

**Weekly Parsha CHAYEI SARAH**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

Our matriarchs of Israel were very strong personalities and were formidable women. The life experiences of our mother Sarah are an excellent example of this assessment of character and behavior. From the Torah narrative we are informed early on that she is infertile, unable to conceive and give birth naturally. Nevertheless, we do not hear despair from her. She is willing to bring another woman into her house and to share her husband, so to speak, with that woman in the hope that this would somehow facilitate her own becoming pregnant.

Having Hagar in her home and watching her arrogant behavior forces her to chastise Avraham's attitude towards this complex relationship. She takes action to bring Hagar in line and thus preserve the primacy of her relationship to Avraham. Having escaped from the clutches of the Pharaoh and being aware of the dangers facing a beautiful woman in a cruel and violent society, she nonetheless continues her life's mission of advancing monotheism and morality in a surrounding society that condones evil and violent paganism.

She is wondrously shocked, almost to disbelief, when informed by a stranger who appears as a Bedouin Arab that she will conceive and bear a son to Avraham. At that moment she realizes that she will not only become an "ordinary" mother but rather the matriarchal figure that will preside over an eternal people that will influence all future societies.

To protect and safeguard that eternity, she is forced to expel Yishmael from her home. She does not flinch at performing this distasteful task. In this respect, she is stronger than Avraham...and Heaven, so to speak, backs up her position. She is the woman of iron that acts to guarantee the future survival of the Jewish people.

Sarah serves as the paradigm for the matriarchs that follow her in the Torah narrative of the book of Bereshith. Rivka is certainly the strong force in the house of Yitzchak who recognizes the darkness of Eisav in comparison to the heavenly potential of Yaakov. She shows strength in having to do family triage, so to speak, and knowingly to accept the consequences of such a painful and agonizing decision. The ability and strength that she exhibits, in switching her husband's blessings from the older son to the younger one, is indicative of the certainty of commitment and clarity of vision that so characterized all of the matriarchs of the people of Israel.

Sarah lived on in Rivka and her life's decisions. The same thing is true regarding Rachel and Leah who are more aware of the nefarious and dangerous ways of their father Lavan than is their husband Yaakov. It is they who finally force Yaakov to heed the Heavenly voice that directs him to leave Aram and return home to the Land of Israel.

Again it is the strength of character and will that decides the ultimate issue, and it is that decision that tips the scales of eternity in favor of Jewish survival. If Chava is recorded as being the mother of all living things, it is Sarah who is the mother of the loving, vibrant and eternal people of Israel.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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**Parshas Chayei Sarah**  
**5783**

**Cheshvan**

**Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim Talmudic University**  
**Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav**  
**Yochanan Zweig**

**This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of**  
**Reb Yaakov Fefer ben Yisroel Yitzchak. "May his**  
**Neshama have an Aliya!"**

**Effects of Affects**

Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her (23:2).

This week's parsha opens with the death of Sarah, the first matriarch of the Jewish people. The Torah relates that following her death her husband Avraham came to eulogize and weep for her. Rashi (ad loc) explains that Sarah's death is juxtaposed next to the story of the binding of Yitzchak because the shock of him being nearly slaughtered caused her soul to leave her body.

Many commentaries question the order of events in the verse: "Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and weep for her." But shouldn't weeping come before the actual eulogy?

The Talmud (Brachos 6b) states, "Rav Sheyshis says that the benefit of a eulogy is the wailing" and Rashi (ad loc) explains that when the speaker raises his voice and cries out to express his anguish it causes those listening to cry out as well, which is the ultimate purpose of a eulogy.

There is a fascinating field of study called social psychology. It is the study of how a person's environment can radically influence one's emotional state.

Ever wonder what compels sports fans to pay outrageous sums of money to sit in a frenzied, crowded stadium and suffer through the most severe weather and traffic jams merely to watch "their" team play a game? Viewed superficially it makes absolutely no sense.

Why don't these avid fans watch the game comfortably from their climate controlled home where they don't have to pay \$15 for a \$2 hotdog and beer? Not to mention the fact that they'll actually have a far better view of the game. Yet week after week, millions of fans suffer through boiling or freezing temperatures (or sit in the pouring rain)

to watch “their” team from hard, uncomfortable stadium seats. It’s simply illogical. Why do they do this?

The answer is that everyone at their very core wants to be connected to something larger than themselves. Thus, being a part of and in the midst of a frenzied crowd has an incredible and powerful emotional lift that one simply cannot achieve at home watching a game alone. There is a sense of being connected to something bigger and greater than oneself with the excitement of the crowd driving one’s own excitement even further. This powerful effect on one’s emotions is intoxicating and causes fans to act in this seemingly illogical manner.

Similarly, watching a bereaved mourner cry in pain causes others to cry as well. This in turn has a ripple effect and causes even more observers to break down weeping. It is this crying that allows us to identify and connect, thereby beginning the process of internalizing the loss to the greater whole with whom the mourner is now connected.

The possuk here isn’t referring to Avraham’s personal grieving and crying, which took place earlier and likely in private. Rather, the possuk is describing how Avraham made the loss of his wife palpable and relatable to all. His crying at the time of the eulogy allowed others to internalize and feel the loss of the great woman who was now missing from their lives.

### **A Blessed Change**

Rather to my land and to my birthplace shall you go, and take a wife for my son Yitzchak (24:4).

In this week’s parsha we find Avraham charging his faithful servant Eliezer with going and locating a wife for his son Yitzchak. Avraham makes Eliezer swear that he will not seek a suitable wife for Yitzchak from the Canaanite nation amongst whom they were dwelling. Rather, he was charged with going back to Avraham’s ancestral lands to locate a mate for Yitzchak.

