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Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman **Outline of Drosho for Chayei Sarah 5765**

The Rabbi often spends a lot of time officiating at weddings and at funerals. It can be difficult to go back and forth between these two extremes of human emotion.

Of course, that is how life is; sadness and joy, tragedy and celebration, loss and renewal, rub shoulders with each other.

And so it is that we find these two extremes in close juxtaposition in this weeks parshah, which begins with Sarah's death and אברהם's efforts to find a suitable burial place for her, and then immediately goes on to the story of אליעזר's search for a wife for יצחק, and culminates in the marriage of יצחק and רבקה, ending on the note of יצחק אחרי אמו, and so the story moves on to the next chapter.

But while one might simply see this juxtaposition as another example of the way in which, in life, tragedy and שמחה follow on each other heels, its seems that the connection is deeper – because this very connection between the purchase of המכפלה and marriage is embedded by the הלכה into the very structure of Jewish marriage:

How do we know that marriage is contracted with כסף ושוה כסף – for example, with a ring, but not necessarily – The Gemara explains that we derive נתתי כסף השדה קח ממני – קיחה קיחה משדה עפרון כפי יקח איש אשה.

How seemingly morbid – that the very instrument of marriage should be somehow connected – modeled on the purchase of a burial plot!. Important lesson. אברהם and שרה had come a very long way together. How many, many years ago had it been that they began their life together, two young revolutionaries in far away כשדים, fighting paganism together.

And then, together, they had left everything behind, set out for an unknown land, leaving family and friends behind. And how much had they been through – always together – in the years since? The many trials, the shared dangers, the shared pain of childlessness, the joy of יצחק's birth – a full lifetime together. And now this unique shared life was coming to a close.

It was many, many years since אברהם and שרה had first begun their life together. And now, that shared journey that had begun with the giving of עפרון – of a wedding ring, or whatever was the equivalent in those times – was ending with the counting out to עפרון of the money with which to purchase a place for them to be buried together.

Yet the one was as much an expression of love and commitment as the other. The same love, the same loyalty, and the same commitment that he had shown then – at the beginning of the journey – were present now at the end. They had faced life together, and now they faced the end of life together; she going first, and he preparing a place for both of them to be together in death.

Real commitment has to constant, through good times and bad, through thick and thin; equally strong under the חופה and in the shadow of tragedy. It is measured not only in how we rejoice together, but also in how we cry together.

קיחה קיחה משדה עפרון – because the commitment that a young groom makes to his bride under the חופה, and the commitment that אברהם showed in his old age in arranging the קבורה of שרה – are one and the same. The one is the completion of the other.

What is true of marriage is true of every other commitment in life. The measure of commitment – to a friend, to a job, to a kehillah – is how well it holds up when things are difficult. A fair weather commitment is no commitment at all.

Coming to a דף יומי, for example, is a kind of commitment, and our many participants can tell you it's not always easy, especially in the very hard מסכתות that they've been learning lately. And one of the beauties of the דף is that it inculcates the idea of commitment to Torah study – not just when it feels like it, not just on occasion, but on a regular – committed – basis.

And I'd like to add a particular יישר כח to some of the young men in the who recently started coming to the דף – and to their wives, in particular, because the דף requires at least as much commitment from the wives as from the husbands.

Being part of a shul is also a commitment. That's one of the things that our young people need to be educated to – that you don't come to a shul – you belong to a shul, and share in the life – in the joys and sorrows, the difficulties and the achievements – of the entire kehillah. And that kind of commitment, we know, can be deeply enriching.

Love of ארץ ישראל – and commitment to ארץ ישראל – are an important part of our lives, of who we are, or what this קהילה represents. We take great pride in the accomplishments of her people; we celebrate her victories, we pray for her welfare.

But the depth of our commitment to ארץ ישראל is measured not only by how we rejoice with her – שישו את ירושלים כל מאהביה – but by how we share her troubles. It is measured not only by how well we rejoice when she is victorious – but also in how firmly we stand by her when she is beleaguered. It is tested not by how ready we are to sing with her – but by how willing we are to cry with her....

From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org on behalf of Rabbi Yissocher Frand
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Sent: Friday, November 25, 2005

To: ravfrand@torah.org

Subject: **Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chayei Sarah**

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

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #480 Calling off an engagement

The Role of Beauty

At the beginning of this week's parsha, the verse says, "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, and twenty years and seven years; the years of Sarah's life" [Bereshis 23:1]. The Medrash quotes the pasuk "Hashem knows the days of the perfect, their inheritance will be forever" [Tehillim 37:18] and comments "Just as the righteous are 'temimim' [perfect / complete] so too are their years 'temimim'. Sarah was as beautiful as a 7-year-old at age 20, and at 100 her quantity of sins was equal to that of a 20 year old.

The Medrash is obviously addressing the strange way in which the pasuk states that Sarah lived to the age of 127. It is understandable why the Medrash wants to point out the righteousness of Sarah. The longer we live, the more susceptible and open we are to sin. So we can readily understand the praise implicit in the statement that when she was 100, she was like a person who was only 20 in terms of the number of sins she had committed in her lifetime. This is a significant measure of piety that is worth knowing about our first matriarch.

But what is the point of the Medrash telling us that at twenty, Sarah was as beautiful as a 7-year-old? The Torah is not discussing someone who is entering a beauty pageant here. What is the point of this drasha (exegesis)? We are discussing our matriarch Sarah. Why is it significant to know that she had the beauty of a 7 year old when she was twenty?

Rav Mottel Katz, z"l, in his work Be'er Mechokek explains the very important concept of Biblical beauty. The Torah goes out of its way to describe the various matriarchs as being beautiful in appearance. This is not the type of description which we would expect to hear today in describing a prominent Rebbetzin or even in proposing a shidduch (marriage

match) to a serious Rabbinical student. Even when someone is interested in "looks", it is still uncommon for one to stress "she is a beautiful girl" when discussing a potential match. We are supposedly above that. However, the Torah does point out that the matriarchs were beautiful people.

Our Sages state that ten measures of beauty descended to the world. Jerusalem took 90% of that beauty and the rest of the world divided up the remaining 10% [Kidushin 49b]. Here again, the Gemara emphasizes that Jerusalem is the most beautiful city in the world. Why is it important that Jerusalem be a beautiful city? Would it be any less meaningful or holy for the Jewish people if Jerusalem were not the most beautiful city in the world?

The answer is that we as human beings are very influenced by our physical surroundings. Physical beauty can put a person in a frame of mind that is more receptive to the spirituality that exists. The Talmud says elsewhere, "three things broaden a person's mind – a beautiful house, beautiful possessions, and a beautiful wife" [Brachos 57b]. What is the meaning of this Gemara? The meaning of the Gemara is that when a person lives in nice conditions and is not bogged down by physical distractions, he has the ability to be more receptive to matters of holiness.

A person who is in a beautiful home with beautiful furniture, beautiful surroundings, and a beautiful wife, can have the freedom and peace of mind to devote himself to the higher tasks of life. The beautiful home, car, and wife are not ends in and of themselves. But they allow the

person to rise above the impediments of physical distractions that sometimes get in the way of spiritual growth.

When a person enters Jerusalem and looks out upon the beautiful Judean Hills, his soul becomes more receptive to be influenced by the inherent sanctity of the place than what would be possible if Jerusalem had been an equally sanctified but less attractive city.

Chazal tell us in the above quoted Medrash that the beauty of Sarah was like that of a 7-year-old. The beauty of a 20-year-old woman can sometimes be used for the wrong purposes in life. The beauty of a 7-year-old, on the other hand, has a certain purity and innocence. This is exactly the point made by Chazal. The beauty of Sarah was not used like the beauty of a 20-year-old woman can sometimes be used. It was used like the beauty of a 7-year-old girl — not for malevolent, not for prurient, and not for sensual purposes — but purposes of inspiration and aspiration, as our Sages say "Sarah converted the women."

A Tale of Two People

This week's parsha contains the story with Eliezer, the servant of Avraham. The Torah spends a tremendous number of pasukim on the mission of Eliezer and how he faithfully carried out his master's instructions.

Chazal are inspired to say "the conversation of the servants of the patriarchs is even preferable to the Torah discussions of their descendants" [Bereshis Rabbah 60].

Our Sages say that Eliezer wanted his daughter to be engaged to Yitzchak.

However, Avraham rebuffed this suggestion, telling Eliezer that he was a slave, descended from Canaan who was cursed. Therefore "the one who is cursed cannot cling to the one who is blessed."

However, the Medrash at the end of the parsha says that since Eliezer faithfully carried out his mission he left the category of "cursed" and entered the category of "blessed." Eliezer "shteiged" – he grew.

