mitzvah of lighting from her personal acceptance of Shabbos: אם לא שתתנה תחלה, ואפילו תנאי בלב סגי - unless she stipulates beforehand, and even a mental stipulation suffices (O.C. 263:10). She may therefore make a verbal or mental *tenai* before lighting that Shabbos will not begin for her with Hadlakas Neiros.

The Magen Avraham, Rav Avraham Gombiner (c. 1635–1682), cautions דאין להתנות כי אם לצורך מאחר שיש חולקין - one should make such a stipulation only when necessary, because some authorities disagree that it is effective (Magen Avraham 263:20; see Mishnah

Berurah 263:44). A *tenai* is therefore not simply a matter of ordinary convenience. Rav Cohen gives examples of genuine need: completing preparations for the mikveh; traveling to the home where the Friday-night meal will be eaten; transportation after lighting, such as to the Kosel; davening Minchah; eating before Kiddush; or an urgent trip to the hospital (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, pp. 37–38).

**Does a Tenai Change the Order of the Berachah?**

One might reason that if a woman makes a *tenai* not to accept Shabbos through her berachah, she should revert to the usual order of reciting the berachah before performing the mitzvah. Rav Cohen explains that she does not. Even with a *tenai*, she follows the established Ashkenazic practice: she lights first and recites the berachah afterward (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 60). The stipulation affects when Shabbos begins for her, not how she performs Hadlakas Neiros.

**Which Lights Bring in Shabbos?**

A woman may switch on numerous lights throughout the house in preparation for Shabbos, but doing so does not itself constitute her principal Hadlakas Neiros or acceptance of Shabbos. The Rema writes ועיקר הדלקה תלויה בנרות שמדליקין על השולחן אבל לא בשאר הנרות שבבית - the principal lighting depends on the candles lit at the table, not on other lights elsewhere in the home (O.C. 263:10).

The practical point is that the ordinary electric lights needed throughout the home should be turned on before Hadlakas Neiros. Once she has recited the berachah and accepted Shabbos, she may no longer turn them on herself unless she made an effective *tenai*. Her *kabbalas Shabbos* is ordinarily associated with the principal Hadlakas Neiros and its berachah, not with the other lights turned on beforehand.

**What If a Man Lights?**

The rule is different when a man performs Hadlakas Neiros. The Magen Avraham writes ואם האיש מדליק ליכא מנהגא ומותר במלאכה ומ"מ טוב להתנות - when a man lights, there is no established custom that he thereby accepts Shabbos, and he remains permitted to perform melachah, although it is preferable to make a *tenai* (Magen Avraham 263:18; Mishnah Berurah 263:42).

There is also a difference in the order of the berachah. Since a man does not ordinarily accept Shabbos by reciting the berachah, he follows the usual rule of *oveir la'asiyasan*: he recites the berachah first and then lights. An Ashkenazic woman continues to follow her established practice of lighting first, even when she has made a *tenai* (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 60). Hadlakas Neiros and *kabbalas Shabbos* are closely connected, but they are not inherently the same act.

**Does Her Acceptance Bind the Household?**

The Rema continues אבל שאר בני הבית מותרין במלאכה עד ברכו - the other members of the household remain permitted to perform melachah until *Barechu* (O.C. 263:10). Thus, when a woman accepts Shabbos through Hadlakas Neiros, her husband and the rest of the household do not automatically accept Shabbos with her. Rav Cohen adds that even if a man lights and personally accepts Shabbos through his lighting, his wife and other household members do not thereby accept it with him (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 39).

The Rema's words עד ברכו refer to the congregation's acceptance of Shabbos through Maariv, which, according to the customary practice of his time, occurred at *Barechu*. This introduces a separate question: whether acceptance through tefillah, particularly by the husband or the community, can bind others who have not yet personally accepted Shabbos.

**What If the Husband Accepts Shabbos Through Tefillah?**

Rav Yair Chaim Bacharach (1638–1702), the Chavos Yair, in *Mekor Chaim* (O.C. 263:17), maintains that when the husband accepts Shabbos through tefillah, his wife and household are drawn after his acceptance. Rav Shmuel Wosner likewise adopts a stringent position (*Shevet HaLevi* VII:35). On this view, the wife must complete her melachah and light before her husband's acceptance of Shabbos through tefillah.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (1895–1986), however, distinguishes between a husband's personal acceptance and an established family practice (*Igros Moshe*, O.C. III:38). He explains that a husband cannot ordinarily impose his own *kabbalas Shabbos* upon his wife merely by accepting Shabbos himself. However, where the husband has an established practice of accepting Shabbos early as a mitzvah of *tosefes Shabbos*, or to avoid performing melachah too close to Shabbos, his wife is also expected to follow that practice.

