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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON CHAYEI SARAH - 5765

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From: Kerem B'Yavneh Online [feedback@kby.org]
Sent: November 04, 2004 To: Parsha KBY Subject:
Parshat Chayei Sara
Parshat Chayei Sara
Eliezer's Prayer
RAV YONAH METZGER Shlita
Chief Rabbi of Israel

The story of Yitzchak and Rivka's marriage arrangements is striking! After Eliezer finished speaking, the Torah writes: "Then Lavan and Betuel answered and said, 'The matter stemmed from Hashem!... Here Rivka is before you; take her and go.'" (Bereishit 24:50-51) The question arises: Lavan and Betuel were idol worshippers, so where did they suddenly find the faith in Hashem to declare: "The matter stemmed from Hashem?"

On the pasuk: "The matter stemmed from Hashem," Chazal teach in Midrash Rabbah: "From where did it stem? From the Mountain of Moria." How is the Mountain of Moria connected to Rivka's marriage?

In order to understand this, we need to study a little more deeply the signs Eliezer employed to reveal the proper match for Yitzchak: "Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Please tip over your jug so I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will even water your camels,' her will You have designated for your servant, for Yitzchak." (Bereishit 24:14)

Yet, the Rambam rules: "Anyone who creates omens for himself: 'If such and such should happen to me – I will do so and so; if it will not happen to me – I will not,' like Eliezer the servant of Avraham and anything similar – it is all forbidden ... and he is lashed." (Hil. Avoda Zara 11:14) The Ra'avad disagrees with him and writes: "This is a great error, since this thing is certainly permitted ... How could he attribute to such righteous ones this sin?"

It would appear that the Ra'avad's comment is correct. Whoever studies carefully what Eliezer said will find that he acted appropriately. He did not say: 'If Rivka does such and such, it is an omen that she is the one.' He also did not request a sign that involves "nichush" (omen-giving) without any logic or reason. The Rambam himself explains in the previous Halacha: "It is forbidden to employ nichush like idol worshippers ... What is considered nichush? For example: 'Since my bread fell out of my mouth or my staff fell out of my hand – I will not go to a certain place, and if I shall go my desire will not be fulfilled.'"

These signs are irrational, because there is no connection between the action and the sign, therefore the omen is forbidden. However, Eliezer did not guess at all; he just tested the girl's kindness. She rushed to the well time and again until the camels finished drinking without saying a word in protest, even though there were ten strong men on hand who were observing her actions and not lifting a finger to help. After a sign like this, there is no need for any additional signs, neither of her lineage

nor of her beliefs, as her kindness is totally compatible with Avraham's house of good deeds.

The Sforno views Eliezer's words as a prayer. He prayed that this should happen; not that he relied, Heaven forbid, on an omen. When Chazal said: "Any nichush that is not like Eliezer's nichush is not nichush" (Chulin 95b), their intention is that the person says things similar to Eliezer. However, he does not say it in a praying manner, but instead as a superstitious omen, that if such a thing should happen – I will do such and such.

Indeed, it is clear that Eliezer's words are a prayer, as it says: "He said, 'Hashem, G-d of my master ... may You so arrange it for me this day that You do kindness with my master Avraham ... and may I know through her that You have done kindness with my master.'" (Bereishit 24:12,15) Rashi explains: "This is a manner of supplication – inform me through her." The Siftei Chachamim comments: "Not that through the sign he should know, but instead this is the beginning of a new phrase. He begged of Hashem that He will inform him through [the girl] that He bestowed kindness."

If so, the Rambam's intention is that whoever speaks like Eliezer – just not in praying manner but as an omen – is lashed. Had Eliezer told Lavan and Betuel that he discovered Rivka through nichush or through sorcery, they would have refused to give her to him, because it would seem odd to them. When they heard that he prayed to Hashem, he proved to them that indeed: "The matter stemmed from Hashem!"

Therefore, Chazal emphasize, "The matter stemmed from Hashem" – from the Mountain of Moria. Avraham did not, Heaven forbid, sacrifice his son to the Molech like the rest of the gentiles. Instead he prayed there, as we say in Selichot: "He who answered Avraham Avinu at the Mountain of Moria should answer us." If so, Hashem – who answered Avraham at the Mountain of Moria – answered Eliezer's prayer. What emerges is that the Mountain of Moria is the source of both Avraham's and Eliezer's prayers. Therefore, Chazal said: "The matter stemmed from Hashem – from the Mountain of Moria." Just as Avraham's prayer was answered at the Mountain of Moria, so, too, Eliezer's prayer was also answered.

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From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: November 04, 2004 To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chayei Sarah

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chayei Sarah

A Slip of the Tongue Can Mean The Difference Between Life and Death Rashi [Bereshis 23:2] cites the reason given by the Medrash Tanchuma for the juxtaposition of the "Binding of Yitzchak" with the death of Sarah: "Through hearing the news of the Binding, that her son was readied for slaughter and was nearly slaughtered (kim'at shelo nishchat), her soul flew from her and she died."

The Sifsei Chachomim makes an inference from Rashi's use of the expression "kim'at sehlo nishchat" (which literally means "he was almost NOT slaughtered"). The simple translation of Rashi is that Sarah was shocked by the fact that Yitzchak was almost slaughtered. However strictly speaking, that is not what the words of Rashi are saying.

The Sifsei Chachomim therefore explain the scenario as follows: The angel came from Mt. Moriah and began describing to Sarah what happened at the Akeida. He told her something to the effect that "your son was slaughtered, but he was not killed." The angel should have told Sarah "I have good news for you. Your son is fine. He was almost slaughtered." Rather than saying it that way, the angel began with the dramatic statement "Your son was on the verge of being slaughtered." Sarah died before he had a chance to add the words "but he wasn't."

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz (1874-1936) comments that we see how someone - even an angel - can have the opportunity to deliver good

news, but simply spoil the whole message because of the way he chooses the order of his words. The angel of "good news" became the angel of death.

The lesson here for us all is that we must be extremely careful in how we speak. So many times, people mean no harm whatsoever. But they wind up saying things to people in a way that is painful to them. There is no ill will. Their intent is not to be mean. It is just a matter of carelessness or, at worst, stupidity. But one is not allowed to be stupid. Rav Yisrael Salanter used to say that the first mitzvah in the Torah is "Do not be a fool!"

Sometimes, merely the way the words are said makes all the difference in the world. Sometimes people are so terribly hurt as a result of carelessness in the expression of certain ideas, as a result of someone not thinking something through.

We need to sensitize ourselves to all that is going on in the homes and the minds of our listeners. We must think before we talk and think while we talk. We must know what to say, who to say it to, how to say it, and in what situations it should not be said.

As we see from this Rashi, sometimes just a slip of the tongue can mean the difference between life and death.