Eliezer peppers Avraham with questions regarding his mission and at what point is he supposed to pivot and find another possible source for a mate for Yitzchak. Rashi (24:39) explains that Eliezer himself had a daughter that he very much wanted to suggest as a possible match for Yitzchak and he attempted every pretext that might allow his daughter to qualify as a suitable candidate. But Avraham refused and dismissed it out of hand explaining, “My son is blessed and you are cursed, and one who is cursed cannot be attached to one who is blessed.”

Avraham’s statement is explained in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 59:9), which says that Eliezer is identified as a descendant of Canaan (the son of Cham) who was cursed by Noah. Why was he cursed?

In a breathtakingly selfish and brutal act, Cham ensured Noah would be unable to father any more children – for more siblings meant that the world would be divided among them and Cham’s share would be further diluted. According to Chazal, Cham’s son Canaan was the first to

come upon Noah and see him in a vulnerable, drunken state and suggested to his father that there was an opportunity to attack Noah (see 9:22-23 and Rashi ad loc). Noah then curses Canaan and declares that they will be slaves forevermore. Avraham and Yitzchak were descendants of Noah’s son Shem who was explicitly blessed by Noah (see 9:25-26). According to the Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel, Eliezer was the son of Nimrod who was the son of Cush who was the son of Canaan. Thus, Eliezer and his family were considered accursed.

How are we to understand this concept of being “cursed” and how is that a fitting retribution for the act that was perpetrated on Noah?

Canaan’s perspective is uniquely self-serving and selfish. He was so greedy and narcissistic that he focused solely on making sure that he didn’t lose any future assets, by any means necessary. In his mind, the world revolved around him and his needs.

This is why Noah cursed him to be a slave forevermore. A slave has nothing, can own nothing, and every minute of every day is about serving someone else’s needs. He remains a slave because, at the end of the day, his selfishness remains – he just wants to be taken care of without any real responsibility for himself.

The reason that a cursed person cannot attach to a blessed one is because there is no relationship; the cursed one is totally selfish and the blessed one is forced into a black hole of giving. It becomes a one-way street and that is not a healthy attachment. This is why Eliezer instinctively understands that Yitzchak’s future wife must be a person who is totally giving, even without being asked to do so.

Remarkably, when Lavan first sees Eliezer he says to him (24:31) “Come, O blessed of Hashem!” Chazal comment on this possuk that at this time Eliezer finally loses the classification of being “cursed.” Why?

Imagine for a moment a couple that has been married for many, many years but have never been able to conceive a child. Every time any young couple gives birth, they must be wistfully wondering why they haven’t been as fortunate. Similarly, parents of a daughter who is desperate to get married but has no prospects watch with a broken heart every time a younger girl seems to effortlessly find her matrimonial match, while they wonder when will it be their daughter’s turn. In fact, in either case, no matter how hard they try it is hard to see how they could be completely happy for someone else’s joy in such situations.

This was the case by Eliezer as well. As Rashi explained he was desperately trying to suggest his daughter for Yitzchak, but Avraham would not hear of it. This must have been very emotionally painful for Eliezer as it was a rejection at the most personal level and his heart cried out for his daughter as well.

Yet, even with all that baggage, he throws himself completely into finding a proper mate for Yitzchak. He beseeches Hashem to bring his quest to a successful

conclusion and devises a test to find the appropriate match for Yitzchak. He negotiates with people who want to kill him and steal the goods he brought and he refuses to accept anything but the immediate return of Rifkah to his master Yitzchak. He could have made every excuse with good cause for being unsuccessful.

However, he set aside his personal feelings and interest in the matter and selflessly brought his quest to a successful conclusion. Eliezer broke the mold of his family's selfishness. This is why Lavan called him "blessed."

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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

***Dvar Torah Chayei Sarah: How can anyone have two lives on earth?***

**16 November 2022**

Parshat Chayei Sara commences as follows (Bereishit 23:1):

*"Vayihyu chayei Sara," – "And the life of Sarah was,"*

*"Meah shana v'esrim shana, vesheva shanim," – "a hundred years and twenty years and seven years," (i.e. a total of a hundred and twenty seven years)*

*"Shnei chayei Sara," – "the years of the life of Sarah."*

The last three words seem to be totally redundant. Are they not included in everything that precedes them?

In a wonderful sefer, Doreish Lifrakim by Rav Mordechai Rubenstein, which is a commentary on Pirkei Avot, the introduction explains that the word 'shnei' can mean two things: it can mean 'the years of' and it can also mean 'two'. Therefore, "shnei chayei Sarah" does not only mean, "the years of the life of Sarah." It could mean, "Sarah had two lives!"

Therefore these words are not redundant.

Rav Rubenstein explains that for the vast majority of people on earth, we're actually only active and properly alive for two thirds of our lives. That's because we're asleep for the other third.

With regard to Sarah, however, when she went to sleep it wasn't because she loved to take it easy and was looking forward to having that schluff. Rather, every moment of rest was an investment in the next day when she would be able to be active and alert, to perform as much chessed as possible, because Sara spent her life performing kindnesses for others.

In this way, Sarah lived two separate lives – the time when she was awake and also the time when she was asleep, because that was not wasted time; it was time when she energised herself and prepared herself to do great things. All of Sarah's 127 years were used for good causes; were

used constructively. Even when she was asleep, she was using every precious moment for a good purpose.

From her we can learn how critically important it is to utilise every precious moment we have, and even when we rest, let's use that as an investment in all the future productive activities that we will achieve.

*Shabbat shalom.*

*Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.*

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### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Chayei Sarah Charity Begins At Home**

Avraham Avinu was the archetypical "gomel chessed" (benefactor of kindness).