Summer early Shabbos is often different. A congregation may daven early simply because otherwise the Friday-night meal would begin very late. Where the early tefillah is principally for convenience, Rav Moshe holds that the wife and family need not accept Shabbos when the husband does. She may continue performing melachah for herself, although she should not ordinarily perform melachah specifically for him, such as ironing his shirt after he has accepted Shabbos.

Other authorities are more lenient concerning the effect of a husband's acceptance on his household (see *Minchas Yitzchak* I:24; *The Radiance of Shabbos*, pp. 39–40). The fact that a husband has davened an early Maariv therefore does not, by itself, determine when his wife must accept Shabbos. The nature of his acceptance and the family's established practice also matter.

**When the Community Accepts Shabbos**

The Shulchan Aruch rules אם רוב הקהל קבלו עליהם שבת, המיעוט נמשכים אחריהם על כרחם - if most of the community has accepted Shabbos, the minority is drawn after them even against its will (O.C. 263:12). In a community with one established shul, individuals could not simply continue treating the time as weekday after the community had accepted Shabbos. The stage of tefillah constituting communal acceptance depends upon the established practice, and need not always be *Barechu* (see Mishnah Berurah 263:58).

Rav Cohen explains that the application differs in many contemporary communities with several established shuls or minyanim. Even if most people happen to daven in one shul, those in other established minyanim generally are not forced to accept Shabbos at the same time (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 41). The older rule may still apply where there is only one functioning shul or minyan, such as a camp, bungalow colony or hotel. Rav Cohen notes that many authorities regard everyone there as bound by the community's acceptance, although particular circumstances may require a halachic ruling (*The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 42).

**Conclusion**

For an Ashkenazic woman, Hadlakas Neiros ordinarily marks the moment when Shabbos begins for her: she completes the lighting, extinguishes the match, recites the berachah and accepts Shabbos. A *tenai* can defer that acceptance in a case of need, but does not change her customary order of lighting and berachah. A man who lights

follows a different rule, while a husband's acceptance through tefillah and the acceptance of the community present separate questions.
The candle that returned when Rivkah entered Sarah's tent represented the restoration of Sarah's home. Just as the Shabbos light was associated with Sarah and returned when Rivkah became the *akeres habayis*, Hadlakas Neiros continues to occupy a special place in the Jewish home. For the woman lighting, it is not merely the kindling of a candle, but ordinarily the moment when she personally welcomes Shabbos.

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*Adapted from*
**משנת רבי אהרן על התורה** by **Rav Aharon Kotler** (1892-1962)

**Eliezer: The Torah of Middos and Derech Eretz**

**Why Is Eliezer's Story Repeated?**

The Torah devotes an extraordinary amount of space to Eliezer's mission to find a wife for Yitzchak. First it describes what happened, and then Eliezer repeats almost the entire account when he arrives at the home of Besuel and Lavan. Rashi (Chayei Sarah 24:42), quoting Chazal, explains:

יפה שיחתן של עבדי בתי אבות לפני המקום מתורתן של בנים שהרי פרשה של אליעזר כפולה בתורה והרבה גופי תורה לא ניתנו אלא ברמיזה - *The conversations of the servants of the Avos are more precious before Hashem than the Torah of their descendants, for the account of Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, while many fundamental laws are given only through allusion.*

This is difficult to understand. How can the conversations of a servant be more precious before Hashem than fundamental *halachos*? And why does the Torah repeat the entire account when so many important laws are taught through only a brief reference?

**The Torah of Derech Eretz**

The answer lies in the importance of *middos* and *derech eretz*. The Torah teaches not only what a person must do, but how he should think, speak and conduct himself. Chazal say דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה - *derech eretz preceded the Torah*. Proper conduct is not merely something desirable alongside Torah; it is part of the foundation upon which Torah life is built.

This is also why Sefer Bereishis is called ספר הישר - *the Book of the Upright*. The Avos were called *yesharim*, and their lives teach the *yashrus* with which a Torah Jew must conduct himself. Their greatness was expressed not only in their Avodah, but also in their relationships with others and in the ordinary details of daily life.