Avraham Arose From The Presence of His Dead

The Minchas Ani (the Chumash Commentary of Rav Yakov Ettlinger [1798-1871]) asks what is the meaning of "Avraham arose from the presence of his dead" [Bereshis 23:3]? The Minchas Ani says that Avraham Avinu suffered a terrible tragedy. He just lost his wife. In a sense, his wife was the only "victim" of the Akeidah test.

This could have been a terribly traumatic spiritual experience for Avraham. He just returned from the Akeidah where he heard G-d testify "Now I know that you are one who fears the L-rd" [Bereshis 22:12]. He is at the apogee of his career and his life. He comes home only to find his wife dead - a result, at least indirectly, of this very Akeidah. This could have been an event that could have set him back emotionally and spiritually to the extent that he would never recover. He might always look at the Akeidah, not as the high point of his career, but as the cause of his wife's death.

But the Torah testifies that Avraham "got up" from the presence of his dead. He arose from this experience. He had the inner strength - despite this trauma that he had just experienced - to arise from the situation and even to grow from it. He did not let this situation beat him down.

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dhoffman@torah.org These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #436 Daughters: Shidduchim & Parental Wishes.

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From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: November 03, 2004 Subject: Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Turning Grey into Gold to subscribe, email weekly@torahweb.org for anything else, email: torahweb@torahweb.org <http://www.torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN TURNING GREY INTO GOLD

A yeshiva student of Novardok was thrown into jail by the Communists. They did not allow him to have seforim in jail, but did permit him to receive food parcels. His family decided to wrap the food in a daf of

gemarah. The question arose, should they use an old frayed gemarah or a new one? The answer was a new one, as the older one has a greater degree of kedusha (sanctity).

Reverence for the past begins with Avraham Avinu. The Torah teaches, "And Avraham had become old and advanced in days, and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything" (Braishis 24:1). The Talmud (Bava Metzia 87a) teaches that until Avraham, there were no visual signs of old age, and Avraham prayed for recognizable old age to come into existence, and Hashem responded in the affirmative. The medrash (Braishis Rabbah 65) teaches that Avraham argued before Hashem that a man and his son could walk together and no one would know whom to honor. Thus signs of aging were a gift from Hashem, to enable the younger generation to show reverence and respect for a life of accomplishment. Grey hair is not to be camouflaged but to be flaunted as a crown of glory. This is in sharp contrast to the subsequent teaching of the gemarah, that until Yaakov there was no illness. Yaakov prayed to Hashem that mankind be afforded a warning that their end might be approaching, enabling them to put their life and affairs in order in preparation for the next world.

The old age of Avraham is one of blessing, fulfillment, and accomplishment. This can only be understood from a spiritual perspective. From a physical perspective the senior years are marked by a significant diminution of physical strength, prowess, and accomplishment. Avraham wanted old age so that the elderly would be venerated. Indeed, Rav Yochanan would greet and rise before the elderly of even the non-Jewish community (Kiddushin 33a), stating that they have weathered the various storms of life, and have graduated from the school of hard knocks.

The Gemarah (Bava Kamma 97b) teaches that the coin of Avraham Avinu had an elderly couple on one side, and a young couple on the other. Rashi understands this to refer to Avraham and Sarah on one side, and Yitzchak and Rivka on the reverse. The Maharsha, however, explains the coin to refer exclusively to Avraham and Sarah. To enable them to have Yitzchak they were miraculously transformed to younger individuals. They underwent a renewal.

Perhaps this is the reason for the custom as found in many siddurim that recommend that upon completion of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, one recite the verse, "V'Avraham zakein bo bayomim, v'Hashem beirach es Avraham bakol" - "now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything" (Braishis 24:1). Rosh Chodesh is a time of renewal. Renewal of the moon, and our taking note of Hashem's renewal of nature affords us an opportunity to renew our relationship with Him. In addition, as Avraham and Sarah experienced renewal so must we.

While their renewal was more physical in nature, our rabbis note that a spiritual transformation occurs as well. The Mishna (Kinim 3:6) makes a sharp distinction between the aging of "amei haaretz", the unlearned, who seek but personal gratification, and the learned. The former, commensurate with the lessening of their physical capacity and pleasures, experience a void and emptiness that robs them of their meaning and purpose in life. In contrast, the latter, despite the same bodily decline, their attainment of spiritual endeavors increases and flourishes, fulfilling the verse "od yenuvun b'saiva" - "they will still be fruitful in old age, even vigorous and fresh", (Psalms 92:15).

The Abarbanel in his explanation of the mitzvah of yovel (Jubilee year - Vayikra 25:8-13) echoes the above theme. He teaches that the Torah is alluding to the fifty years of working on behalf of family and society. The remaining years are to be an opportunity for the personal self-actualization that was often limited in one's earlier years. Enrolling in a kollel for senior citizens, attending shiurim and bringing satisfaction to others through many different chessed opportunities, can adorn one's life with a new sense of personal growth, purpose, and meaning.

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TORAH PERSPECTIVES ON CLONING BY RABBI CHAIM JACHTER

There has been considerable debate throughout the world regarding the propriety of cloning. The Torah world has also engaged in considerable discussion of this important issue, and a significant literature grappling with this issue from a Torah perspective has emerged. In this essay we shall summarize the basic Hashkafic (philosophical) and Halachic debates that have emerged regarding this issue. This essay also incorporates insights from my TABC Talmidim to whom I presented Shiurim on this topic, especially the 5764 "Y9" Gemara Shiur.

Hashkafic Perspectives

Rav Chanoch (Kenneth) Waxman of Alon Shvut frames the fundamental Hashkafic issues regarding cloning in an essay that appears in Volume 9 of the Torah U'madda Journal. He notes that the core issue is whether cloning constitutes an appropriate exercise of humanity's mandate to conquer the world (Bereshit 1:28) or an inappropriate intrusion into the world order similar to the sin of Kilayim (the prohibition to interbreed various species of animals and plants).

On the one hand, Hashem commanded man to be fruitful and multiply and conquer the world. The Ramban (commentary to the Torah, ad. loc.) writes that this Biblical verse authorizes man to engage in invasive actions in Hashem's world such as removing metals from the ground. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik in his great essay "The Lonely Man of Faith" writes that space exploration is a legitimate expression of our mandate to conquer the world. On the other hand, the Ramban (commentary to Vayikra 19:19) explains that Kilayim is forbidden because it constitutes an inappropriate reordering of Hashem's world.

Thus, the basic Hashkafic question regarding cloning is whether it is analogous to Kilayim or space exploration. Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv (a leading Israeli Posek) is quoted by Dr. Abraham S. Abraham (see Torah U'madda Journal 9:195 and 216) as asserting that cloning violates the spirit of the Torah, as it is similar to Kilayim. In addition, Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 15:45:4) strenuously objects to cloning. On the other hand, Rav J. David Bleich (a leading American Posek who serves as a Rosh Kollel at Yeshiva University) writes (Tradition, Spring 1998) that the Halacha could potentially approve of some products of cloning if governments throughout the world strictly monitor and control cloning procedures to ensure that it is used only for moral purposes. In addition, Rav Moshe David Tendler wrote in a letter printed in the New York Times (12/12/97) that cloning is advisable under certain circumstances.