These last two parshios — Vayera and Chayei Sarah — can be a contrasting study of two people: A study of a person named Lot and a study of a person named Eliezer. They led very similar lives. They both had a close relationship with the patriarch Avraham and were members of his household.

They both spent time with and learned from Avraham Avinu. And yet Lot decided to leave Avraham and make his fortune in Sodom. We know what happened to Lot. He ended his life engaging in incestuous relationships with his own daughters. On the other hand, Eliezer starts out as a cursed slave and yet ends up emerging from the category of cursedness and entering into the category of blessedness.

This is a lesson in the ability to seize opportunities. Chazal say that Eliezer recognized that he was cursed with the curse of Canaan and was therefore destined to be a slave. But even given that fate, man still has some control over his destiny. One can be a slave to a wicked person, to a barbarian, to a terrible person or one can be a slave to the greatest personality of the generation — Avraham Avinu. Eliezer's attitude was "I might as well try to make the best of a bad situation. If I need to be a slave, I might as well become a slave — and a faithful slave — to an Avraham Avinu."

He became the servant of an Avraham and used that opportunity to learn and to grow. The man turned his life around. He went from being an 'Arur' to being a 'Baruch.'

Lot had the same opportunity. The curse of Canaan did not hang over his head. Nevertheless, because he went to try to make a fortune in Sodom, he lost everything, and had no 'nachas', so to speak, from his children and his grandchildren.

Life presents us with opportunities. It is our choice whether to use these opportunities to grow and to bring ourselves into the realm of those who are blessed, or sadly to go in the other direction and wind up like Lot.

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Rav Moshe Feinstein's Brilliant Resolution of an Igun Situation by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Rav Moshe Feinstein (1894-1986) still enjoys a well-deserved reputation as a leading decider of Halachah of unparalleled brilliance and creativity. Rav Moshe's greatness (and lasting impact) is most evident in his responsa regarding issues of personal status, undoubtedly the most sensitive area of Halachah. In these matters there is no margin of error and a mistaken ruling can prove catastrophic in either direction. In this essay we shall discuss how Rav Moshe resolved an enormously challenging situation of Igun, where there is potential for a woman to be ineligible to remarry according to Halachah.

The Case

In the case addressed by Rav Moshe in 1960, a husband who lived outside of the New York area (and thus visited a Beit Din outside of New York) ordered a Get to be written and delivered to his wife who resided in the New York area[1]. However, when the Get arrived to the Mesadeir Get (Get administrator) in New York, the Mesadeir was alert and noticed something awry with the Get – the witnesses' signatures were written in a handwriting identical to that of the Get itself[2].

The New York Rav contacted the out-of-town Mesadeir Get to inquire as to what had occurred. The latter explained that the witnesses were unable to sign and required the Sofeir's assistance. He related that either the scribe had held the hand of the witnesses who signed the Get or that the witnesses ordered the Sofeir to sign on their behalf. In either scenario, this constitutes a grave deviation from standard protocols and poses grave concerns as to the validity of the Get[3]. The out of town Rav could not simply ask the husband to return and order the writing, signing and delivery of a new Get, since he had disappeared and no one knew of his whereabouts or contact information.

Thus, the New York Rav was faced with a terrible quandary. On the one hand, he could not deliver an invalid Get, especially since it would lead to violation of the severe sin of Lo Tin'af (adultery) for which Halachah demands, 'Yehareig VeAl Ya'avur' (martyrdom). On the other hand, if a compelling argument could not be found to render the Get acceptable, the wife would remain an Agunah, Halachically ineligible to remarry, for the foreseeable future. Thus, the New York Rav sent the question to the great Rav Moshe Feinstein for adjudication. Rav Moshe presents his decision regarding this case in Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Even HaEzer 1:134.

The New York Rav's Approach

The New York Mesadeir Get did not merely present the question to Rav Moshe, but rather, in the manner of Torah scholars, submitted his thoughts to argue for the (Bedi'eved, after the fact) validity of the Get in

this Makom Igun Gadol (situation in which the wife might be permanently unable to remarry). He reasoned that the Get was essentially acceptable in either of the two potential scenarios that occurred.

The Get is valid, he felt, even if the Sofeir held the hand of the Eidim and signed the Get. Magein Avraham (240:7) rules that if on Shabbat one individual held a quill and a second individual held that person's hand and wrote, the latter has violated the Torah prohibition of writing on Shabbat, indicating that in our case it is considered as if the Sofeir signed the Get (and the Get is invalid).

However, the Tosefta (Shabbat 12:10) states[4] that if the Sofeir merely intended to assist the individual whose hand was holding the quill, then the latter is considered to have written on Shabbat. The New York Rav suggested to Rav Moshe that in a case of Igun one may assume that the Eidim intended for the Sofeir to serve merely as their assistant and thus the Eidim are considered to be the ones who signed the Get.

Regarding the possibility that the Eidim delegated the Sofeir to sign on their behalf – this issue is addressed by the Rishonim. The Haghos Oshri (Gittin 2:12) cites a dispute between Rabbeinu Simchah and Ohr Zarua about this matter. Rabbeinu Simcha argues that just as the husband may delegate his responsibility to write the Get to a Sofeir to write on his behalf, so, too, the Eidim are permitted to assign the Sofeir to carry out their task of signing the Get. Ohr Zarua vehemently rejects Rabbeinu Simcha's view, even going so far as to say that if such a Get was presented to him he would summarily disqualify it.

The New York Mesadeir suggested to Rav Moshe that in a case of great Igun, one may rely on the opinion of Rabbeinu Simchah. He noted that Beit Shmuel (130:29) cites this dispute without issuing a ruling, implying that Rabbeinu Simchah's opinion is not rejected by the codifiers of Halachah.

Rav Moshe's Response to the New York Rav

Rav Moshe did not, for the most part, accept the New York rabbi's arguments defending the validity of the Get. In terms of the possibility that the Sofeir held the hand of the Eidim holding the quill, he notes that this matter is relevant only regarding Hilchot Shabbat, but if the signatures perfectly match that of the Sofeir's (and each other's signature), they are not valid signatures.

Rav Moshe bases himself on Tosafot's discussion of the Gemara's protocol for witnesses who are unable to sign a Get (Gittin 9a s.v. Mekarin). The Gemara recommends (according to Tosafot's understanding) making a stencil of the names of the Eidim and placing it over the place where the Eidim sign. The Eidim, in turn, fill the stencil with ink and thus their names are written.

Tosafot cite the Yerushalmi which asks how the signatures created in this manner are considered valid if they are identical to each other. Signatures by definition must be unique and their uniqueness is how they can be verified as authentic (by the signatories or by others who recognize the signatures). A signature that does not feature any individuality is by definition not considered a signature. Tosafot, in turn, cite the Yerushalmi which clarifies that the stencil letters are made very large and the Eidim do not fill the entire space with ink. The amount of space left unfilled is up to that witness's discretion, allowing for individuality in the signatures.

Rav Moshe, on this basis, writes that the discussion regarding Hilchot Shabbat is not particularly relevant. The sole criterion is whether the Eidim holding the quill had at least a miniscule[5] impact on the appearance of the signature, so as to make the signatures appear slightly different from each other and verifiable as authentic. Rav Moshe notes that the Gemara (Gittin 36a) regards witnesses who draw a picture of a fish as their signature as valid, since it is recognizable and verifiable. The same applies to witnesses who cause even the slightest indication of their individuality when they hold the quill. Thus, Rav Moshe instructed the New York Rav to carefully reexamine the signatures and see if he could

discern even the slightest difference between the two. If there is no difference, rules Rav Moshe, the signatures are not valid.

Along the same lines, Rav Moshe expresses grave concerns about the validity of Rabbeinu Simcha's assertion that Eidim may delegate their signatures to the Sofeir. He argues that one by definition cannot appoint a substitute to sign on his behalf, since the substitute cannot create the individuality required for a signature. Moreover, Rav Moshe notes that Rabbeinu Simcha's opinion cannot be accepted regarding a Get to be delivered by an agent (as in our case), since Rambam (Hilchot Geirushin 9:32) and Shulchan Aruch (Even HaAzer 141:12) rule that a Get delivered by a Shaliach (agent) must have valid signatures that can be authenticated, to provide the required corroboration of the Shaliach's claim that he is delivering a genuine Get. Signatures that the Eidim did not sign themselves cannot be authenticated and thus are clearly unacceptable for a Get delivered by an agent.

Rav Moshe, however, notes that a Shaliach customarily is given an authenticated Harsha'ah (power of attorney document) signed by Eidim or a Beit Din which proves that the Shaliach was duly appointed to deliver the Get and that the Get is legitimate (Rema E.H. 141:11; the out-of-town Rav did send a Harsha'ah along with the Get). Rav Moshe, however, expresses concern to rely solely on the Harsha'ah to validate the Shaliach. He was worried that the Harsha'ot were not composed properly.