There is, however, an important difference between *halachah* and *derech eretz*. Many *halachos* can be expressed through definite rules. Proper *middos* and *derech eretz* cannot always be reduced to a fixed formula. אין קבועות כל כך בכל הפרטים ותלויות במצב הדברים ולפי הענין - *the proper conduct is not fixed in every detail, but depends upon the circumstances and the particular situation*. What is considerate in one situation may be thoughtless in another. The proper response depends upon the person involved, his feelings and the circumstances.

That is why הדרכה ושימוש תלמידי חכמים - *guidance and shimush talmidei chachamim* - are so important. One must learn not only the principles of proper conduct, but how great people apply them. The Torah therefore records the conversations and actions of the Avos and their households in extraordinary detail. Their conduct teaches lessons that could not be conveyed as effectively through a series of rules.

**Learning Middos from Others**

A person is also deeply influenced by those around him. Chazal ask איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם - *What is the proper path to which a person should attach himself?* Among the answers are חבר טוב - *a good friend* and שכן טוב - *a good neighbor* (Avos 2:9). A person who wishes to develop good *middos* must surround himself with people whose conduct he can learn from.

This is especially important in choosing a wife. The person with whom one builds a home becomes part of his daily environment and helps shape the next generation. Eliezer therefore looked for more than family standing or wealth. He sought the *middos* necessary for the home of Avraham and Yitzchak.

His test of Rivkah illustrates how much depends upon the details of conduct. Eliezer had proposed that the proper young woman would answer שתה וגם גמליך אשקה - *Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink*. Rivkah, however, first said שתה אדני - *Drink, my master*, and only after Eliezer finished drinking did she add גם לגמליך אשאב עד אם כלו לשתת - *I will also draw water for your camels until they have finished drinking*.

Her response displayed more than a willingness to perform *chesed*. By first attending to Eliezer and only afterward offering to water the camels, she showed consideration for his dignity and sensitivity to how a favor should be offered. True *chesed* requires understanding not only what another person needs, but how to give it without causing discomfort.

**עבד אברהם אנכי**

*Yashrus* is not limited to one's dealings with others. It also governs how a person regards and conducts himself. לא רק ביחס לחבירו אלא גם בנוגע לעצמו - *not only in relation to another person, but also in relation to oneself*. A person must recognize his own חשיבות - *his dignity and significance* - particularly as someone who has been given Torah. He should not lower himself through conduct unworthy of that dignity.

Yet recognizing one's true worth is very different from seeking honor. A person secure in his position has no need to exaggerate his importance before others. Eliezer provides a remarkable example. When he arrived at Besuel's home, he introduced himself with three words: עבד אברהם אנכי - *I am Avraham's servant* (24:34). Chazal derive from this very pasuk the principle מילתא דגנאי דאית בך קדים אמרה - *if there is something about yourself that might be viewed unfavorably, say it yourself first* (Bava Kamma 92b).

This was an extraordinary introduction. Eliezer was המשל בכל אשר לו - *the one who ruled over everything Avraham possessed*. Chazal describe him as דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו לאחרים - *one who drew from his master's Torah and gave it to others to drink* (Yoma 28b). He was a great *talmid chacham*, the administrator of Avraham's enormous household and his trusted representative.

He could easily have introduced himself through his accomplishments and responsibilities. Instead, he stated his position simply and truthfully: עבד אברהם אנכי. His greatness did not require embellishment. That too is *yashrus*.

**The Hidden Negiah**

Yet the Torah reveals another, more subtle aspect of Eliezer's character. When Avraham first instructed him to find a wife for Yitzchak, Eliezer asked perhaps the woman would not agree to follow him. Later, when recounting this conversation to Besuel's household, he said:

אולי לא תלך האשה אחרי - *Perhaps the woman will not follow me* (24:39). Rashi notes אלי כתיב - *the word is written defectively*, allowing it to be read as אלי, *to me*. Eliezer had a daughter, and he hoped that perhaps Avraham would consider her as a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham answered: בני ברוך ואתה ארור ואין ארור מדבק בברוך - *My son is blessed, while you are descended from one who was cursed, and one who is cursed cannot join with one who is blessed*.

This is astonishing. Eliezer was entirely devoted to Avraham. He carried out his mission faithfully, and Chazal describe him as having emerged from ארור - *cursed* - and entered ברוך - *blessed*. Yet even such a person could have a subtle personal interest affecting his judgment.

The Navi says כנען בידו מאזני מרמה - *Canaan has deceitful scales in his hand* (Hoshea 12:8). Chazal apply this description to Eliezer. He may sincerely have considered whether his daughter was a suitable match for Yitzchak. He was not necessarily attempting to deceive anyone. But because the question touched his own interests, his judgment could not be entirely free of *negiah*.