Rav Bleich and Rav Tendler's approach seems to be supported by comments made by the Meiri (an important Rishon who lived during the thirteenth century) in his commentary to Sanhedrin 67b. The Meiri writes that making creatures asexually is permitted, since anything performed naturally is not defined as a prohibited act of Kishuf (sorcery). It is incredible that the Meiri notes (in the thirteenth century!) that one who understands how nature functions is aware of the fact that it is possible to produce beings asexually.

Dr. Eitan Fiorino of Teaneck (in the aforementioned volume of the Torah U'madda Journal) articulates Hashkafic objections to cloning. He argues that cloning violates the Biblical and Talmudic model of reproduction since cloning does not involve the union of two individuals or of their genetic material. The Gemara (Niddah 31a) speaks of Hashem, father, and mother being the three partners in the creation of man. Moreover, Dr. Fiorino argues that cloning radically alters the family structure, which has the potential to further destabilize society beyond the damage inflicted by the high divorce rate, surrogate mothers, and homosexual unions. Other potential problems include cloning for profit, for spare parts or other uses, and differential access to cloning among socioeconomic classes. Other authors mention the potential nightmare of evil individuals such as Osama bin Laden cloning themselves on a large scale.

On the other hand, Rav Bleich (in the aforementioned essay in Tradition) argues that if cloning were conducted in a manner that is strictly supervised by government authority, cloning could potentially yield some positive products. These include cloned animals as well as tissue and organs for therapeutic purposes such as to produce bone marrow for someone afflicted with leukemia. Cloning animals is clearly permitted as is evident from Sanhedrin 65b, which we shall cite later in this essay.

Halachic Issues

Cloning raises a host of Halachic issues. These include the questions of whether Halacha regards a clone as human, whether a man who produces a child by cloning has fulfilled the Mitzva of Pru Urvu, and the propriety of an unmarried man or woman cloning himself or herself. A particularly tantalizing possibility has been raised that cloning can prevent a Mamzer/Mamzeret from passing his/her status to the next generation.

Is a Clone Human?

Poskim in the modern context are constantly challenged to precisely define Halachic concepts that have not been explicitly defined by earlier generations. For example, the discovery of electricity compels Poskim to precisely articulate the Halachic definition of fire - whether an incandescent light constitutes a fire despite the fact that there is no fuel consumption. The introduction of in vitro fertilization motivates Poskim to define whether motherhood is established by providing the genetic makeup of the child (i.e. by donating the egg) or by giving birth to the child. Rav Hershel Schachter once remarked that the emergence of new issues requires us to rigorously define each of the thirty-nine categories of forbidden labor on Shabbat. Similarly, cloning challenges Halachic experts to articulate a Halachic definition of humanity.

A potential Talmudic source to answer this question is the highly unusual passage regarding the creation of a Golem (Sanhedrin 65b). The Gemara says: "Rava stated: If they wish, Tzadikkim [Rashi: who are free of sin] could create a world. Rava created a man [Rashi: by using the book called Sefer Yetzirah that teaches how to combine the letters of the Divine Name] and he sent it to Rabi Zeira. Rabi Zeira spoke with it and it did not respond. Rabi Zeira then stated, "You are created by my colleague (see Maharsha ad. loc.), return to your dust," (i.e. die). Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah would sit every Friday and study the Sefer Yetzirah and create a calf that has reached a third of its potential development [this was considered a great delicacy in the times of the Gemara] and subsequently eat it."

My Y9 students understandably found this Gemara quite odd. We suggested that perhaps the entire reason that this passage is included in the Gemara is because Hashem wished to provide precedents and insights for many generations later regarding cloning.

At first glance, it would appear that this passage indicates that a clone is not human. Rava's Golem was not considered human, as Rabi Zeira "killed" it and the Gemara does not record any objection to this action. Thus, one might be tempted to argue that since a clone is not a product of sexual reproduction, it is not human. Indeed, the Chacham Zvi (Teshuvot Number 93) argues that Rava's Golem was not considered human because it was not created in a woman's womb.

This definition of humanity is problematic, as noted by the Radzhiner Rebbe (Sidrei Taharot Ohalot 5a), because it leads to the absurd conclusion that Adam Harishon was not human. Accordingly, we must search for a different definition of humanity. The Maharsha (commenting on Sanhedrin 65b) seems to say that the Golem created by Rava was not human because of its inability to speak. This approach seems rooted in Onkelos' translation of the Pasuk (Bereshit 2:7), "and man became a living being," as "and man became a talking being." This definition of humanity, though, appears problematic, as it would also lead to an absurd conclusion that one who is unable to talk due to an illness does not have the status of a human being. It appears that Rav J. David Bleich (in the aforementioned Tradition article) offers a very fine definition of humanity. He writes:

"The matter of identification as a member of a species is best summed up in a pithy comment attributed to Rav Chaim Soloveitchik. It is reported that Rav Chaim explained a certain Halachic concept by posing the following query: Why is a horse a horse? The answer is that a horse is a horse because its mother was of that species. For that reason the Mishna, Bechorot 5b, declares that the offspring of a kosher animal is kosher even if it has the appearance and physical attributes of a non-kosher animal and, conversely, the offspring of a non-kosher animal is non-kosher even if it has the appearance and physical attributes of a kosher animal. Thus, identity as a member of a particular species is determined not by distinguishing characteristics, but by birth.

Rav Bleich cites one of Rav Chaim's primary Talmidim, Rav Elchanan Wasserman (Kovetz He'arot 8:33), who argues that the principle articulated by the Mishnah in Bechorot (Yotzei Min HaMutar Mutar and Yotzei Min HaAsur Asur) applies to all areas of Halachah and not just to Kashrut. Accordingly, a clone is human because

it is created from a human being. Thus, Rav Bleich argues that the fundamental difference between a Golem and a clone is that a clone is a product of a human being and a Golem is not. It seems to this author that the Chazon Ish (Yoreh Deah 116:1) adopts this approach as well. Accordingly, the Golem is not human, whereas a clone is most definitely regarded as a human being.

Conclusion

Next week, Im Yirtzeh Hashem and Bli Neder, we shall conclude our discussion of Halachic perspectives on cloning.

From: Kol Torah [koltorah@koltorah.org] Sent: Friday, October 29, 2004 3:30 PM
To: koltorah@koltorah.org Subject: Kol Torah Parshat Vayera

TORAH PERSPECTIVES ON CLONING - PART 2

BY RABBI CHAIM JACHTER

Introduction Last week, we introduced the topic of Halachah and cloning. We discussed whether Halachah permits cloning and whether a clone has the Halachic status of a human being. This week, we shall conclude our discussion of this topic by exploring some of the Halachic ramifications of engaging in the process of cloning.