Rav Moshe's Stunning Validation of the Get

Thus, the New York Rav's suggested approaches are insufficient according to Rav Moshe to justify the validity of the Get. However, Rav Moshe presents a creative solution to the problem. He applies the principle of "Keivan SheHigid, Shuv Eino Chozeir Umagid," that one cannot retract one's testimony after it is already given (Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat Perek 29). Rav Moshe notes that the Harsha'ah, signed by three Dayanim (including the out-of-town Get administrator), lists the names of the witnesses who signed the Get. Rav Moshe argues that the out-of-town Rav's assertion that the Eidim did not sign the Get was inadmissible since he had previously signed the Harsha'ah stating that the Eidim had signed the Get (listing the names of the Eidim on the Get is a standard feature of a Harsha'ah).

Moreover, the Rav's assertion that the Eidim did not sign the Get not only is an unacceptable withdrawal from his signing of the Harsha'ah but also runs counter to the testimony of the other two Dayanim who signed the Harsha'ah. Thus, the Rav's words are not believed since his is only one voice against the testimony of two other people (this principle appears often in the Mishnah and Gemara; see, for example, Sotah 6:4).

Conclusion

It is typical for Rav Moshe to develop novel and creative approaches to resolve problems and help us remain both fully loyal to the demands of Hashem and Halachah as well as being sensitive to people's needs, in this case, the need for a woman to be able to remarry and rebuild her life.

Another valuable lesson may be gleaned from this Teshuvah of Rav Moshe. The New York Rav was clearly well versed in Hilchot Gittin and offered a learned defense of the validity of the Get. Nonetheless, upon examination by a world-class Poseik, his arguments were found to be inadequate. This Teshuvah reinforces the importance for even learned individuals to consult with the most eminent Posekim, especially when dealing with matters of great Halachic import.

[1] For a full description of how a Get is conducted when husband and wife reside in different locations, see Gray Matter 4:261-265.

[2] The husband customarily delegates a scribe to write the Get (Rema E.H. 123:1).

[3] This incident involved a stunning lack of professional competence on the part of the out-of-town Mesadeir Get. The Mesadeir Get's mandate is to oversee the administration of the Get, to insure it is conducted in rigorous conformity with Halachic requirements. In this case, not only did the Mesadeir Get not prevent a severe deviation from

Get protocol, but he was also not even sufficiently alert to notice how the irregular signing was conducted on his watch. To Rav Moshe's great credit, he does not fulminate against the out-of-town Rav, despite his outrageous malpractice. I am quite confident, though, that Rav Moshe wrote to this Rav urging him to refrain from repeating such egregious errors.

[4] According to the textual emendation of the Vilna Gaon.

[5] That is, recognizable to the naked eye (see Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 2:146).

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Old Magazines

When I moved away from Chicago and further from my parents, my mother was ever fearful for my continued intellectual development. In order to allow me to be wise about current events she would send to me by mail the previous month's collection of TIME magazines. I was always impressed by the fact that when I read these magazines weeks after their time sensitive publication, I invariably found that they had gotten everything all wrong.

Their predictions as to events that would occur was woefully inaccurate and their analysis of situations proved to be shallow and of little real strategic value. Yet I had to keep on reading these magazines for after all my mother sent them to me and she always inquired of me as to their welfare and cogency.

But this experience of receiving these old magazines – which went on for many years - cured me of the belief in political and economic experts and pundits. Unforeseen events always arose to mock their oracular predictions and assessments. I always thought of the verse: "He Who sits in Heaven laughs and the Lord mocks them."

So I developed the habit, nevertheless, of only reading old magazines, for in their now evident false understanding of reported events, I did find fiendish enjoyment and perverse pleasure. I imagine that since few people read old magazines except when sitting in a doctor's waiting room, the magazines can keep on churning out their assessments, predictions and analyses without fear of being exposed as being as constantly mistaken... as they truly are.

I recently read a March 2011 issue of a popular English language Israeli magazine. It was just gushing with articles and an editorial about the creation of a new Middle East due to the "Arab Spring" that deposed the rulers of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and would now proceed to do so in Syria, Jordan and the Gulf States as well.

Well the "Arab spring" has turned out to be pretty much of a bust with no real political or economic progress left in its wake. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs have been killed since the "Arab Spring" and almost all of them were killed by their fellow Arabs. The Middle East has become even more unstable and volatile than before and all of the rosy predictions about the "new" Middle East are laughable in retrospect.

And the usual tired rhetoric about the Palestinians and the solution to their plight and problems advanced in the magazine seem to be so unrealistic as to be almost preposterous. I am forced to wonder whether the political and diplomatic leaders of the world ever bother to read old magazines. I am confident that if they did then their policies, statements and goals would be much more realistic than they currently are.

There is no reason to keep on beating dead horses and to repeat past failures. Read the magazines of the Oslo era and weep. Events on the ground truly mock the past wisdom of journalistic experts.

The Torah bids us to remember the past in a meaningful fashion. By this it means not only to remember past events and personalities – and that is certainly necessary for a meaningful present Jewish life – but also to remember the inaccurate assessments that were regarded as infallible in the past.

Remember what wise men once said was impossible to occur, nevertheless did occur. Remember the fallibility of all human beings and the fact that great people often are capable of great mistakes. Remember that the race is not always to the swift or the battle to the courageous and mighty. All of this should be part of the memory bank of the Jewish people.

Remember false messiahs that led us astray and great scholars who erred in their assessment of future events that would befall the Jewish people. Remembrance of the past limits present hubris and arrogance, fanaticism and wild innovations. There were many who said that the Holocaust could never happen but it did.

There were others from diametrically opposed poles of the Jewish world that said that a Jewish state could not be created and if so created would collapse within fifteen years of its initial establishment. They have also been proven to be inaccurate in their predictions and in their understanding of God's will. That does not diminish their greatness but it does prove their humanity and that all human beings are fallible. If you have doubts about this just find some old magazines and start reading them.

Shabat shalom

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Chayei Sarah

In truth, our mother Sarah, like many other mothers past and present in Jewish life, has not quite received her due. Rashi, quoting Midrash in describing Sarah's life, states that all the years of Sarah's life were "for good." He must mean "for good" in a spiritual and holy sense, for in her physical worldly life there was little good that she experienced. Wandering over the Middle East by following her visionary husband to a strange and unknown destination; being forced into Pharaoh's harem; being unable to conceive children; having her maidservant Hagar marry Avraham and attempt to usurp her position in the household; kidnapped by Avimelech, the king of the Philistines; seeing her precious son's life threatened by an aggressive and violent step-brother, Yishmael; and passing away almost fifty years before her husband – this does not make for a happy resume of a life that was "all good." In fact, it raises the eternal question of why do bad things happen to good people. But powerless as we are to really answer that question cogently and logically, we should, in retrospect, view our mother Sarah with a renewed sense of awe and appreciation. Lesser people would have been crushed by such a cascade of events in one's lifetime. The Mishna speaks of the ten tests in life that befell Avraham - and that he rose above all of them. We should also make mention of the tests in life that our mother Sarah endured in her existence and that she too rose above them. "The wisdom of women builds their home," said King Solomon. That certainly must be said of the house of Avraham, the founding home of the Jewish people. It was Sarah's wisdom and fortitude that was the foundation of that home.

In everyone's life there are moments of danger, frustration, disappointment and even tragedy. Who amongst us can say in truth that all the years of our life were "all good?" This being the case we must revert to the understanding that since the "all good" in the life of our mother Sarah must perforce be interpreted in a spiritual sense – in a sense of continual service to God and man and a commitment to a higher

level of living than mere physical existence and an optimistic frame of mind – so too must we search for such an "all good" interpretation in our individual lives as well.

The striving for finding such an "all good" approach to life is the essence of Torah and Jewish ritual. I once had to attend a rabbinical court here in Israel in order to register as being married. As often happens in government offices here the wait to be serviced was long and the ambience was not very pleasant. The clerk handling the matter was rather surly and disinterested in my problem.

Finally a wonderful rabbi came out of his inner office and took care of me and my need expeditiously and warmly. When I was foolish enough to begin to complain to him about the long wait and the less than forthcoming clerk, the rabbi gently shushed me and said: "Here in the Land of Israel all is good!" And when one is on that level of spiritually that is certainly true.

Shabat shalom

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Life and Death Lessons from Meoras Hamachpeilah

The significance placed on Jewish burial by the Torah is so great that the first twenty pesukim of Parshas Chayey Sara are dedicated to an elaborate account of the purchase of the first Jewish burial plot. Other methods of disposal of a body, such as cremation, are clearly prohibited by halacha and are anathema to Jewish tradition. What is it about burial that is so unique and why was it so critical for Avraham to purchase a uniquely "Jewish" burial plot, thereby creating the model of a Jewish cemetery for all generations?