This is the opposite of complete *yashrus*. Even when a person believes that he is weighing a matter fairly, a personal interest may affect the scales without his realizing it. A person can be intelligent, sincere and devoted to the truth, yet still fail to recognize the influence of his own desires.

**Why the Torah Repeats the Story**

We can now better understand why the Torah records Eliezer's account a second time. It is precisely in his retelling that we hear עבד אברהם אנכי - *I am Avraham's servant*, and discover through אלי כתיב the subtle personal interest that lay beneath his earlier question. The first reveals his *yashrus* in presenting himself without exaggeration; the second shows how even a great person must examine himself for hidden *negios*.

Neither detail is incidental. They teach us to observe how a person speaks, what he emphasizes and what his choice of words may reveal about his character. These are lessons that cannot be taught adequately through rules alone. They require the detailed accounts of how people actually conducted themselves.

**From Derech Eretz to Kiddush Hashem**

There is a further lesson. דרכי קידוש השם והפכו חס ושלום - *the ways of Kiddush Hashem, and its opposite* - are also part of *derech eretz*. Here too, proper conduct depends upon the circumstances. A person must develop the judgment and sensitivity to recognize what כבוד שמים requires in each situation.

The ordinary details of conduct therefore have consequences far beyond the immediate situation. A person who trains himself in *yashrus*, sensitivity and proper *middos* is preparing himself for greater tests. But one who becomes accustomed to lowering himself or compromising proper conduct to obtain what he wants may eventually fail when much greater matters of כבוד שמים are at stake.

This is the deeper meaning of יפה שיחתן של עבדי בתי אבות לפני המקום מתורתן של בנים. The Torah repeats Eliezer's conversations because they teach us how Torah shapes a person's character, judgment and conduct. These lessons cannot all be stated in a few words or reduced to a fixed set of rules. They must be learned through the lives of those who lived them.

The conversations of the servants of the Avos are themselves Torah, because they teach us not only what a Jew must do, but what kind of person he must become.

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**What Comes First: Love or Marriage?**

**By Rabbi YY Jacobson**

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

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 do, "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 beckoning 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, tapping 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 beckons 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 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 to 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] Berachot 26b [11] See Talmud ibid. Rabbi Yossi son of Rabbi Chanina said: The prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices... It has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Yossi ben Chanina: Avraham instituted the morning prayer, as it says, "Avraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood." Yitzchak instituted the afternoon prayer, as it says, "Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field at dusk." Yaakov instituted the evening prayer, as it says, "He encountered [vayifga] the place," and "pegiah" means prayer. Rabbi Yitzchak Zaler, in his commentary Minchas Yitzchak to the Talmud ibid. adds a nice hint in their names: The second letter of our three forefathers are: אברהם), 'צ' (יצחק ב')), and יעקב) 'ע), alluding to the Hebrew terms: "בוקר" (morning), "צהריים" (afternoon), and "ערב" (evening). These correspond to the time of day at which each one instituted a different prayer. [12] See Beis Yosef Orach Chaim Chapter 4: A man upon awakening in the morning is like a new creature, as it is written: "The souls are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:23). Cf. Torah Or Lech Lecha Maamar Magen Avraham. Likkutei Torah Behaaloscha Maamar Miksha. [13] Maamarei Admur Hazaken Haktzarim p. 553. [14] Genesis 19: 27 [15] See Ethics of the Fathers ch. 5 [16] 40:27 [17] Genesis 32:24 [18] Ibid. 31:38;40 [19] Gen 28:11 [20] Ibid. 12 [21] Genesis 28:16 [22] See Rambam Laws of Avodah Zarah chapter 1. Rashi Genesis 24:7. Introduction of Meiri to Pirkei Avos. [23] Genesis 23:6 [24] Genesis chapter 26 [25] He also lives longer than his father and child: 180, not 175 or 147. [26] Ibid. 24:63 [27] See Talmud Berachos 6b: One should always be careful to pray the Mincha prayer for Elijah was only answered (when he prayed for a fire to come down and consume his sacrifice) during the Mincha prayer. Rabbi Moshe ibn Machir, in Seder Hayom, Page 32, explains: The prayer of Mincha deserves to be answered because it is a time when everyone is busy in their work and carried away with their doings and needs. Hence, when during such a time one instead runs after the needs of G-d and prays and beseeches before the Master of the world—thus recognizing his Master's greatness, while seeing himself only as a dedicated servant devoted to His service—it is appropriate to recognize this humble man who is careful with the word of G-d whom it is fit to look at him.