Does a Man fulfill his Mitzvah of Pru Urvu by cloning? A major issue to be discussed is whether a man fulfills his obligation of Pru Urvu by cloning. This issue depends on whether or whether one's clone is defined as his child according to Halacha. We must clarify that Halacha does not define parenthood solely based on biology. For example, if a Jewish man fathers a child with a Nochrin, he is not considered to be the Halachic father of the child. In order to put this question in proper perspective we must first examine the debate whether a child produced either through artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization (IVF) is defined as one's child according to Halacha. The Chelkat Mechokeik (Even Haezer 1:8) raises the question as to whether one is regarded as the Halachic father if his child is not conceived by a sexual act. The question is whether fatherhood is conferred by donating the semen or is a sexual act also necessary to create a paternal relationship. Rav J. David Bleich (in the Tradition article we cited last week) concludes that the majority of Poskim (including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and Rav Ovadia Yosef) rule that the semen donor is the Halachic father of the child. For an extensive list of Poskim who address this issue see Rav J. David Bleich, Contemporary Halachic Problems 4:240, footnote nine. Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 15:40) argues that even those who rule that one who fathers a child by artificial insemination is considered to be the Halachic father, would agree that one who conceives a child by IVF is not considered to be the child's Halachic father. He believes that one is defined as the father only when his semen is introduced directly into the wife's uterus and the fertilization occurs in the uterus. The procedure of IVF, argues Rav Waldenberg, differs too much from natural reproduction for Halacha to regard the man as the father. However, Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl (Sefer Assia 34:5) and Rav J. David Bleich (ad loc. p. 239) disagree with Rav Waldenberg and believe that the man who donates the sperm in the IVF procedure is considered the Halachic father even though fertilization occurs outside the womb. Rav Gedalia Orenstein (Techumin 24:156-159) presents a most convincing rebuttal of Rav Waldenberg's arguments.

Cloning, however, is different according to Rav Bleich. Rav Bleich argues (in the aforementioned Tradition article) that a man who donates body material for cloning is not considered the Halachic father, even if the clone was created from body material of both the husband and wife. Rav Bleich asserts that a man is not defined as the father if he has not donated semen to produce the child. Rav Bleich, though, notes that the Halacha might be different if the child is cloned from a sperm cell. Rav Yitzchak Sheilat (a leading Rebbe at Yeshivat Maaleh Adumim, a major Yeshivat Hesder), on the other hand, argues (Techumin 18:138-140) that a man who produces a child by cloning is considered the child's Halachic father. He cites the Minchat Chinuch (Mitzvah 1) who argues that the Mitzvah of Pru Urvu is fulfilled when one has children and not specifically by engaging in marital relations. Thus, Rav Sheilat argues that just as one fulfills the Mitzvah of Pru Urvu even if he produces children by artificial insemination or IVF, so too he fulfills this Mitzvah by cloning. Rav Sheilat does not believe that Halacha considers whether the child emerges from sperm cells or any other body material. Nonetheless, the basis of Rav Sheilat's approach is debatable as many Acharonim disagree with the Minchat Chinuch's assertion, especially in light of the Rambam's comments in Hilchot Ishut 15:1. On the other hand, the majority ruling that one fulfills Pru Urvu even with artificial insemination seems to accord with the view of the Minchat Chinuch.

Husband - Wife Cloning to Produce a Child Aside from ramifications regarding Yibbum and Chalitzah, the dispute between Rav Bleich and Rav Sheilat has profound implications. According to Rav Sheilat, it is appropriate for an infertile

couple to produce a child by cloning. On the other hand, Rav Bleich argues that it is not appropriate for an infertile couple to produce a child by cloning. Dr.

Avraham Steinberg and Dr. John Loike (in an essay that appears in the aforementioned issue of Tradition) present a fascinating ramification of the dispute between Rav Bleich and Rav Sheilat. Drs. Steinberg and Loike suggest that according to Rav Bleich's approach cloning might be a way for Mamzeirim to produce children in a manner that will not pass the stain of Mamzeirut to the next generation. If a man is not the Halachic father of his clone, his Mamzeir status is not passed to the next generation. This suggestion, Drs. Steinberg and Loike argue, is analogous to Rabi Tarfon's advice to a Mamzeir to marry a Shifcha Kenaanit as he will not be regarded as the Halachic father to their child (Kiddushin 69a). Indeed, Rabi Tarfon's ruling is codified in the Shulchan Aruch as normative Halacha (Shulchan Aruch Even Haezer 4:20).

Cloning of Single Individuals Rav Sheilat, however, strenuously objects to a single person cloning himself. Indeed, the Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 582) writes "Hashem wishes for people to be born from the union of a male and a female who unite in a kosher manner." The Chinuch clearly implies that Hashem does not want people to be created from a single male or female. Similarly, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in Nishmat Avraham 4:E.H.1:3) strongly objects to a single woman conceiving a child by means of artificial insemination. In addition, Rav Yigal Shafran (an authority in the area of medical Halacha) writes (Techumin 20:351) that retrieving sperm from a recently deceased man in order to artificially inseminate his widow constitutes a severe violation of the spirit of Halacha. The Torah wants a child to be raised by a father and mother and it is offensive to produce a child knowing in advance that it will be raised without the benefit of being raised by both a mother and a father. Accordingly, Rav Sheilat writes that cloning should be placed under government supervision to assure that cloning should be performed only on behalf of infertile married couples and not on behalf of singles wishing to have children asexually.

Conclusion One of the great wonders of the modern age is the application of the Halacha to modern circumstances, despite the fact that we may not introduce new Halachot after the compilation of the Talmud. Thus, every Halachic issue must be adjudicated on the basis of a precedent in the Gemara and its commentaries or based on an analysis of the principles articulated and implied by the Gemara. It is profoundly wondrous that Poskim consistently find a precedent in the Gemara and its commentaries for every new issue that emerges in modern times. In our case, it is particularly astonishing that the Meiri (that we cited last week) explicitly addresses the possibility of cloning. It appears that Hashem's subtle involvement in the Halachic process facilitates the existence of precedents in the Gemara and its commentaries for every new issue and challenge that arises.

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From: Jeffrey Gross [jgross@torah.org] Sent: November 03, 2004 To: weekly-halacha@torah.org Subject: Weekly Halacha - Chayei Sarah WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5765

By RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT

Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights

A discussion of Halachic topics.

For final rulings, consult your Rav

ON SHABBOS, IS IT PERMITTED TO...