Belief in teschivas hameisim is so basic to our faith that the Rambam lists it as one of the thirteen principles every believing Jew accepts.

Together with articles of faith such as belief in Hashem and the divine origin of the Torah, belief in teschivas hameisim is essential to Torah observance. Why is an event that will occur at some future date so critical to our lives as observant Jews in the present?

There are two radically different ways to view a human being. One can see a person entirely as a physical entity, not fundamentally different than other members of the animal kingdom. Or, alternatively, one can focus on a person's spiritual dimension which is temporarily dwelling in a physical body. The difference between these two perspectives is not just an esoteric philosophical distinction, but rather is the driving force behind one's entire approach to life. One who sees himself as primarily or exclusively physical will dedicate his entire life to the pursuit of physical pleasures. However, one who understands that his true essence is spiritual will pursue spiritual goals that satisfy his soul. These two radically different approaches to life ultimately will be reflected in how one approaches death as well. "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" is the motto for those for whom death is the absolute end. It is the cessation of all physical activity, never to begin again. However, for those who understand that the body is merely a temporary home for the eternal soul, death is a temporary state, since Hashem will recreate the body at a future time to house the soul that never dies.

Depending on one's view of life and death, one will have very different thoughts on what is to be done to a body after death. If life ends with death, the body should be destroyed. If life will continue, the body is placed in the ground not fundamentally different than a seed that is planted hidden from view which will ultimately return as a beautiful plant.

Although we cannot fathom the true meaning of the parah aduma, perhaps there is symbolism in its performance that reflects these themes. We are commanded to take the ashes of the parah aduma and mix it with mayim chayim - water from a "living" source such as a spring. One who just faced death and became impure may come to view death through the lens of the ashes which symbolize total destruction. The Torah insists that we take the ashes and mix them with living water, thereby transforming ashes (eipher) to dirt (aphar). Whereas ashes are an end, dirt is used for planting and symbolizes the ultimate rejuvenations of the body and the soul.

Avraham taught us the significance of burial. Unlike his pagan neighbors who lived for the present, it was inconceivable that Sara would be buried anywhere except with those who shared her understanding of the true meaning of life and death. This lesson has been part of our legacy since the purchase of meoras hamachpeilah[1]. May we merit to see the day when all of those who truly understood life will return once again on the day that Hashem chooses to perform the wondrous act of teschiyas hameisim.

[1] Although many kedoshim throughout Jewish history were tragically denied kever Yisroel, they will once again join their people at the time of teschiyas hameisim

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

Sarah's Lifetime Was One Hundred Years, And Twenty Years, And Seven Years; The Years Of Sarah's Life. (23:1)

The Midrash quotes the pasuk in Tehillim 37:18, Yodea Hashem yemei temimim, "Hashem attends the days of the perfect." This refers to Sarah Imeinu, who was perfect in her actions. Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, derives from Chazal the concept of, tamim b'maaseh, "acting perfectly." This means that an activity is carried out in perfect harmony, focused on serving the Almighty. "Everything" means exactly what it implies: every aspect, all of the person's organs, limbs, working together in perfection to serve Hashem. This was Sarah: tamim b'maasehah, "perfect in her actions."

The Mashgiach observes that, when Avraham Avinu addressed the needs of his guests, it consisted of one long execution, from the moment he saw them until he accompanied them to the door. Every individual deed was part of one long activity, with each part fusing perfectly with the next component, much like a perfectly synchronized watch, in which each wheel causes the next one to move, so that everything works together in harmony. Avraham wanted to treat them well. This mandated showing respect, by addressing the individuals as adoni, my master. He must provide the choicest cuts of meat and do so quickly, and so on and so forth. What appears to be a separate component is actually all part of one long act of chesed. If one aspect were to be off center, if the meat would not have been perfect, the entire act of chesed would be imperfect. This is the meaning of tamim b'maasim.

Eliezer was sent on a mission to seek a wife for Yitzchak Avinu. Thus, everything that took place from the moment that Eliezer left home until he returned with Rivkah was all considered to be intrinsic to the execution of Eliezer's mission. The mission seems to be broken into various segments, but they are actually all components of one long mission. The requirement of temimus, perfection, demands that what seems to be the most minute detail be carried out in exact perfection or else the entire activity is left failing.

Likewise, Rivkah Imeinu merited to become the second Matriarch of Klal Yisrael. She was selected to be Yitzchak's wife due to her attentiveness to chesed. This does not mean that most of her actions were considerate of others. It demands that every nuance of every action was all perfected in harmony to the highest goals of chesed. From the moment Rivkah appeared on the scene until she met Yitzchak, all that was demonstrated was one lengthy act of kindness.

Rav Yeruchem explains that this principle of tamim b'maaseh is rooted in the attribute of emes, truth. Chesed in its own right does not require sheleimus, perfection. Indeed, whatever kindness one performs is great. Emes, truth, demands perfection. For an act of chesed to achieve spiritual integrity it must achieve total

perfection. Chesed v'emes, kindness and truth, do not simply go together, they are one. Chesed must be emes, or else it is not perfect.

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

The Midrash notes the word va'yavo, "And (Avraham) came." "From where did he come," the Midrash asks. "He came from the burial of Terach, his father, but did not the passing of Terach precede Sarah Imeinu's death by two years? We must say that he came from Har HaMoriah." The Midrash is obviously enigmatic. When Avraham left Har HaMoriah, he returned to Beer Sheva. If this is the case, Avraham Avinu was "coming" from Beer Sheva. Ramban explains that vayavo does not refer to Avraham's physical act of coming, but rather, the place which inspired his eulogy of Sarah. Therefore, he explains that Har HaMoriah inspired his appreciation of Sarah.

In his commentary to the Torah, Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, coalesces the two places quoted in the Midrash and offers a practical explanation of the places which inspired Avraham's eulogy of Sarah. The Patriarch focused on two significant points in Sarah's life and how she was able to transcend her own murky background and upbringing in order to be able to raise a son of the caliber of Yitzchak Avinu, infused with holiness and purity, willing to part with his life in the service of Hashem.

Sarah grew up in Terach's home. Her father, Haran, had died as a result of being flung into a fiery cauldron upon the command of Nimrod. Sadly, his own father, Terach, played a role in his son's death, since Terach was an idolator whose vocation was making and selling idols. Avraham and, by extension, his brother, Haran, had a problem with this. They believed in Hashem unequivocally, thus maintaining that idols were composed of nothing more than worthless stone. Terach could not allow his son to continue with this slander of his precious gods. It was bad for business. He went to King Nimrod who immediately gave Avraham a choice: to live as a pagan, or die as a monotheistic believer. Haran had the same choice, but being less of a gambler and less of a believer, he opted to see what would transpire with Avraham. If the Patriarch lived, Haran would jump into the cauldron. If Avraham perished, Haran would take the easy way out. Avraham entered and exited the flames unscathed; Haran did not exit. His daughter was sent to live with his father, Terach.

Being the chief idolator, he certainly must have raised his granddaughter with the appropriate hashkofos, principles and outlook, of a pagan. Terach was out of his league, and was as unsuccessful with Sarah as he was with Avraham. Sarah left this pagan house and reached out to the world, converting thousands of women, while Avraham did the same with the men. Despite the unacceptable, morally repugnant education which Sarah received in Terach's home, she was able to go on to raise her only son to become a Patriarch. Sarah's chinuch prepared Yitzchak to be an olah temimah, perfect sacrifice. How did this apparent paradox happen? How could it have succeeded?

We underestimate our Matriarch, Sarah. She transcended it all. She was not influenced by the pagan home of her surrogate father, Terach. Avraham took one look at Yitzchak and saw a son that would have made any mother proud, a son who was willing to lay down his life for his beliefs. When Chazal say that Avraham buried Terach, they mean that the Patriarch buried everything which Terach represented: his idols, his paraphernalia; everything that even remotely carried the "smell" of Terach. He did this at Har HaMoriah when he saw the results of the excellent chinuch Sarah had imparted to Yitzchak. Har HaMoriah was the scene of Terach's second burial. Here was laid to rest the man and his pagan ideas. Yitzchak was living proof that Terach was dead. This is how Terach's "burial" and Yitzchak's akeidah inspired Avraham's eulogy.

I personally experienced a similar situation, and, by extension, so does each and every ben Torah attest to the burial of the Terachs, the Amaleks, and all of the wicked people throughout the generations. My mother, Glicka bas R'Avraham Alter, a"h, lived a full life. It was a difficult life, as she survived a number of Hitler's death camps. She, together with my father, zl, lost their first set of children during the war and came to America following the liberation, to rebuild their lives and family.