A Medrash in Parshas Noach comments on the pasuk (Mishlei 21:21) "One who pursues righteousness and kindness (Tzedaka v'Chessed) will find life, righteousness, and honor (Chaim, Tzedakah, v'Kavod)." The Medrash interprets: The one who pursues Tzedaka refers to Avraham, as it is written, "...He observes the way of Hashem to do Tzedaka..." (Bereshis 18:19). And who is considered the Ba'al Chessed? Again, it is Avraham who did Chessed to Sora (by burying her). The conclusion of the pasuk in Mishlei thus also refers to Avraham: He is going to live a long life (he lived for 175 years); and he found Tzedakah and Kavod. The Medrash comments that Hashem said, "I am one who bestows kindness. You, Avraham, have taken over my profession. Therefore, come and wear my uniform – as it is written, "And Avraham was old, coming in days, and Hashem blessed Avraham with all." (Bereshis 24:1) Apparently, the Medrash is saying that the uniform of the Ribono shel Olam is Ziknah (aged appearance).

And where, according to the Medrash, did Avraham demonstrate his great Chessed? It was through the burial of Sora. This Medrash is unfathomable! This is the example of the great attribute of kindness of Avraham Avinu? What kind of lowlife would not see to the appropriate burial of his wife upon her passing? Any decent human being would do no less. There are so many examples and Medrashim that could have been cited to demonstrate Avraham's attribute of Chessed! Consider the great hospitality he provided for the three visitors that came in the heat of the day after he had just undergone Bris Milah at an advanced age. What is the interpretation of this Medrash?

I saw in the sefer Darash Mordechai that the Torah is trying to teach us a very important lesson that is unfortunately lost on many people: There are people in society who are the nicest people in the world. They would give you the shirt off their back. They do this for everyone else, except for their own family members. On the outside, they will fix your flat tire. They will do literally anything for you. But at home, they won't take out the garbage. They won't wash the dishes. They won't vacuum when their wife is having a

hard day. The Torah is saying that even though we all know that Avraham Avinu was a great Baal Chessed, what really counts to Hashem more than anything else is how he treated his wife. It is the old maxim—charity begins at home.

Many years ago, I mentioned the words of Rav Chaim Vital, but they are worth repeating: There are people who do Chessed with all other types of people, however they do not do favors for their wives and family members. They are confident that when they come up to Heaven, the Gates of Gan Eden will open wide for them. Woe is to them and woe is to their souls, for they do not know and they do not understand that all their acts of kindness are Hevel u'Reus Ruach (nothingness and evil spirit). First and foremost, a person must do Chessed with his wife and children. 'Your own poor take precedence.' Only after charity has begun at home do the good deeds that a person has done for others count.

That is why this Medrash portrays the prototype of the Chessed of Avraham Avinu as the effort he expended in properly burying his wife. This is the most important type of Chessed.

I recently read about an incident during which a young man complained to Rav Schach: "No matter whether Shabbos starts at 4 PM or 8 PM, my wife is never ready. The house is always a turmoil those last twenty minutes before Shabbos. "She always is just barely able to bentch light on time" he complained. Rav Schach responded, "Take the broom and sweep yourself! Help your wife!"

#### ***For Someone Else, You Need to be an Apikores***

I very recently heard the following thought in a shiur from the Tolner Rebbe of Yerushalayim.

Rivka is coming with Eliezer to meet her future husband. The Torah says, "And Yitzchak came from having gone to Be'er L'Chai Roi, for he dwelt in the south country" (Bereshis 24:62).

Avraham Avinu had been married to Hagar. At one point, Sora told him to send Hagar away. Avraham made her leave. But now, after the death of Sora, Yitzchak went to bring Hagar back.

The Tolner Rebbe, in his inimitable fashion, makes the following observation: Yitzchak is forty years old. He is what we call 'an eltere bachur'. Why was he not married yet when he was forty years old? Didn't he go out? What was he doing? The answer is that Yitzchak was a Tzadik. He was a person who was removed from this world. Yitzchak presumably sat and learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, confident that 'my father will take care of my shidduch'. My job is to occupy myself in the Service of Hashem. What will be, will be. I leave the matters of Shidduchim to the Almighty and to my father.

If Yitzchak is so removed from matters of this world that the last thing on his mind is finding a shidduch, what is he suddenly doing now? He is trying to find a Shidduch—for his father! So, you do know how to drive, or to take the

subway, or to travel to New York to find Shidduchim! So why don't you do it for yourself? The answer is that Yitzchak knew that he would be leaving the house. Sora is no longer here. Avraham Avinu would remain by himself, lonely and with no companion. Yitzchak determined: I need to remedy this situation. It is my responsibility to take charge of this matter.

Regarding me, I can rely on the Ribono shel Olam. I can have Bitachon. Regarding someone else, I can't say "The Ribono shel Olam will help."

There is a famous quip attributed to Rav Yisrael Salanter: Regarding yourself, you need to be a Baal Bitachon (someone who has complete faith in the Almighty); Regarding someone else, you need to be an Apikores (a heretic, who denies the Almighty). Regarding someone else, a person must assume "Hashem will not take care of him". Ay – that is blasphemy? Regarding someone else, such an attitude is appropriate. My friend is in need. He requires sustenance, a Shidduch, or whatever it may be... I need to take care of him. Regarding me, I can sit back and say, "Somehow, it will happen."

That is why for Avraham's Shidduch, Yitzchak gets involved—he becomes proactive. But for his own Shidduch, Yitzchak relies on his Bitachon.

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***Chaye Sara - The Ultimate Agent***

***Ben-Tzion Spitz***

*The condition of an enlightened mind is a surrendered heart. - Alan Redpath*

Sarah has died, Abraham is getting older, and their son Isaac has yet to marry. According to the Midrash, Isaac is forbidden from leaving the land of Canaan, but none of the women of Canaan were considered suitable for Isaac.

Abraham sends his loyal servant, who the Midrash names as Eliezer, to return to Abraham's hometown, Haran, northeast of Canaan, and find a wife for Isaac. Eliezer dutifully goes to Haran and is immediately successful in finding Rebecca, who happens to be from Abraham's family (a granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Nachor – making Rebecca and Isaac first cousins once-removed). Thankfully, Eliezer convinces her resistant family to let her return with him to Canaan to marry Isaac.