QUESTION: ... send a letter or a package on Friday with instructions to deliver it on Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: Amirah l'akum, giving instructions to a non-Jew to do an action which would be forbidden for a Jew to do on Shabbos, is prohibited. (1)It makes no difference whether the Jew's command is given on Shabbos or before Shabbos. Accordingly, it should be forbidden to instruct a non-Jew to deliver an overnight package on Shabbos, since there are several prohibitions involved in delivering mail on Shabbos.(2)

When necessary, however, there is room for leniency. There are some poskim (3) who hold that only a direct command to a non-Jew is forbidden. Instructing a non-Jew to instruct another non-Jew - amirah l'amirah - is permitted. Not all poskim agree with this leniency. Mishnah Berurah(4) rules that one can rely on this view only to avoid a major financial loss (hefsed gadol). Other poskim(5) rule that one may rely on this view only in a case of great need (tzorech gadol). It follows, therefore, that one is permitted to send an overnight letter to be delivered on Shabbos in case of great loss or great need, since the command to deliver the item is not given directly to the delivery man but to another non-Jew.(6)

There are several other arguments for permitting one to have a letter delivered on Shabbos:

* Firstly, the Chasam Sofer(7) rules that even those who prohibit instructing a non-Jew to instruct another non-Jew would permit it if the Jew's instructions were given before Shabbos.(8)

* Secondly, some poskim(9) hold that if the second non-Jew does not know that he is doing a melachah for a Jew, then it is clearly permitted for the Jew to instruct a non-Jew to tell another non-Jew to do a melachah.

* Thirdly, some poskim(10) argue that mailmen do not work for the sender but for the government [or a private company] Postal Service, which has an interest in mail being delivered. They are not delivering the mail because the Jew asked them to do so, but because they are employees of the Service. They are not considered, therefore, as doing something for the Jew. Mail delivery is similar to garbage collection in which the garbage men are not working for the homeowner but for the city government.(11)

All these reasons are sufficient to permit a letter to be sent with instructions to deliver it on Shabbos, even when the situation is not necessarily one of averting a major loss or filling a great need. Obviously, if there is no need or urgency, one should not rely on the above arguments.(12)

When a letter arrives on Shabbos, the recipient should not take it directly from the mailman's hands. Rather, he should allow the mailman to place the letter in the mailbox or in the house. The reason for this is that we do not want the Jew to inadvertently carry the letter into the house, an act which may be Biblically forbidden.(13) Possibly, therefore, if there is an eiruv, one may take the letter directly from the mailman's hands,(14) Some poskim maintain that even though the letter or package originated outside the techum Shabbos, it is not muktzeh(15) - unless it contains a muktzeh item, such as money, bills, important documents, etc. QUESTION: ... brush one's teeth, with or without toothpaste?

DISCUSSION: The consensus of contemporary poskim is that it is forbidden to use toothpaste on Shabbos(16). Their main concern is that applying toothpaste to the teeth or the brush could result in a transgression of the prohibited Shabbos Labor of Memareiach, smoothing.

Brushing without toothpaste is permitted,(17) provided that the following conditions are met:

* Use a toothbrush that is designated for Shabbos use only.(18) Some poskim require that the Shabbos toothbrush also look different from the weekday one, e.g., be of a different color or style.(19)

* Use a soft brush so as not to irritate the gums and cause bleeding. [People with extremely sensitive gums who bleed whenever they brush their teeth may not use a toothbrush at all.]

* To avoid the prohibition of Sechitah, squeezing, a dry toothbrush should be used. It is, however, permitted to rinse the mouth with cold water first and then use the toothbrush.(20)

* The toothbrush should not be rinsed off after it is used unless it is going to be used again on that same Shabbos.(21)

QUESTION: ... make guacamole (a semi-liquid dip made from mashed avocado, lemon juice, dressing or mayonnaise)?

DISCUSSION: Making an avocado dip might entail a violation of the forbidden Shabbos Labor of Tochen, Grinding. In order to avoid Tochen according to all opinions, one should mash the avocado with the handle of a fork, spoon or knife immediately before the avocado dip is to be eaten. (22) To better understand why this is recommended, we must first list three points of dispute among the authorities:

* There is a dispute among the poskim as to whether or not mashing is considered grinding.(23)

* There is a dispute among the poskim whether or not grinding food immediately before it will be eaten is permitted.(24)

* There is a dispute among the poskim whether or not it is permitted to grind in an abnormal manner, i.e., using the handle of a knife, fork or spoon.(25)

Therefore, in order to satisfy all of the views, it is advisable to mash an avocado in an abnormal manner and to do so right before the meal. But clearly, one may rely on the authorities who allow even normal grinding right before a meal or abnormal grinding even not immediately prior to a meal.(26)

The lemon juice, dressing or mayonnaise may be poured onto the mashed avocado and mixed with it. There is no question of transgressing Lishah, Kneading, since kneading is only prohibited when liquid is used to create a single mass from loose particles, which is not the case here.

The lemon juice may also be squeezed from a fresh lemon, since there is no question of Sechitah, Squeezing, when the juice of a fruit is squeezed directly into a solid food(27) - as long as most of the juice is absorbed by the food.(28) It is forbidden, however, to squeeze juice out of a lemon into an empty dish and then add the avocado to it.

FOOTNOTES: 1 This is a Rabbinic prohibition. A minority opinion considers this to be a Biblical prohibition; see Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 243:7. 2 If the overnight mail is delivered to the house together with the rest of the mail, it is permitted to be sent, since the mailman is not doing a special melachah for the Jew; see Chelkas Yaakov 1:65. But usually, overnight mail is delivered separately from the regular mail. 3 Chavos Yair 53. 4 307:24, quoting the Sefer ha-Chayim. 5 Responsa M'harsham 2:136, quoting the Shvus Yaakov 2:42. 6 M'harsham, ibid. and in Da'as Torah 247:1; Az Nidberu 3:36. 7 O.C. 60. 8 See Be'ur Halachah 307:2, who quotes this Chasam Sofer and comments that from the Rashba it seems that this is not so, that even during the week it is prohibited. But see Zichron Yosef 97 (quoted in Machazeh Eliyahu 37) who explains that there is no contradiction between the Rashba and the ruling of the Chasam Sofer. 9 Mishneh Sachir 73 quoting M'harshag. See also Chasam Sofer C.M. 185. 10 Pri Megadim 247:3 according to the explanation of Machazeh Eliyahu 37. 11 Possibly, this argument could be advanced to include employees of a private company as well. 12 See Minchas Yitzchak 6:18, who is hesitant about permitting this, although the author says that many people are lenient. 13 Mishnah Berurah 307:56. 14 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 307:66. 15 Mishnah Berurah, ibid. and Be'ur Halachah who explains that although a letter is not a keli and therefore subject to the prohibition of muktzeh, it is nevertheless permitted to carry since one can use a letter to cover a bottle (or as a bookmark). Harav S.Z. Auerbach (printed responsum in Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 13) rules that even nowadays one can rely on this. Igros Moshe O.C. 5:21-5; 22:5 does not agree with this leniency. Harav Y.S. Elyashiv is also hesitant about this (see Shalmei Yehudah 12, note 21). 16 Igros Moshe O.C. 1:112; Seridei Eish 2:28; Minchas Yitzchak 3:48; Shevet ha-Levi 5:45; Tzitz Eliezer 7:30. [While a minority opinion permits using toothpaste - see Ketzos ha-Shulchan (Badei ha-Shulchan 138:31), Yabia Omer 4:28 and Nefesh ha-Rav, pg. 168 - it is universally accepted not to do so.] 17 See Minchas Shelomo 2:35:3. 18 Based on Mishnah Berurah 327:10. 19 Minchas Yitzchak 3:50. 20 Igros Moshe, ibid.; Shevet ha-Levi, ibid. 21 Igros Moshe, ibid. 22 For a halachic definition of what "immediately" means, see pgs. 262-263. 23 Igros Moshe (O.C. 4:74, Tochen 2) and Yechaveh Da'as 5:27 rule that mashing is not synonymous with grinding; grinding is only when an item is ground into tiny particles, like flour, not when it is mashed into one [or several] large - albeit very soft - piece. Chazon Ish (O.C. 57) strongly disagrees and maintains that mashing is a more serious transgression than plain grinding. 24 Mishnah Berurah 321:45 quotes both views and does not object to those who follow the lenient opinion. Many other poskim also rule leniently (see Pri Megadim, Shulchan Aruch Harav, Aruch ha-Shulchan and Igros Moshe ibid.), while Chazon Ish (O.C. 57) disagrees and prohibits grinding and mashing even when done immediately before the meal. See also Kitzur Shulchan