They raised three children who, in turn, raised two more generations of Torah-abiding Jews. My mother was widowed early on, and she was left to raise her family alone. She did so with perseverance, dedication and love, never once faltering in her commitment to Torah observance. At her funeral, I insisted that she be carried out only by her grandsons, who were mature bnei Torah. As the coffin was raised up, one of the bystanders, an elderly "landsmann," friend from Europe, remarked, "She has just taken her revenge on Hitler!"

When we maintain our allegiance to Hashem, His Torah, and mitzvos, we bury all of those enemies who have attempted to destroy our beliefs throughout the ages. Every Jewish child who receives a Torah education, who lives a life of Torah

values, represents another nail in Amalek's coffin. Every bar mitzvah, wedding, simchah adds more dirt to his grave. By acting like Torah-committed Jews, we take our revenge on our enemies. We also inspire those who are on the line, whose Jewish lives are filled with ambiguity and uncertainty. They know that the lives they lead are void of Jewish values and morals; yet, they are afraid to take the plunge. When they observe the simchas ha'chaim, joy of life, joie d'vivre, that is inherent in Jewish observance, they may finally be tempted to take the next step.

Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her. Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead. (23:2,3)

Avraham Avinu eulogized his life's partner: the woman with whom he had shared his spiritual goals; the mother of his son, Yitzchak; the first Matriarch of the Jewish Nation. This is a tall order. There must have been so much to say, so much to emphasize about a woman who had lived life so well, who was such a vital component of Avraham's success as leader of the world, father of the Jewish People, paradigm of the morally perfect, ethically correct, spiritually replete individual. Yet, when one peruses the pesukim, not one word is mentioned concerning the eulogy Avraham must have given for Sarah Imeinu. Clearly, a eulogy of such import should find its way into the Torah. Horav Yosef Berger, Shlita, quotes Horav Shlomo, zl, m'Munkatch, grandson of the Bnei Yissaschar, who asked this question when he eulogized his own Rebbetzin. "What was Avraham's hesped, eulogy?" he wondered.

Vayakam mei'al pnei meiso, "Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead." This was the gist of Avraham's eulogy. The Patriarch realized and expounded upon the fact that his tekumah, rising up, spiritual elevation, success as a person, teacher, leader, was due to pnei meiso, "the presence of his dead." Sarah was the reason that Avraham achieved such success. The Patriarch recognized this. It was all in his noble wife's merit. He attributed nothing to himself. This was truly an impressive and inspiring eulogy.

When one reads the pasuk, "Avraham came to eulogize Sarah," the lamed, which actually means "to" as in "to Sarah," seems out of place. Obviously, since Sarah was the deceased, he was coming to eulogize her and no one else. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, explains this practically. Avraham was the gadol ha'dor, preeminent leader of the generation. As such, it is certain that Sarah's funeral was well-attended by every noble and distinguished personage. Quite possibly, many of these illustrious leaders were asked to speak - which they probably did. They spoke with great fanfare, relating the many accolades and praises of Avraham Avinu. Sarah was praised for being the wife, helpmate, life's companion of the gadol ha'dor, but they mentioned very little about Sarah herself. It was Sarah's funeral; yet, they spoke about Avraham! What about Sarah - as a person in her own right? Thus, the Torah tells us, "Avraham came to eulogize Sarah," only Sarah, her values, her attributes, her virtue, her character refinement, her nobility. He spoke about the deceased - in her own right - not as her husband's partner in life. Sarah had achieved her own personal significance. In his Ohel Rachel, thoughts on the month of Elul and the Yamim Noraim, Horav Shmuel Auerbach, Shlita, has a section entitled, Alon Bachus, which is the eulogy he gave for his Rebbetzin. It is an inspiring mussar shmues, discourse, which portrays the Torah's attitude concerning the esteem that a gadol ha'dor had for his wife. The Rosh Yeshivah explains that his distinction in the field of Torah and as rosh yeshivah should be attributed to the direction he received from his wife. She was involved in every aspect of his life, encouraging a number of his decisions vis-?-vis the yeshivah and his students. To her, it was all about learning Torah, which was paramount in her life.

His Rebbetzin was integrity personified, unable to grasp anything that was not totally "true." She never thought of herself - only of others. She had no needs; others had needs. The Rosh Yeshivah relates that, during one of her more difficult, painful days, as she was slowly succumbing to her illness, one of his students became engaged. The ceremony honoring the engagement was being celebrated that night. Rav Shmuel was not planning to attend. How could he leave his wife when she was in such excruciating pain?

The Rebbetzin replied with complete equanimity, "You must go! You do not mix two situations. My pain is my pain. It is not the chassan's pain. Why should he suffer because of my pain? He is waiting for you to attend as his rebbe, his Rosh Yeshivah, and his spiritual father. Why should his simchah, joyous occasion, be marred because of your absence? I am in pain, and he is experiencing great joy. What does one have to do with the other? You are going!" It was as simple as that. These two distinct situations were exclusive of one another. The pain that she was enduring should have no effect on the life of anyone other than herself - and her husband. The subject was closed.

Her illness did not deter her from her many acts of chesed, kindness. Toward the end of her life, the Rebbetzin attended a Shabbos Sheva Berachos, which required

traveling and staying as a guest at someone's house. She arrived before the Rosh Yeshivah. After spending part of the day helping to prepare for the festivities, she insisted that the Rosh Yeshivah partake of the sweets that had been set aside for them. The hostess worked hard to prepare a fitting welcome for the guests, how could he not eat? Also, she said, to be careful not to leave any crumbs! This is what went through her mind - and this is what was important to him to remember at her funeral!

I think her life was aptly summed up in the phrase on her matzeivah, gravestone: Evlah b'libah v'tzahalasa al panehah, "Her sadness (was) in her heart; her joy (was) on her face." This was the Rosh Yeshivah's tribute to his Rebbetzin.

Now Avraham was old, well on in years. (24:1)

The word zakein, old, implies that the individual has lived an increased number of days. Likewise, ba ba'yamim, well on in years, indicates that we are not talking about a young person. Zakein and ba ba'yamim are redundant to one another. Why are they both used in the same pasuk? Chazal explain that some people have experienced physical longevity, ziknah, but their days are incomplete. Likewise, there are those who age prematurely, although their length of days are actually short. Avraham Avinu's ziknah, old age, was the result of a full life, well-lived in the service of the Almighty.

The Shlah HaKodesh, zl, derives a profound lesson from the coupling of zakein with ba ba'yamim. Avraham Avinu teaches us that one should make sure that he experiences positive achievement every day of his life. Otherwise, that day is rendered lifeless. In order that a day of life be considered a "living" day, it is necessary for one to infuse that day with life by doing something positive and good. Shlomo HaMelech says in Mishlei 10:27, V'yiraas Hashem tofif yamim, "And the fear of G-d adds days," meaning that on a day in which a person acts positively, he injects that day with life. In contrast, u'shenos reshaim tiktzarenah, "the years of the wicked will be shortened," meaning that even if a wicked person has a lengthy stay on this world, it will ultimately be shortened, because his many days are rendered incomplete.

Avraham was ba ba'yamim, with each day being added as a day of life infused with his many positive activities. His life was full, because every day was well-lived. We wonder why it is only concerning Avraham that emphasis is placed upon his "days." Was he any different than any of the other Patriarchs whose lives were all infused with daily goodness? Horav Yisrael Chaim Prager, zl, Mashgiach Ruchani of Yeshivas Novominsk, explains that, concerning the counting of days, Avraham was truly different from the others. He quotes the Midrash Rabbah, "Rabbi Nechemiah says, Lech Lecha, 'Go to yourself,' is actually a command concerning the 'goings,' (Thus the lecha, yourself, is translated as 'go.' The pasuk would be read as lech, lech - 'go twice'). This is a reference to two commands: one from Aram Naharaim/ Aram Nachor (which was actually Uhr Kasdim, where Avraham was thrown into the fiery cauldron); the second refers to the five years which Avraham spent in Charan following the Br is Bein HaBesarim, the Covenant of the Parts (which was essentially when Avraham had his seminal dialogue with Hashem concerning his and his descendants future)."

Chazal teach us that Hashem directed Avraham to leave Aram Naharaim, but instructed him to tarry in Charan for five years, after which he went to Eretz Yisrael at the age of seventy-five. The Midrash uses a vernacular in describing Avraham's trip from Charan to Eretz Yisrael as: She'hifricho mi Bein HaBesarim v'havio l'Charan, "He (Hashem) flew him from Bein HaBesarim and brought him to Charan." Why "fly" him? Chazal explain that, following the Covenant, Avraham expressed concern for the earlier years of his life, when he had participated in the "family" worship that had prevailed in his home. Hashem made the sins of Avraham's youth disappear, sort of "fly away." This is what is meant when Chazal say that Hashem flew Avraham to Eretz Yisrael.