The Torah is effusive in its description of Eliezer, calling him "the elder of his house and the one who rules everything that is his [Abraham's]." The Bat Ayin on Genesis 24:2 wonders as to how Eliezer achieved such distinction as a servant. He explains that Eliezer had such respect and awe for Abraham, that he completely identified

with Abraham's mission and goals and annulled his own desires to the extent that he was the ultimate agent on Abraham's behalf. The Bat Ayin elaborates that when a servant of the king is so closely identified with the king, then the servant, in a certain respect, is comparable to the king, in his power and majesty.

Eliezer subsumed and annulled his own desires so thoroughly and took on Abraham's goals so devotedly that he became comparable to Abraham himself. That gave Abraham the confidence to send Eliezer on this most vital mission for the continuity of his family, to find a suitable match for Isaac. Hence, the Torah's description of Eliezer as "the elder of his house and the one who rules everything that is his."

By surrendering his own ego and fully accepting the role of a humble servant, Eliezer became the authoritative representative of the great Abraham and the master of Abraham's entire domain.

May we realize that to serve often means to lead.

*Dedication - To NASA's Artemis 1 launch to the moon.*

*Shabbat Shalom*

*Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.*

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**Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

***Parashat Chayei Sarah - Short, Courageous, and Practical***

Parashat Chayei Sarah includes two important stories. The first is the story of the death and burial of Sarah in the Cave of the Patriarchs, Me'arat Hamachpela, in Hebron. The second is the story of Abraham's servant going to Haran in Aram Naharayim to search for a bride for Isaac and bringing Rebecca back with him. The second story is particularly long, with a significant part of it consisting of the servant – identified by Chazal as Eliezer – speaking to Rebecca's family. He describes, and then reiterates, the background of his mission and what occurred when he got to Haran until the moment when he asks them for Rebecca as a wife for Isaac.

The midrash in Breishit Rabbah says about this long conversation: "More beloved is the chatter of the forefathers' servants than the minutiae of the children's laws." But we will focus on the conversation of Rebecca, on her voice that pipes up for one moment in the midst of this long story.

After Eliezer concludes with Rebecca's father – as was customary in those days – that she would come with him to the Land of Canaan and marry Isaac there, he distributes gifts to Rebecca and to her family and they sit down to a festive meal. But the following morning, when he wanted to take Rebecca and embark on their journey, sounds of hesitation are heard. Her brother and mother suggest that she remain at home for a year and go only after that. The

servant is embarrassed by their backtracking and they suggest, "Let us call the maiden and ask her." When they ask Rebecca, "Will you go with this man?" they surely expected a different answer from the one they got. Rebecca responded with one sure, secure, unhesitant response, "I will go!"

This answer, conveying complete readiness, reminds us of the words with which the series of Abraham stories begins, "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." Rebecca, too, takes a step similar to that of Abraham. She is ready to leave her land, her birthplace, and her father's house for an unknown destination.

This story reminds us of one of Abraham's important traits. When Abraham was seeking a burial plot for Sarah, Ephron, the owner of what was to become the Tomb of the Patriarchs, said, "I have given you the field, and the cave that is in it, I have given it to you...bury your dead." But when the deal was about to be sealed, it turned out that Ephron was not quite so generous when he asked for the exaggerated price of "four hundred shekels of silver" for the field and the cave.

In another story we read last week, Abraham locates three passers-by and offers them hospitality, "And I will take a morsel of bread, and sustain your hearts;" and then he offers them a feast. "And Abraham hastened to the tent to Sarah, and he said, 'Hasten three seah of meal [and] fine flour; knead and make cakes'. And to the cattle did Abraham run, and he took a calf, tender and good, and he gave it to the youth, and he hastened to prepare it. And he took cream and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and he placed [them] before them." And he referred to this entire feast as "a morsel of bread."

*The Babylonian Talmud compared these two stories and concluded:*

*From here we learn that the righteous say little and do much, whereas the wicked say much and do not do even a little. (Tractate Baba Metziya, 87)*

One of the characteristics of a righteous person is that he does a lot but speaks a little. He does not show off his good deeds and does not emphasize them. On the contrary, an evil person speaks highly of himself but, in actuality, does nothing.

Rebecca was another link in the chain of the patriarchs' family. Her short and courageous response of "I will go" shows how suitable she was to be part of Abraham's family. She was prepared to embark on a long journey for an important purpose, but she does not talk too much. She makes a decision and acts on it.

*The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

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**Rav Kook Torah**

***Rav Kook on Mishpatim: An Eye for an Eye***  
***Rabbi Chanan Morrison***

וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשִׁיחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עֶרֶב

"Isaac went out to meditate (*lasu'ach*) in the field toward evening." (Gen. 24:63)

The meaning of the word *lasu'ach* is unclear, and is the subject of a dispute among the Biblical commentators. The Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, twelfth-century scholar) wrote that it comes from the word *si'ach*, meaning "plant." According to this interpretation, Isaac went to oversee his orchards and fields.

His grandfather Rashi, on the other hand, explained that *lasu'ach* comes from the word *sichah*, meaning "speech." Isaac went to meditate in the field, thus establishing the afternoon prayer.

Why doesn't the Torah use the usual Hebrew word for prayer? And is there a special significance to the fact that Isaac meditated in the afternoon?

#### The Soul's Inner Prayer

Rav Kook often expanded concepts beyond the way they are usually understood. Thus, when describing the phenomenon of prayer, he made a startling observation: "The soul is always praying. It constantly seeks to fly away to its Beloved."

This is certainly an original insight into the essence of prayer. But what about the act of prayer that we are familiar with? According to Rav Kook, what we call "prayer" is only an external expression of this inner prayer of the soul. In order to truly pray, we must be aware of the soul's constant yearnings.

The word *lasu'ach* sheds a unique light on the concept of prayer. By using a word that also means "plant," the Torah is associating the activity of prayer to the natural growth of plants and trees. Through prayer, the soul flowers with new strength; it branches out naturally with inner emotions. These are the natural effects of prayer, just as a tree naturally flowers and sends forth branches.