Aruch 80:21 who rules stringently. 25 Many poskim, including Mishnah Berurah (321:25), Chazon Ish (O.C. 57) and Igros Moshe (O.C. 4:74, Tochen 2), rule leniently on this issue. But several others maintain that grinding abnormally is only permitted when done immediately prior to the meal; (Kaf ha-Chayim 321:37, quoting Olan Shabbos; Aruch ha-Shulchan 321:12; Eglei Tal, Tochen 30, 5). 26 It is difficult, however, to rely on the argument that mashing is not grinding, since Igros Moshe himself seems to rely on this argument only when the mashing is done right before the meal. See also Shevet ha-Levi 7:92 who disproves Igros Moshe's ruling from Rabbeinu Chananel. 27 O.C. 320:4. 28 Mishnah Berurah 505:5 Weekly-Halacha, Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org. The author, Rabbi Neustadt, is the principal of Yavne Teachers' College in Cleveland, Ohio. He is also the Magid Shiur of a daily Mishna Berurah class at Congregation Shomre Shabbos. The Weekly-Halacha Series is distributed L'zchus Doniel Meir ben Hinda. Weekly sponsorships are available - please mail to jgross@torah.org. The series is distributed by the Harbotzas Torah Division of Congregation Shomre Shabbos, 1801 South Taylor Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118 HaRav Yisroel Grumer, Marah D'Asra. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> or email learn@torah.org to get your own free copy of this mailing. Project Genesis - Torah.org is a recognized charity and depends upon your support. Please help us by visiting <http://torah.org/support/> for information on class dedications, memorials, annual giving and more. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> -- see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc. learn@torah.org 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 (410) 602-1350 Baltimore, MD 21208

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: November 03, 2004
 To: yhe-parsha@etzion.org.il Subject: PARSHA64 -05: Parashat Chayei Sara
 yeshivat har etzion israel koschitzky virtual beit midrash (vbm) parashat hashavua
 This parasha series is dedicated in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l. <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha65/05-65chayei.htm> Parashat Chayei Sara This shiur is dedicated in memory of Howard (Haim) Greenspan z"l.

KETURA
BY RAV YAAKOV MEDAN

A. THREE WOMEN

Our parasha is clearly divisible into three sections, according to the main character in each. Chapter 23 deals entirely with Sara and her burial; chapter 24 discusses Rivka and her marriage to Yitzchak, and chapter 25 (or at least the first part of it) deals with Ketura [1]. This structure presents a clear message. Sara's death leaves a vacuum on two levels: Avraham is left without a wife, and Am Yisrael is left without a matriarch. The first vacuum is filled by Ketura, Avraham's new wife, while the second is filled by Rivka. She enters Sara's tent as Yitzchak's wife, and survives Sara as the second matriarch of Israel for all future generations [2]. Chazal focus, naturally, on the second level, and describe at length how Rivka filled the void left by Sara's death: "Yitzchak brought her to the tent of Sara, his mother' – As long as Sara lived, a cloud was attached to the entrance to her tent. When she died, this cloud disappeared, and when Rivka came, it reappeared. As long as Sara lived, the doors were open wide; when Sara died, the openness disappeared; and when Rivka came, the openness reappeared. As long as Sara lived, there was blessing in the dough; when Sara died the blessing ceased; and when Rivka came it was restored. As long as Sara lived, a candle burned from one Shabbat eve to the next; when she died, the candle ceased, and when Rivka came it was restored." (Bereishit Rabba 9, and Rashi 24:16) Chazal compare the forefathers' tent to the Holy of Holies in the Temple, since the Divine Presence was revealed to the forefathers in their tents in the same way that it was revealed to Moshe from above the covering between the two keruvim. The structure of the

matriarchs' tent therefore also paralleled the image of the Temple: the cloud attached to the tent resembled the cloud of ketoret (incense) that arose from the golden altar, the light that remained burning resembled the menorah, and the blessing that was bestowed on the bread paralleled the showbread. In a certain sense, though, Rivka may be perceived as filling a void left by Sara as Avraham's wife, even though she did not marry him. Proof of this is to be found in Avraham's command to his servant, the elder of his household, as to how to evaluate a bride suitable for his son: "The servant said to him: Perhaps the woman will not agree to follow me to this land; shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came? Avraham said to him: Guard yourself lest you take my son back there. The Lord G-d of the heavens, Who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and Who spoke to me and promised to me, saying, 'To your seed I shall give this land' – He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman will not agree to follow you, you will be free of this oath; only do not take my son there." (24:5-8) The woman destined to be Yitzchak's wife will be tested as to her willingness to leave her birthplace in Charan and to journey to an unknown land. She, too, will thereby fulfill the commandment that was given to Avraham: "Go, then, from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you." Without this test of faith, the woman is not worthy of inheriting Sara's heritage and becoming Avraham's daughter-in-law. The wise servant understands the message that is left unsaid, and tests Rivka in terms of another characteristic of Avraham's home – the warm hospitality: "Behold, I am standing by the well, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. Let the girl to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your pitcher and let me drink,' and she will answer, 'Drink, and I shall water your camels, too' – let her be the one whom You have destined for your servant for Yitzchak; thereby shall I know that You have shown kindness to my master." (24:13-14) Avraham's daughter-in-law is evaluated in terms of the two founding pillars of the Nation of Israel: kindness and faith. **B. FOR WHAT REASON DOES AVRAHAM REMARRY?**