We see from the Midrash that our Patriarch was very anxious concerning his past, the earlier years of his life when his "days" were far from perfect. Therefore, the Torah makes a point of underscoring Avraham's length of days, that each and every one achieved perfection. Once he committed his belief to Hashem, his past was expunged and his days cleansed, so that all of his one hundred and seventy-five years were considered to be pristine and complete.

This Midrash is an eye-opener. Many recently-returned baalei teshuva worry about their less than perfect pasts. Are they to be ignored? Does one walk around with a life-long guilt trip just because he was not born into an observant family? Avraham Avinu had similar concerns, which Hashem allayed. While we are not Avraham Avinu, sincerity does go a long way. If the present is stable, one should have very little to worry about the past. It is only when one hinges on the past, with it returning to haunt him every time the present does not reach his expectations, that

one must be concerned - not only about the past; apparently, his present is shaky as well.

V'dibarta bam. And speak of them.

Rashi quotes the Sifri that interprets this phrase: Shelo yehei ikar diburcha ela bam. Aseim ikar v'al taaseim tafeil. "Your primary conversation shall be about Torah and mitzvos. Make them primary; do not make them secondary." Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, quotes Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, who finds in this Sifri a source for the teaching of secular subjects, as long as the Torah remains primary and of utmost significance - with the secular subjects remaining secondary to it. If secular subjects were to be totally excluded from the Jewish curriculum of study, Chazal would have said something to the effect that, v'dibarta bam - shelo yehei diburcha ela bam, "Your conversation should be only in them." Since exclusiveness is not granted to Torah study - only primary significance, it implies that, for certain purposes, secular studies are permitted.

I am not sure what the proof is. Chazal are speaking about conversation - not necessarily study. One is certainly permitted to converse, maintain a dialogue in areas that are not exclusively Torah, as long as Torah is the ikar, primary. Setting time aside for secular study at the expense of Torah might be another question altogether, to which Chazal might not be alluding.

In Memory of our beloved parents, grandparents, and great grandparents: Rabbi Justin Hofmann Harav Yekusiel ben Yosef z"l niftar 25 Cheshvan 5770 and Sofie Hofmann Tzipora bas Hachaver Avraham Yosef Simcha Hacohen a"h nifteres 13 Kislev 5773 From the Elzas, Greenfeld and Levine families

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Beginning the Journey

A while back, a British newspaper, The Times, interviewed a prominent member of the Jewish community – let's call him Lord X – on his 92nd birthday. The interviewer said, "Most people, when they reach their 92nd birthday, start thinking about slowing down. You seem to be speeding up. Why is that?"

Lord X's reply was this: "When you get to 92, you start seeing the door begin to close, and I have so much to do before the door closes that the older I get, the harder I have to work."

Something like that is the impression we get of Abraham in this week's parsha. Sarah, his constant companion throughout their journeys, has died. He is 137 years old. We see him mourn Sarah's death, and then he moves into action.

He engages in an elaborate negotiation to buy a plot of land in which to bury her. As the narrative makes clear, this is not a simple task. He confesses to the local people, Hittites, that he is "an immigrant and a resident among you," meaning that he knows he has no right to buy land. It will take a special concession on their part for him to do so. The Hittites politely but firmly try to discourage him. He has no need to buy a burial plot. "No one among us will deny you his burial site to bury your dead." He can bury Sarah in someone else's graveyard. Equally politely but no less insistently, Abraham makes it clear that he is determined to buy land. In the event, he pays a highly inflated price (400 silver shekels) to do so.

The purchase of the cave of Machpelah is evidently a highly significant event, because it is recorded in great detail and highly legal terminology, not just here, but three times subsequently in Genesis (23: 17, 25: 9, 49: 30, 50: 13), each time with the same formality. Here for instance is Jacob on his deathbed, speaking to his sons:

"Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites." (Gen. 49: 29-32)

Something significant is being hinted at here, otherwise why mention, each time, exactly where the field is and who Abraham bought it from? Immediately after the story of land purchase, we read, "Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything." Again this sounds like the end of a life, not a preface to a new course of action, and again our expectation is confounded. Abraham launches into a new initiative, this time to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac, who by now is at least 37 years old. Abraham leaves nothing to chance. He does not speak to Isaac himself but to his most trusted servant, whom he instructs to go "to my native land, to my birthplace," and find the appropriate woman. He wants Isaac to have a wife who will share his faith and way of life. Abraham does not specify that she should come from his own family, but this seems to be an assumption hovering in the background.

As with the purchase of the field, so here, the course of events is described in more detail than almost anywhere else in the Torah. Every conversational exchange is recorded. The contrast with the story of the binding of Isaac could not be greater. There, almost everything – Abraham's thoughts, Isaac's feelings – is left unsaid. Here, everything is said. Again, the literary style calls our attention to the significance of what is happening, without telling us precisely what it is.

The explanation is simple and unexpected. Throughout the story of Abraham and Sarah, God had promised them two things: children and a land. The promise of the land ("Rise, walk in the land throughout its length and breadth, for I will give it to you") is repeated no less than seven times. The promise of children occurs four times. Abraham's descendants will be "a great nation," as many as "the dust of the earth," and "the stars in the sky"; he will be the father not of one nation but of many.

Despite this, when Sarah dies, Abraham has not a single inch of the land that he can call his own, and has only one child who will continue the covenant, Isaac, currently unmarried. Neither promise has been fulfilled. Hence the extraordinary detail of the two main stories in Chayei Sarah: the purchase of land and the finding of a wife for Isaac. There is a moral here, and the Torah slows down the speed of the narrative, so that we will not miss the point.

God promises, but we have to act. God promised Abraham the land, but he had to buy the first field. God promised Abraham many descendants, but Abraham had to ensure that his son was married, and to a woman who would share the life of the covenant, so that Abraham would have, as we say today, "Jewish grandchildren."

Despite all the promises, God does not and will not do it alone. By the very act of self-limitation (tzimtzum) through which He creates the space for human freedom, He gives us responsibility, and only by exercising it do we reach our full stature as human beings. God saved Noah from the flood, but Noah had to make the ark. He gave the land of Israel to the people of Israel, but they had to fight the battles. God gives us the strength to act, but we have to do the deed. What changes the world, what fulfills our destiny, is not what God does for us but what we do for God.

That is what leaders understand, and it is what made Abraham the first Jewish leader. Leaders take responsibility for creating the conditions through which God's purposes can be fulfilled. They are not passive but active – even in old age, like Abraham in this week's parsha. Indeed in the next chapter, to our surprise, we read that after Sarah's death, Abraham takes another wife and has eight more children. Whatever else this tells us, and there are many interpretations (the most likely is that it explains how Abraham became "the father of many nations"), it certainly conveys the point that Abraham stayed young the way Moses stayed young. "His eye undimmed and his natural energy unabated." Though action takes energy, it gives us energy. The contrast between Noah in old age and Abraham in old age could not be greater.

Perhaps though the most important point is that large promises – a land, countless children – become real through small beginnings. Leaders begin with an envisioned future, but they also know that there is a long journey between here and there and we can only reach it one act at a time, one day at a time. There is no miraculous shortcut, and if there were, it would not help. It would make achievement like Jonah's gourd, that grew overnight, then died overnight. Abraham acquired only a single field, and had just one son who would continue the covenant. Yet he did not complain, and he died serene and satisfied. Because he had begun. Because he had left future generations something on which to build. All great change is the work of more than one generation, and none of us will live to see the full fruit of our endeavours.

Leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow a life with immortality.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Drasha Parshas Chayei Sarah

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Who's on First

A number of weeks ago, I wrote about Ishmael. Actually, I wrote about his mother, and the piece was not so kind to her. I received scores of e-mail, some praising the piece, others railing that it was not strong enough, and still others decrying it, saying that it bordered on racism.

Today, once again, I am going to write about Ishmael. But before you gird your loins, let me tell you that I won't speak about the biblical Ishmael, but rather his namesake, Rabbi Ishmael.

You see, one of the great sages of the Talmud was named Rabbi Ishmael. A fact that should shock our genteel readers. In fact, the Talmud is filled with quotes from Rabbi Ishmael. But how did he get such a name? After all, why would anyone name their child after the "wild-ass of a man whose hand is against everyone, and everyone's hand is against him" (Genesis 16:11)? Rabbi Yishmael's opinions are from the most significant in the entire Talmud yet his name is surely not a Rabbinic one? Or perhaps there is more to Ishmael than we truly know.