Why was Isaac's meditative prayer said in the afternoon?

The hour that is particularly suitable for spiritual growth is the late afternoon, at the end of the working day. At this time of the day, we are able to put aside our mundane worries and concerns, and concentrate on our spiritual aspirations. Then the soul is free to elevate itself and blossom.

(*Gold from the Land of Israel* pp. 56-57. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. I, p. 109)

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#### Shema Yisrael Torah Network

#### Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Chayei Sarah

פרשת חיי שרה תשפ"ג

ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים

**Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years. (23:1)**

*Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 58:3) relate an intriguing story. Rabbi Akiva was giving a profound, intricate *shiur*, lecture. He noticed that his students were drifting off. In order to arouse them from their "slumber," he presented them with a question (more like a riddle): Why did Esther merit to reign over 127 countries? He answered: She was a descendant of Sarah *Imeinu* who had lived 127 years. The question is rhetorical; the answer is beguiling. What does one have to do with the other? It is not as if Esther actually reigned over 127 countries. She was married to King Achashveirosh who ruled over these countries.

*Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl, m'Lublin*, offers a riveting explanation which implies a lesson for us all. Esther took her life into her own hands when she went uninvited to meet Achashveirosh in the palace. Anyone who entered the palace uninvited was condemned to death. Hashem protected her, and she emerged unscathed. From where did she derive the courage to risk her life in this manner? *Chazal* teach that when Esther entered the royal chamber, she became ensconced with a holy presence, *ruach ha'kodesh*. It was this Divine Presence that catalyzed her captivation of the king's heart, allowing her to live. How did she achieve such an elevated spiritual level to merit Divine protection?

*Rav Tzadok* posits that Esther used Sarah, her ancestress, as her role model. Sarah achieved spiritual distinction in her life such that has never been emulated. We must factor in the murky roots of Sarah's early life. She was raised by her grandfather, Terach, an idolater of the lowest order, a man who was prepared to send his sons to their deaths, because Avraham had ridiculed him and his lifeless idols. Everywhere Sarah went, she was confronted by the cruelty and perversity associated with idol worship. She knew that she was destined for a greater, holier life. She bided her time, knowing that, one day, she would sever her relationship with them and move on to a better, more sanctified life. It took time, patience, intense yearning and commitment – but she made it.

Not only did Sarah leave her ignominious past, she was able to employ her murky past to enhance and enable her commitment to Hashem. Her humble background enabled her to nurture a sense of humility and diffidence, which led her to Hashem. She married and was now recognized as the wife of the most distinguished monotheistic theologian of his time – a man who literally stood alone against a world of falsehood and paganism. She fought every step of the way, never giving into hopelessness. Was she asking too much? Was she striving too high? When she married Avraham *Avinu*, the marriage did not go to her head. She maintained the submissive character that had always been her trademark.

Esther could have easily fallen into despair. She could have become despondent, thinking that Hashem had left her. She was no longer the same Esther. She was now

married to a gentile, a cruel individual, an avowed enemy of the Jews. She could have pitied herself, and, as a result, not imagined that Hashem would save her. She kept her chin up and went forward. After all, her role model/mentor, Sarah, would have done the same. If she was here in Shushan, married to the king, it must have been by Divine initiative. She would watch it play out.

Esther employed Sarah's approach of not permitting her somber past and present surroundings to cloud her future. On the contrary, it served as a springboard for spiritual growth. Nothing was going to hold her back from achieving her goals of sanctity and purity. Esther followed Sarah's lead and calmly walked into the king's chamber – come what may. She was on a mission to save Klal Yisrael. Her marriage to a gentile despot did not prevent her from going forward. Her firm commitment to Hashem was her lodestar with which she would navigate through the spiritual obstacles that stood in her way.

Esther's humility kicked in – as it did for Sarah. Never did she entertain thoughts of heroism, or seek credit and accolades for risking her life for her people. She was carrying out her mission. She was acutely aware that any of the talents and skills that she possessed were Divinely inspired to assist her in her duty to Hashem. She followed the course set forth by every past Jewish leader: to always act with humility.

When Rabbi Akiva noticed his students begin to wane, he attributed it to their viewing themselves as falling short in their ability to grasp the depth of the lesson. They felt that the new wisdom he was revealing was way above them. As a result, they suffered from a sense of unworthiness and malaise. Rabbi Akiva intimated: If Sarah and Esther could overcome the despondency that would have enveloped a lesser person – so could they. We do not give up when we are confronted by obstacles, we either step over or drive right through. We are on a mission. While humility should be part of our psyche, it should never hinder us from personal growth and achievement – it should never be an obstacle.

**ויקם אברהם מעל פני מתו וידבר אל בני חת**

**Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead and spoke to *bnei Cheis*. (23:3)**

The Torah is circumspect concerning its text, spelling of each word and overall locution. No word is superfluous, no spelling is ignored. *Chazal* derive volumes of *halachah* from every nuance, every seeming redundancy. As the message of its Divine Author, nothing in the Torah is to be taken capriciously. As such, it is intriguing to note that the words, *bnei Cheis* (children of Cheis), are mentioned nine times in our *parshah* and once in *Parashas Vayechi* (49:32). It is not as if these were laudable people. They were idolaters who were greedy and selfish – among other things. Yet, the Torah finds it important to underscore their negotiating with Avraham

*Avinu* when he sought to purchase a plot of land to bury his wife.

*Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 58:8) intimate this question. Rabbi Eliezer said, “How much ink is spilled and how many quills are broken, in order to write ‘*bnei cheis*’! Ten times, the Torah writes ‘*bnei cheis*’. These ten citations correspond to the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, in order to teach that whoever assists in the business ventures of a *tzaddik*, righteous person, it is considered as if he has fulfilled the *Aseres HaDibros*.”