The necessity of Rivka's inclusion into the family and her positive qualities are obvious. But for what reason does Avraham marry Ketura? Rashi attempts to present her positive traits: "Ketura – this was Hagar. She is called 'Ketura' because her actions were pleasant like incense (ketoret), and because she had remained celibate, not having relations with anyone from the day that she separated from Avraham." (Rashi, 25:1) But Rashi would appear to be contradicting himself. Previously, he commented concerning Hagar: "She departed and she wandered' – she returned to the idols of her father's house." (Rashi, 21:14) How can Rashi speak of the actions of an idolater as being pleasant? From the narrative itself, it would seem that the entire purpose of this second marriage was to bear more children. The midrash teaches: "In the morning – sow your seed, and towards evening do not cease' (Kohelet 11:6) – if you have children when you are young, marry a wife in your old age and bear [more] children. From whom do we learn this? From Avraham, who married a wife and had children when he was younger, and he took [another] wife in his old age." (Yalkut Shimoni 109) What is the point of bearing more children, when ultimately Avraham was going to send them away, just as he did Yishmael? "Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzchak. And to the children of the concubines, Avraham gave gifts, and he sent them away from Yitzchak his son, while he was still alive, eastwards, to the land of the east." (25:5-6) Perhaps Avraham's need to bear numerous children is related to the difference between the two covenants that G-d made with him. In the context of his circumcision, G-d tells him explicitly: "I shall establish My covenant with Yitzchak, whom Sara will bear to you at this time next year."

This is a covenant that will be established only with his consecrated seed – Yitzchak the son of Sara. This covenant promises Avraham the land of Canaan, which will be given to Yitzchak's descendant – Yaakov, and will be settled by Yaakov's descendants, divided into inheritances for the tribes, each comprised of its households. This is the holy land, promised to Israel: "It shall be for you alone, no strangers [will inherit it] with you" (Mishlei 5:17). But G-d also made another covenant with Avraham – the "covenant of the parts" (berit bein ha-betarim), where He mentions not "the land of Canaan" but rather "the land" – from the Nile to the Euphrates [3]. The content of this covenant discusses not the sanctity of Avraham's descendants, but rather the historical process that they will endure in exile, as strangers, in servitude and oppression, until they build up their independent kingdom in their own land, no longer under foreign rule.

The land of Canaan lies between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea; it is holy ground, and concerning it the Torah teaches, "The land has become defiled and I have visited its iniquities upon it, and the land shall spew out its inhabitants" (Vayikra 18:25). But such a tiny land seems inadequate for the establishment of an independent sovereignty. Throughout the biblical period, so long as these were the borders of the Kingdom of Israel, independence was short-lived, and it was subject to whatever the reigning empire was at the time. The situation in modern times bears out the same conclusion: the State of Israel in its borders between the Jordan and the Medite(the so-called "Greater Land of Israel") is not an independent entity; it relies upon the favor of foreign powers, especially that of the U.S. The geopolitical unit that represents the independent kingdom of Israel lies between the Nile and the Euphrates. If we look at a map, we note that this is not a particularly large area. The Persian Empire, this entire expanse constitutes only one province out of the one hundred and twenty comprising the Empire! These, then, are the borders of the independent kingdom of Israel, and indeed it was only when these were the actual borders – during the reigns of David and Shelomo – that the kingdom of Israel was entirely independent. Therefore, when discussing the inheritance of Am Yisrael from a historical point of view, and the transition from being strangers to political independence, we are speaking of the complete Eretz Yisrael – from the Nile to the Euphrates. However, the nation is unable to populate the wide expanses of this land and its vast wildernesses until G-d fulfills His promise (Devarim 1:11) and increases our number a thousand-fold over the number that originally entered the land (i.e., six hundred thousand times one thousand). This, apparently, is the reason why Avraham had many children and sent them away from Yitzchak, his son. Yishmael was banished to the wilderness of Sinai, which leads on to Egypt; the children of Ketura were sent to the eastern wilderness, which stretches up to the area around the Euphrates. In this way, Avraham tried to fill the land between the Nile and the Euphrates with his offspring: the children of Yishmael, the children of Ketura, Edom and the children of Lot – Ammon and Moav, who are also considered his descendants. All would live in "the land" – the land between the Nile and the Euphrates – but only Yitzchak, with whom G-d had established the covenant of circumcision, would live in the holy land of Canaan. Further on in the Torah, it becomes clear that the entire great land is given to Am Yisrael. We find this stated explicitly several times, especially in Sefer Devarim: "If you will guard well all of these commandments which I command you to do, to love the Lord your G-d, to walk in all His ways and to cleave to Him, then G-d will drive out all of these nations from before you, and you will possess nations greater and mightier than you. Every place where your feet tread – shall be yours, from the wilderness and Levanon, from the great River Euphrates up to the furthestmost sea shall be your border. No man shall be able to stand up to you; G-d will put the fear of you and dread of you upon all the

land where you will tread, as He has spoken to you." (Devarim 11:22-25) From the style, we note that the great land is given to the descendants of Yaakov, to rule it and to make it their kingdom, but together with them live all the descendants of Avraham [4]. Yaakov is blessed with the inheritance of the land after his battle against Esav for the birthright and the blessing: "Nations will serve you and peoples will bow down to you; you shall be a lord over your brethren and your mother's children will bow down to you; those who curse you will be cursed, and those that bless you will be blessed." (27:29)