The answer is somewhat simple. It is based on two words in the Torah. "Yitzchak and Yishmael." Let me put them in context. You see, the Torah tells us "Abraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content, and he was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah. (Genesis 25:8-9)." It seems innocuous enough. But alas, the Talmud infers something from two words that turn Ishmael, from the castigated wild-man, to one who is worthy of place in Jewish history, a Talmudic giant bearing his name.

The Talmud in Bava Basra tells us, that from the fact that Ishmael, the older son, yielded the precedence to Isaac, the more holy son, we gather that Ishmael repented of his evil ways and, in fact this is what is meant by the "good old age" mentioned in connection with Abraham's passing.

Amazing! An entire life's transformed is embodied in the smallest act of letting a younger brother go first. And Ishmael becomes the hero after whom the great rabbi is named! How is that? Just because he let his younger brother go first? Is that really possible?

Richard Busby (1606-1695), headmaster of the prestigious Westminster School was a strict disciplinarian. It is reputed that in his 58 years as headmaster only one pupil passed through the school without being personally beaten by Busby. With its fine reputation, the school was visited by King Charles II.

As Dr. Busby was showing King Charles II around the school, it was noticed that, contrary to etiquette, the headmaster kept his hat on in the royal presence. One of the king's aides, mention this flagrant violation of protocol to the headmaster.

Busby demurred. He excused himself in these words: "It would not do for my boys to suppose that there existed a greater man on earth than I."

Think about it. Who was at that funeral? All of Ishmael's grandchildren, each strongly entrenched in the belief that they were the descendants of the truly chosen son.

And now comes Avraham's funeral, an occasion attended by hundreds of his followers and admirers. Protocol would have the true heir walk first. It's the perfect setting to make a statement. It is the setting where you can insist that you are the true heir and tell the world, that now, with the passing of Avraham, "there is no greater man on earth than I."

Yet Ishmael defers. He lets Isaac go first. It is perhaps a greater act than laying down a sword or embracing an enemy. It is breaking an ingrained character trait. And breaking a character trait, breaking the desire for a little bit of respect in the eyes of observers is a true sign of greatness.

Thank you Rabbi Yishmael's mom for letting us know that. Thank you Yishmael for being so brave. Pass the message on.

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Parshat Hayei Sarah: Seeing the other

By Shmuel Rabinowitz

October 24, 2013 Thursday 20 Heshvan 5774

When we talk about "seeing the other," we do not mean only recognizing his existence but recognizing his needs and making real room for him in our hearts.

In this week's Torah portion, we encounter an already elderly Avraham. His wife has passed away and he is crying for her, mourning her, and he purchases a gravesite for her. Now Avraham is free to worry about the future.

Yitzhak, the son who is going to continue the family dynasty, is still a bachelor so Avraham turns to his household manager – Eliezer – with a request that he find a partner for Yitzhak.

Eliezer travels to search for the special woman worthy of being Yitzhak's wife, and finally finds Rivka, who agrees to come to Eretz Canaan – where Avraham and Yitzhak reside – and marry Yitzhak.

This story is described in the Torah in great detail.

One of our sages concluded something interesting from this: Rav Acha said: The discussion of the servants of the fathers is more beautiful than the Torah of sons. (Midrash Raba, Genesis Parsha 60) Meaning: Many commandments are written in the Torah briefly, using few words, but this story, most of which is comprised of Eliezer's thoughts and words, is written in great detail.

The number of words used by the Torah for each topic is not coincidental and acts as an indication of the importance of the issue. From this, Rav Acha concludes that the importance of this story is greater than the importance of other commandments written in the Torah.

Why is this story describing the shidduch of Yitzhak and Rivka so important?

Following the way Eliezer searches for a partner suitable for Yitzhak teaches us a basic and significant point about relationships, and about the necessary characteristics in the person who will be privileged to be the one who continues the dynasty of Avraham Avinu and from whom Am Yisrael will grow.

Eliezer embarks on this search mission with one only one piece of data: The girl he is looking for has to be from Avraham Avinu's family living in his native country, Aram Naharayim.

Being familiar with Avraham's lifestyle and the values he wanted to bequeath to following generations, Eliezer decides, on his own, to run a "test" of the girls in the place he reaches. And he says it like this: Behold, I am standing by the water fountain, and the daughters of the people of the city are coming out to draw water. And it will be, [that] the maiden to whom I will say, 'Lower your pitcher and I will drink,' and she will say, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels,' her have You designated for Your servant, for Yitzhak..." (Genesis 24, 13-14) And indeed, the girl to whom Eliezer turned with this request was Rivka, and she agreed to his request and even added her own suggestion to help him give water also to the herd of camels that accompanied him on his journey.

Eliezer is excited about his success and immediately offers her jewelry and turns to speak with her parents about the match which will eventually take place, but not before Rivka expresses her consent to going with Eliezer with the purpose of marrying Yitzhak.

We read this incredible story and wonder: Is this the only criterion necessary for Yitzhak's partner? Aren't there other details that Eliezer should verify before he

decides that this is the woman worthy of continuing Avraham's dynasty? Aren't there additional important qualities other than giving and helping others? Here we discover Avraham's great spirit which was the basis for Eliezer's actions, and which acts as the basic value upon which all of Judaism rests: Giving is the foundation of everything.

Avraham Avinu, who opened his home to any passing guest, bequeathed this message to us deeply and thoroughly. Nothing teaches us about a man's character like the trait of giving. When a person gives of himself to others, it proves that he is not insular but is capable of seeing the needs of the other, and even the needs of animals living around him. This kind of person is one who is worthy of continuing the dynasty of Avraham since he internalized the most important value of all, the principle that guides success: Seeing the other.

When we talk about "seeing the other," we do not mean only recognizing his existence but recognizing his needs and making real room for him in our hearts.

This is the trait that teaches us about a man's character more than any other. Rivka proved she had this trait because she not only agreed to the request of the stranger standing before her, but recognized his hidden needs, thinking of him and of his camels. She, therefore, was the woman worthy of being Yitzhak's partner.

After we learn this important message, it is clear to us why this story is more important than other commandments written in the Torah. For it teaches us about the highest principle, the basis upon which all of Judaism rests, and the correct way in which we should lead our lives – recognizing the other and both his obvious and hidden needs.

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The Text of Birchas Hagomeil

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

After Eliezer's extensive travels through the desert, he presumably recited birchas hagomeil. Did he use the same text that we use?

Question #1: Slip up in shul

Not long ago, I received the following question in an e-mail. Upon reciting birchas hagomeil, the individual erred and recited the following:

"Hagomeil tovim, shegemalani kol tuv," thereby omitting the word lachayavim in "Hagomeil lachayavim tovim." Must he now repeat the bracha because he omitted a word?

Question #2: Minor acknowledgements

"Thank G-d, my nine-year old daughter is now recuperating very successfully from surgery. Does she recite birchas hagomeil?"

Question #3: Daily thanks

"Does someone who travels daily recite birchas hagomeil?"

Answer:

In a previous article, we learned that birchas hagomeil is to be recited by someone who has been saved from a dangerous situation. Specifically, Sefer Tehillim (107) and the Gemara (Brachos 54b) mention four categories of people who survived treacherous predicaments: someone who traversed a wilderness, a captive who was freed, an ill person who recovered, and a seafarer who returned to terra firma. A safe return, release or recovery warrants reciting this bracha, although the halacha is that one recites birchas hagomeil after surviving any life-threatening situation. This article will discuss some aspects of this bracha that were not yet covered.

Someone else reciting

May someone else recite some form of birchas hagomeil on behalf of the person who actually was in the difficult circumstance? In this context, we find the following Gemara passage (loc. cit.):

"Rav Yehudah was ill and then recovered. When Rav Chona of Baghdad and other scholars came to visit him, they said to Rav Yehudah, 'Blessed is the merciful One (in Aramaic, rachmana), Who returned you to us and not to the earth.' Rav Yehudah responded, 'You have exempted me from reciting birchas hagomeil!'"

Thus, we see that Rav Yehudah ruled that the praise recited by Rav Chona exempted him (Rav Yehudah) from reciting birchas hagomeil, notwithstanding the fact that Rav Chona had not been ill and had no requirement to bensch gomeil.

The Gemara proceeds to ask several questions about this conversation: "But do we not require a minyan for birchas hagomeil?" to which the Gemara replies that there indeed were ten people present when Rav Chona visited Rav Yehudah.

Subsequently, the Gemara questions how Rav Yehudah could have fulfilled the requirement to recite birchas hagomeil, if he himself had not made the bracha, to which it replies that he answered 'Amen' to the blessing of Rav Chona of Baghdad. Thus, we see a second halacha. Someone who is required to recite birchas hagomeil need not recite the entire bracha himself, but can fulfill his responsibility by answering amen to someone else thanking Hashem.