*Chazal* ask the question, derive the lesson, convey the message, but what should we learn from it (other than the overriding importance of assisting a *tzaddik* in his financial affairs)? *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl* (Wisdom for Living), explains that *Chazal* are teaching us that (even) one act can alter the course of history. *Bnei cheis* were far from respectable people. They were barbarians whose entire demeanor was the antithesis of that of Avraham *Avinu*. It was the furthest from the mind to imagine them sitting down to the table with our holy Patriarch to discuss a business enterprise – one which was not a long-term arrangement, but a one-time deal which would net them just so much. Yet, for once, they acted like *mentchen*, decent human beings, deferring respect to the *tzaddik* who stood before them, someone who was acknowledged as the *Nasi Elokim*, Prince of G-d. This godless people showed reverence to a representative of G-d who embodied spirituality at its apex. This one time, one act, singular performance of kindness and decency, elevated them to the point that they are considered to have fulfilled the *Aseres HaDibros*. Their one-time achievement made their life worth living.

One deed, one achievement at the right time, in the right place, can impact the world in such a manner that it qualifies (and gives meaning to) one's existence and makes his name worthy of being perpetuated for all time. One well-placed act can enroll a person in the eternal book of history. Because he made a change, he made a difference. This does not mean that once one has successfully performed this life-altering act that he should go into retirement, live a reclusive life of abandon. No! It should serve as the springboard for a continued successful life – impactful living. While some live longer than others, it does not mean that the one with the shorter life span has a diminished opportunity for achievement. It is not how long one lives – it is how one lives that matters. If every G-d-given moment of life is recognized as just that – G-d-given, he will not waste it. He knows that he can achieve and influence a world in that moment.

The people that change the course of history, who leave an enduring impact, are not necessarily the well-known movers and shakers. Each and every one of us has the opportunity to leave our imprint for eternity. *Rav Weinberg* explains that by reaching out to our fellow Jew, who – for a number of reasons (many out of his control) –



is alienated from the religion of his ancestors, whose understanding and appreciation of his heritage is at best minimal, superficial and often jaundiced, is drowning in a society whose culture is immoral and toxic, one can change the course of generations to come. If we throw him/her a line and succeed in reining him/her in, we have changed the world and made our mark for eternity.

The one good deed will pay out its investment in ways that one cannot imagine. I present two vignettes in which we see how this played out. Rav Mendel Futerfas, a *Lubavitch chassid* emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* from Communist Russia after spending many years in the *gulag*, Russian prison, for the “treason” of teaching and inspiring Jews to *Yiddishkeit*. He also risked his life to help his fellow Jews escape from Russia.

When he emigrated in the 1970’s, he first traveled to England where his wife was living. He then went to Crown Heights to meet with the *Lubavitcher Rebbe, zl*. When he left New York, his first destination was to return to his wife in England, and together they would travel to *Eretz Yisrael*. He was sitting next to a man whose facial features identified him as Jewish. He could not prove it, but his gut feeling gravitated toward Jewish. The man was clearly not *frum*, observant. His soul was in a turmoil. After spending years reaching out to Jews of all stripes, in a country dedicated to denying the existence of a Supreme Being, saving Jews both physically and spiritually, how could he sit next to this man for six hours and ignore his apparent disconnect from Jewish observance? The problem was that he hardly spoke English. How could he interact with the man? On the other hand, the fact that they were sitting next to one another was surely Divinely preordained. He had an idea. He took out his *Tefillin* and pointed to them. He said to him, “I Jew, you Jew; I *Tefillin*, you *Tefillin*.” His neighbor agreed to put on *Tefillin*. It was not the most eloquent oratory – but it was sincere. When words emanate from the heart – not just the mouth – they drive home a message: “I care about you.” That one decision altered the trajectory of that man’s life.

Rabbi Yechiel Spero (*To Light a Spark*) relates the story of a family in Bnei Brak who began to notice cracks in their son, Yossi’s, spiritual armor. In the beginning, it was little nuances, the manner in which he would *daven*, his attitude toward *Shabbos*; *kashrus* was no longer observed in the strict manner in which he was raised. Their normally good relationship began to sour, as his failure to observe Torah and *mitzvos* became more obvious, evidencing a lack of respect for his parents’ feelings and an almost rebellious attitude toward Torah and *halachah*. The clincher came when Yossi asked his father to buy him a car. It was not as if his parents could not afford the expenditure. They were well-to-do, and a car would not break the bank. Their concern was: Would he flagrantly drive on *Shabbos*? Were they assisting him in *chillul Shabbos*? Perhaps they should purchase the car on the

condition that he does not drive it on *Shabbos*? They decided that they knew only one address to hear *daas Torah*, the wisdom of Torah: The *Chazon Ish*. The sage was not well, but he made the effort to advise families that were going through challenges with their children.

The *Chazon Ish* met with the father and listened to his tale of woe. The father related his son’s latest request and his suggestion that he buy him the car on the condition that he does not drive it on *Shabbos*. The *Chazon Ish* responded immediately, “Absolutely not! When a father buys a car for his son, no strings or conditions should be attached to the gift.” The father was expecting/hoping to hear a different response from the sage, but the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, had spoken. He would adhere.

The next day Yossi received his new car – without strings attached. Surprisingly, when *Shabbos* began, the car was parked in its place. Yossi no longer observed *Shabbos*, but, apparently, he was not about to desecrate it with the new car that he had received. This went on for four weeks, until one *Shabbos*, Yossi sat down to partake in the *Shabbos* meal with the rest of his family. Words cannot describe the joy mixed with tears that coursed through his parents’ heart. It was an inspiring meal, almost like a homecoming – which it was. Nonetheless, the father wanted to know what it was that had effected the change in Yossi’s attitude.