From the above, one might have the impression that perhaps the level of Avraham's descendants – the children of Ketura and of Yishmael, and later on the children of Esav – is somehow higher than the level of other gentiles. Perhaps their right to dwell in those areas of the great land that lie outside of the Land of Canaan (only!), on condition that they accept Jewish sovereignty over them, is a legitimate right anchored in the Torah [5]. This question brings us to our final point: a dispute between the Tanaim in the Midrash as to whether Ketura was Hagar or another woman. "Rabbi said: Hagar is the same as Ketura. Why is she called Ketura? Because she was completely celibate [after originally being banished by Avraham]. But the Sages said: He married a different woman. What is Rabbi's reason for saying that Hagar is Ketura? For it is written concerning Yitzchak, 'Yitzchak came from the way of Be'er Le-chai Ro'i' – the same that is referred to in the verse, 'She called the Name of G-d Who spoke to her: You are E-l Ro'i.' From this we learn that she was Hagar." (Tanchuma, Chayei Sara 8) We have already noted that Rashi would appear, in his commentary on chapter 25, to adopt the approach of Rabbi, despite the fact that in chapter 21 he rejects Hagar completely, interpreting the text in accordance with the Sages who disagree with Rabbi. Rabbi's proof for his claim is based on the juxtaposition of Avraham's marriage to Ketura to Yitzchak's arrival from Be'er Le-chai Ro'i – the place where Hagar dwelled. There may even be another proof: according to the description in our parasha, Yishmael dwelled in the western Negev and in Sinai up until Shur of Egypt, while the children of Ketura were sent "eastwards to the land of the east" – to the wilderness on the eastern side of the mountains of Gilad. In the story of the sale of Yosef, we witness, throughout the route from the eastern wilderness to Egypt, cooperation between the Yishmaelites and the Midianites. Likewise in the story of Gidon's battle against Midian and the "children of the east," we are told explicitly that the Midianites' earrings belonged to the Yishmaelites (Shoftim 8:24). In Sefer Divrei ha-Yamim, we find a description of a great war that Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Menashe fight against the tribes of the eastern wilderness (where the children of Ketura dwelled), known as the Geri'ites (geri'im) – i.e., the children of Hagar (Divrei ha-Yamim I 5:18-20). From all of these sources, it would appear that the children of Yishmael and the children of Ketura are the same family. In light of these verses, Rabbi maintains that "Hagar is Ketura," and hence the descendants of Hagar and the descendants of Ketura are the same. NOTES: [1] Chazal maintain that Ketura is Hagar; if this is so, then chapter 25 in its entirety deals with Ketura. [2] Yitzchak's love for Rivka similarly develops in the wake of her similarity to Sara, his mother: "he brought her" (va-yevi'eha) becomes "he loved her" (va-ye'ehaveha). [3] The Torah's consistent distinction between "the land" (with its boundaries between the Nile and the Euphrates) and the "land of Canaan" (with its boundaries from the Jordan up to the Great Sea) is explained well in a detailed article by Rav Yoel bin-Nun in Megadim 17. [4] This, too, I learned from Rabbi bin-Nun. [5] As above. [6] This has no political relevance at present, since the author of this article is most doubtful as to whether any direct ethnic connection exists between Yishmael and the inhabitants of the lands in question, but in any case this topic lies outside the scope of the present discussion. Translated by Kaeren Fish

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Covenant & Conversation - Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from
RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British
Commonwealth [From 2 years ago]

Chayei Sarah The promise

The sedrah of Chayei Sarah focuses on two episodes, both narrated at length and in intricate detail. Abraham buys a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and he instructs his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Why these two events? The simple answer is because they happened. That, however, cannot be all. We misunderstand Torah if we think of it as a book that tells us what happened. That is a necessary but not sufficient explanation of biblical narrative. The Torah, by identifying itself as Torah, defines its own genre. It is not a history book. It is Torah, meaning "teaching." It tells us what happened only when events that occurred then have a bearing on what we need to know now. What is the "teaching" in these two episodes? It is an unexpected one.

Abraham, the first bearer of the covenant, receives two promises - both stated five times. The first is of a land. Time and again he is told, by G-d, that the land to which he has travelled - Canaan - will one day be his.

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. (12:7)

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north, south, east and west. All the land that you see, I will give you and your offspring for ever . . . Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." (13: 14-17)

Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to take possession of it." (15: 7)

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates - the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites." (15: 18-21)

"I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your G-d and the god of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and to your descendants after you; and I will be their G-d." (17: 7-8)

The second was the promise of children, also stated five times:

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing." (12: 2)

"I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted." (13: 16)

He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them" Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (15: 5)

"As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations." (17: 4-5)

"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky and as the sand on the seashore." (22: 17)

These are remarkable promises. The land in its length and breadth will be Abraham's and his children's as "an everlasting possession." Abraham will have as many children as the dust of the earth, the stars of the sky, and the sand on the sea-shore. He will be the father, not of one nation, but of many. What, though, is the reality by the time Sarah dies? Abraham owns no land and has only one son (he had another, Ishmael, but was told that he would not be the bearer of the covenant).

The significance of the two episodes is now clear. First, Abraham undergoes a lengthy bargaining process with the Hittites to buy a field

with a cave in which to bury Sarah. It is a tense, even humiliating, encounter. The Hittites say one thing and mean another. As a group they say, "Sir, listen to us. You are a prince of G-d in our midst. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs." Ephron, the owner of the field Abraham wishes to buy, says: "Listen to me, I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." As the narrative makes clear, this elaborate generosity is a façade for some extremely hard bargaining. Abraham knows he is "an alien and a stranger among you," meaning, among other things, that he has no right to own land. That is the force of their reply which, stripped of its overlay of courtesy, means: "Use one of our burial sites. You may not acquire your own." Abraham is not deterred. He insists that he wants to buy his own. Ephron's reply - "It is yours. I give it to you" - is in fact the prelude to a demand for an inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. At last, however, Abraham owns the land. The final transfer of ownership is recorded in precise legal prose (23: 17-20) to signal that, at last, Abraham owns part of the land. It is a small part: one field and a cave. A burial place, bought at great expense. That is all of the Divine promise of the land that Abraham will see in his lifetime.

The next chapter, one of the longest in the Mosaic books, tells of Abraham's concern that Isaac should have a wife. He is - we must assume - at least 37 years old (his age at Sarah's death) and still unmarried. Abraham has a child but no grandchild - no posterity. As with the purchase of the cave, so here: acquiring a daughter-in-law will take much money and hard negotiation. The servant, on arriving in the vicinity of Abraham's family, immediately finds the girl, Rebekah, before he has even finished praying for G-d's help to find her. Securing her release from her family is another matter. He brings out gold, silver, and clothing for the girl. He gives her brother and mother costly gifts. The family have a celebratory meal. But when the servant wants to leave, brother and mother say, "Let the girl stay with us for another year or ten [months]." Laban, Rebekah's brother, plays a role not unlike that of Ephron: the show of generosity conceals a tough, even exploitative, determination to make a profitable deal. Eventually patience pays off. Rebekah leaves. Isaac marries her. The covenant will continue.

These are, then, no minor episodes. They tell a difficult story. Yes, Abraham will have a land. He will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, or suddenly, or easily. Nor will they occur without human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower will bring them about. The divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that G-d will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation, from G-d to Abraham and his children that they should act. G-d will help them. The outcome will be what G-d said it would. But not without total commitment from Abraham's family against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable obstacles.

A land: Israel. And children: Jewish continuity. The astonishing fact is that today, four thousand years later, they remain the dominant concerns of Jews throughout the world - the safety and security of Israel as the Jewish home, and the future of the Jewish people ("Will we have Jewish grandchildren?"). Abraham's hopes and fears are ours. (Is there any other people, I wonder, whose concerns today are what they were four millennia ago? The identity through time is awe-inspiring.) Now as then, the divine promise does not mean that we can leave the future to G-d. That idea has no place in the imaginative world of the first book of the Torah. To the contrary: the covenant is G-d's challenge to us, not ours to G-d. The meaning of the events of Chayei Sarah is that Abraham realised that G-d was depending on him. Faith does not mean passivity. It means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we - inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise-who must bring it about.