Deriving Halacha

In addition to what we noted above, this Gemara discussion teaches several other halachos about birchas hagomeil:

1. Although the authorities quote a standardized text for birchas hagomeil, we see that one fulfills the requirement to recite the bracha even if one recited a version that varies considerably from the standard text. As long as one recites or responds to a bracha that acknowledges appreciation to Hashem for the salvation, he has fulfilled his obligation.
2. The person who was saved can fulfill his obligation by answering amen when he hears someone else thank Hashem, even though the other person who recited the bracha has no requirement to bensch gomeil. This is a unique halacha, because usually one may fulfill a bracha or mitzvah by hearing it from someone else only when the person reciting the bracha is equally required to observe the mitzvah. Nevertheless, Rav Yehudah discharged his responsibility through Rav Chona's bracha, even though Rav Chona had no requirement to recite birchas hagomeil.
3. We can also derive from this anecdote that someone may fulfill the requirement of birchas hagomeil through someone else's bracha, even though the person who recited the bracha did not intend to recite it on behalf of the person who is obligated. This is also an unusual facet of birchas hagomeil, since, in all other instances, the person fulfilling the mitzvah does so only if the person reciting the bracha intends to be motzi him.
4. Some authorities ask: How could Rav Chona of Baghdad have recited a blessing, when he did not know that Rav Yehudah would fulfill the mitzvah with this recital? Since Rav Chona was unaware that Rav Yehudah would fulfill the mitzvah, why was he not concerned that he would be reciting a bracha levatalah, a blessing recited in vain?

The answer is that Rav Chona of Baghdad's recital was certainly praise to Hashem and thanks for His kindness, and therefore this blessing would certainly not be a bracha levatalah, even if no one fulfilled any requirement through it (Tur, Orach Chayim 219).

Uniqueness of birchas hagomeil

From these last rulings, we see that the concept of birchas hagomeil is unlike other brachos, and, therefore, its rules are different. As long as the person obligated to thank Hashem is involved in an acknowledgement that Hashem saved him, he has fulfilled his obligation.

What about mentioning Hashem's name?

One should not infer from the above story that one can fulfill reciting birchas hagomeil without mentioning Hashem's Name. This is because the word rachmana, which translates literally into English as "the merciful One," also serves as the Aramaic word for G-d. Thus, Rav Chona of Baghdad did mention Hashem's name in his blessing.

What about mentioning malchus?

The Rishonim note that from the way the Gemara quotes Rav Chona of Baghdad, "Blessed is the merciful One Who returned you to us and not to the earth," one might conclude that it is sufficient to recite Baruch Ata Hashem for birchas hagomeil, and that one does not need to say also Elokeinu Melech haolam, the standard text prefacing all brachos. This would be very novel, since all brachos require an introduction that includes not only mention of Hashem, but requires also proclaiming that Hashem is King. However, the Tur and the Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 219) reject this conclusion, contending that one does not fulfill birchas hagomeil unless one does mention sheim and malchus. We must therefore assume that the Gemara abbreviated the bracha recited by Rav Chona of Baghdad, but that he had indeed mentioned Hashem's monarchy in his blessing.

The text

What is the optimal nusach, the exact text, of this bracha?

Although our Gemara (Brachos 54b) quotes a wording for birchas hagomeil, it is apparent that different rishonim had variant readings of the text of the bracha. The most common version recorded is: Baruch Atta Hashem Elokeinu Melech haolam, hagomeil lachayavim tovim, shegemalani kol tov. "Blessed are You, Lord, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who grants good to those who are guilty, for He granted me much good." The assembled then respond with "Amen," and then add Mi shegemalcha kol tov hu yigmalcha kol tov sela, "May He Who has granted you much good continue to grant you much good forever." The established Sefardi custom is to recite two pesukim prior to reciting the bracha, which calls people to

attention, so that they can focus on the bracha and respond appropriately (Kaf Hachayim, Orach Chayim 219:14).

The wording of the bracha sounds unusual, for it implies that the person who recited this bracha is assuming that he was deserving of Divine punishment, yet was saved because of Hashem's kindness. Why should the saved person make this assumption?

The Maharam Mintz (Shu't #14), an early Ashkenazi authority, explains that someone who became ill or was imprisoned should be introspective, seeking to learn a lesson by discovering why this happened to him, and, in so doing, he should realize that he is indeed guilty of things for which he needs to do teshuvah. In this context, the Avnei Nezer (Shu't Orach Chayim #39) asks the following: while the Maharam Mintz's reason explains why a person who was captured or imprisoned should consider himself guilty, it is not clear how it applies to someone who survived a journey on the high seas or through the desert, since he himself chose to undertake the trip. To this, the Avnei Nezer answers that there could be one of two reasons why this traveler undertook this trip: one alternative is that he felt a compelling need to travel, for parnasah or some other reason, in which case he should ask himself why Hashem presented him with such a potentially dangerous situation. The traveler should contemplate this issue and realize that he needs to do teshuvah for something -- which now explains why the bracha calls him "guilty." The other alternative is that the traveler could have avoided the trip, in which case he is considered guilty, because he endangered himself unnecessarily. In either instance, we can now appreciate why the person reciting the bracha refers to himself as being "guilty."

What about a child?

If a child survived a situation that would require an adult to recite birchas hagomeil, does he do so?

Early halachic authorities rule that a child under the age of bar or bas mitzvah does not recite birchas hagomeil. The Maharam Mintz explains that it is inappropriate for a child to recite the wording hagomeil lachayavim tovot, "Who grants good to those who are guilty." Since the evil that befalls a child is not a result of his own evildoing, but of his father's, a child reciting this text implies that his father is guilty, which is certainly improper for a child. Furthermore, to modify the bracha is unseemly, since one should not change the text of the bracha handed down to us by Chazal (quoted by Elyah Rabbah 291:3).

Some authorities are dissatisfied with this last answer, since we see that Rav Yehudah felt he had fulfilled his requirement to recite birchas hagomeil on the basis of the bracha in the form of praise recited by Rav Chona of Baghdad, "Blessed is Hashem that returned you to us and not to the earth," which is quite different from the text "Who grants good to those who are guilty, for He granted me much good." It would seem that any bracha text that includes a praise acknowledging thanks for Hashem's rescue fulfills the requirement (see Shaar Hatizyun 219:5). Thus, it should be relatively easy to structure a birchas hagomeil text for children.

The above-quoted Avnei Nezer similarly disapproves of the reason presented by the Maharam Mintz, although he agrees with the ruling that a child should not recite birchas hagomeil -- but for a different reason. The Avnei Nezer explains that although one could modify the text so that a child would be able to recite birchas hagomeil, having a child recite a different bracha would no longer accomplish the mitzvah of chinuch, which requires a child to fulfill the mitzvah the way he would as an adult.

On the other hand, the Chida (Birkei Yosef 219:1) quotes authorities who disagreed with the Maharam Mintz, and ruled that a child should recite birchas hagomeil, although he does not cite the rationale for this ruling. Presumably, they contend that having a child recite this bracha is no different from any other mitzvah in which we are required to educate our children. Most authorities agree with the rulings of the Maharam Mintz and the Avnei Nezer and, as a result, in most communities, both Ashkenazi and Sefardi, children do not recite birchas hagomeil (Kaf Hachayim 219:2).

Travels daily

The Minchas Yitzchak (4:11) was asked by someone who lived in Copenhagen, whose livelihood required him to travel among the nearby Danish islands of the Baltic Sea, whether he was required to recite birchas hagomeil every time he traveled through the Sea, in which case he would be reciting it almost daily. Based on the above-quoted Avnei Nezer, who explained why all four categories of people who recite birchas hagomeil are categorized as "guilty," the Minchas Yitzchak concludes that one does not recite birchas hagomeil if one lives in a place where each day requires sea travel. One cannot consider someone "guilty" for living in a place that is considered a normal place to live, and if a recognized livelihood in such a place requires daily sea travel, this cannot be considered placing oneself in an unnecessary danger.

Conclusion

Rav Hirsch (Commentary to Tehillim 100:1) notes that the root of the word for thanks is the same as that for viduy, confession and admitting wrongdoing. All kinds of salvation should elicit in us deep feelings of gratitude for what Hashem has done for us in the past and does in the present. This is why the blessing can be both an acknowledgement of guilt and thanks.

We often cry out to Hashem in crisis, sigh in relief when the crisis passes, but fail to thank adequately for the salvation. Our thanks to Hashem should match the intensity of our pleas. Birkas hagomeil gives us a concrete bracha to say to awaken our feelings of gratitude for deliverance. And even in our daily lives, when, hopefully, we do not encounter dangers that meet the criteria of saying birchas hagomeil, we should still fill our hearts with thanks. It is certainly appropriate to focus these thoughts during our recital of mizmor lesodah, az yashir, modim or at some other point in our prayer.