Yossi explained, “When I asked you to buy me a car, I was certain there would be the condition of no driving on *Shabbos*. I had decided that if this would be the case, I would return the car, make a loan and purchase my own car, which I would drive all over – on *Shabbos*. I was going to do this to spite you. If you cannot accept me for who I am, then you do not really love me. When you bought me the car and gave it to me without strings attached, however, I realized that you were giving me the car because you loved me. I then asked myself, “How can I drive the car when I know that it will hurt my parents and cause them severe pain?” I decided not to drive out of respect for you. After a few weeks, I realized how much *Shabbos* meant to me – and I returned.

One decision prompted by the *gadol hador* saved a young boy from the abyss of spiritual infamy.

**ויגוע וימת אברהם בשיבה טובה זקן ושבוע**

**And Avraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content. (25:8)**

The perfection and wholesomeness in life which Sarah *Imeinu* achieved was also merited by Avraham *Avinu*. *Horav Yechezkel Leinstein, zl*, would refer to Avraham *Avinu*’s life as *zate’ teg*, days for which he was content and satisfied, knowing that he had lived every moment of his life in accordance with the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem. One hundred seventy-five years: thirty days a month, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. He did not waste a moment of his life. When one lives in such a



manner, leaving this world is merely crossing over to the next world. The *Chafetz Chaim*, *zl*, would weep copious tears as he rebuked himself when he was unable to account for half-an-hour. He was not completely certain what he did during this time. He would say, “Half an hour is thirty minutes, with each minute affording me the time to learn two hundred letters of Torah.”

The *Ponovezher Rav*, *zl*, spoke on *Shabbos mevorchim ha'chodesh*, when the blessing ushering in the forthcoming month is recited, to his *yeshivah* students. He began, “We pray, *V'sitein lanu chaim aruchim*, ‘May You give us long life.’ At present, we are praying for the following month. Why do we interject and ask for long life? How does ‘long’ life interplay with the blessing for the following thirty days?” The *Rav* explained that a moment saved and used for the correct purpose is *chaim aruchim*, long life, since by our actions we can transform one minute into *nitzchiyus*, eternity. Thus, we ask Hashem to grant us the ability and resolution to merit to convert the mundanity of life into purposeful living in accordance with the will of Hashem, thereby elevating it to eternity.

Unfortunately, we measure time by its generic value, rather than by its potential, i.e., what can be achieved in its duration. If we would be able to perceive the idea of *nitzchiyus*, eternity, it might alter our attitude. *Horav Yosef Nendick*, *zl*, *Mashgiach Yeshivas Kletzk*, offered the following portrayal in an effort to make his students develop an understanding and appreciation of the concept of eternity. “Imagine, if you will,” he began, “that our *bais hamedrash* was filled floor to ceiling with poppy seeds. Once every hundred years, a bird would eat one poppy seed. Can you even begin to imagine how long it would take until all the poppy seeds were gone? Now, imagine that our entire city (Yanov – a city in the Ukraine) was completely filled with poppy seeds, top to bottom, up to the sky. This time, the bird would visit once every thousand years. It would certainly take many lifetimes until the city would be left clean of its poppy seeds. One more example: if the entire world, ground to sky, were to be filled with poppy seeds, and the bird appeared every ten thousand years to take one seed, how long would it be before the world was emptied of its poppy seeds? At that point, the *Mashgiach* became animated and cried out, *Aber kein netzach is dos nisht*, “But eternity, it is not!” In other words, the word eternity, by its very definition, means without parameter, forever, until infinity. There is no cap on eternity. Likewise, we live a foreordained number of years. Some live longer than others, but all live a predestined, measured number of years. Hashem determines the length of our earthly visit. Regardless of its length, it is always too short. When we realize that with every moment of life used properly, we can acquire eternity, we would come to realize that to waste time would not only be sinful, it would be downright fatuous.

Having said this, we understand that stealing time, depriving one of using his time properly, is an unforgivable theft for which one cannot compensate. *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky*, *zl*, explains that one can repay what he stole from someone. If he stole time, however, it cannot be repaid. Perhaps that person was destined to do something great, something exceptional at that very moment. Now, the moment is gone forever. The next moment is not the same as the present. Once it passes, it is lost for eternity.

When the *Ohr Sameach* was *niftar*, the *Rogatchover Gaon*, *zl*, who was his colleague in Dvinsk, eulogized him. He bewailed the inestimable loss to *Klal Yisrael*. “*Rav Meir Simcha* learned Torah with such diligence, similar to a person who is rescuing his possessions from a raging fire. Under such overwhelming circumstances, one does not stop to look at the clock: Is it the middle of the night? Is it the afternoon, and I have things to do? Does rescuing my possessions involve difficulty? No! One rolls up his sleeves and acts, doing whatever he must do to save whatever he can. This was *Rav Meir Simcha*. Every minute that could be devoted to Torah he pulled out of the fire.” He was salvaging that minute to learn Torah. Another minute, another minute; every minute was precious. How could he abandon it?”

#### ***Va'ani Tefillah***

**אשרי יושבי ביתך – *Ashrei Yoshvei veisecha*. Fortunate are those who dwell in Your house.**

As mentioned, reciting the *Tehillah l'David* (*Ashrei*) prayer provides the supplicant with amazing merit, to the point that *Chazal* (*Berachos* 4:b) teach that one who says this prayer three times daily is guaranteed a place in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. First and foremost, this merit is earned only after one recites the *tefillah* with great *kavanah*, intention, and sincerity. Otherwise, he is just saying words. Many reasons are given for this prayer's distinction. The *Machatzis HaShekel* (1:7) writes, “When one recites *Tehillah l'David* with the proper intention, he will come to realize that everything in life comes to us from Hashem. This prayer is comprised completely of praise to Hashem, lauding His attributes. When a person acknowledges the incredible kindness which Hashem provides him, he will be circumspect to distance himself from any negative activity which may lead to sin. This will engender within him a desire to repent and come closer to Hashem. He will, thus, be ensured a place in *Olam Habba*.

*In Memory of our beloved parents, grandparents, and great grandparents*

*Rabbi Justin Hofmann*

הרב יקותיאל בן יוסף ז"ל - נפטר כ"ה חשוון תש"ע  
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תשע"ג

*From the Elzas, Greenfeld and Levine families*

## **Performing a Proper Hespel**

### **Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1: I have heard eulogies where the speaker seemed more interested in demonstrating his ability as a speaker than in commemorating the departed. Is this the proper way to eulogize?

Question #2: Someone told me that sometimes one obeys the request of a person not to be eulogized, and sometimes one may ignore it. How can this be?

Question #3: Is it true that one may not schedule a hesped within thirty days of a Yom Tov?

Our Parsha

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

The Mitzvah

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

As the following passages demonstrate, our Sages strongly emphasized the importance of performing this mitzvah properly:

“When a Torah scholar passes away, the entire nation is obligated in his eulogy, as it states, ‘and Shmuel died, and all of Israel eulogized him’” (Mesechta Kallah Rabbasi Chapter 6).

“Whoever is idle in carrying out the hesped of a Torah scholar does not live long” (Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua 35).

“Whoever is idle in carrying out the hesped of a Torah scholar deserves to be buried alive” (Shabbos 105b)!

“A voice from above declared, ‘Whoever was not idle in participating in Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi’s eulogy is assured of life in the World to Come’” (Koheles Rabbah 7).

“If someone cries upon the passing of an adam kasher (a halachically observant person) Hashem counts his tears and then stores them (Shabbos 105b).”

From this we see that the responsibility of hesped applies both to the person saying the eulogy and to those in attendance, and that this obligation sometimes applies to each individual. Furthermore, we see that the reward for fulfilling this mitzvah properly is very significant, both physically and spiritually, and that the eulogy and the crying associated with mourning are both highly important.

A “Kosher” Person

Above, I cited the statement: “If someone cries upon the passing of an adam kasher, Hashem counts his tears and then stores them.” I translated adam kasher as a halachically observant person.

Who qualifies as an adam kasher?

The rishonim discuss this question. Although the Rosh (Moed Katan 3:59) notes that his rebbe, the Maharam of Rottenberg, was uncertain what the term means, he himself concluded that it refers to someone who observes mitzvos properly, even if the person is not a talmid chacham and one sees nothing particularly meticulous about his religiosity. The Shulchan Aruch follows this definition.

Others explain that this is not enough to qualify as an adam kasher. Rather, the title applies to someone who, in addition to observing mitzvos properly, also pursues opportunities to perform *chesed* (Shach, Yoreh Deah 340:11, quoting Rabbeinu Yonah, Ramban and Bach). According to either approach, one should cry at the funeral of an adam kasher.

What is a proper hesped?

“It is a great mitzvah to eulogize the deceased appropriately. The mitzvah is to raise one’s voice, saying about him things that break the heart, in order to increase crying and to commemorate his praise. However, it is prohibited to exaggerate his praise excessively. One mentions his good qualities and adds a little... If the person had no positive qualities, say nothing about him (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 444:1).” (I will soon discuss why one may exaggerate “a little bit,” even though, it would seem, a small lie is also a falsehood.) The eulogy should be appropriate to the purpose and extent of the tragedy. For example, one should eulogize more intensely for a young deceased than for an older one, and more for someone who left no surviving descendants than for someone who had children (Meiri, Moed Katan 27b). Also, the crying of any hesped should not be to excess (Meiri, ad loc.).

In summation, we see that the purpose of a hesped is to cause people to cry over the loss of a Jew who observed mitzvos properly. On the other hand, eulogizing inappropriately is sinful.

At this point, we can answer the first question: “I have heard eulogies where the speaker seemed more interested in demonstrating his ability as a speaker than in

commemorating the departed. Is this the proper way to eulogize?

Despite its frequency, such behavior is obviously wrong. I discovered that this sin of eulogizing in non-accordance with halachah, such as speaking for one's own self-aggrandizement or exaggerating excessively, is so serious that in some places there was a custom to never eulogize and to forgo the mitzvah altogether, despite its importance (see Gesher Hachayim 1:13:4).

Why Do We Eulogize?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 46b) raises a halachic question: Do we eulogize out of respect for the deceased, or in order to honor the surviving family members? In other words, is the chesed of this mitzvah due to the posthumous dignity granted to the departed, or is it due to its inspiring people to realize the extent to which the surviving family members have been bereaved? The Gemara devotes a lengthy discussion in proving which option is correct.

Do any variations in observance result from this question?

The Gemara notes two such differences:

No Hespedit for Me!!

I. What happens if a person requests that no one eulogize him?

If the purpose of a eulogy is to honor the deceased, the deceased has a right to forgo the honor and request that no eulogies be recited. Since the hespedim are in his/her honor, he/she has the right to forgo the honor and we respect this request. However, if the purpose of a eulogy is to honor the surviving relatives, a request of the deceased does not forgo the honor of the survivors, and we will eulogize him/her anyway, if the family so desires.

Paying for a Speaker

II. A second halachic difference resulting from the above question (whether the mitzvah is to respect the deceased or to honor the surviving family members) is whether one may obligate the heirs to pay for the eulogy.

In many circles and/or eras, it is or was a common practice to hire a rabbi or other professional speaker to provide the eulogy. May one hire such a speaker and obligate the heirs to pay his fee? If the mitzvah is to honor the deceased and hiring a professional speaker is standard procedure, then one can obligate the heirs to hire a speaker, just as they are required to pay for the funeral. If eulogizing is for the sake of the bereaved, one cannot obligate them to pay for professional eulogizers if they prefer to forgo the honor.

The Gemara rallies proof from this week's parsha that the mitzvah is in honor of the deceased. As the pasuk clearly mentions, Avraham Avinu was not present when his wife Sarah died. The Gemara asks why did they wait until Avraham arrived to eulogize her. If the reason for the hesped is indeed to honor the living, Sarah should not have been left unburied until Avraham arrived. On the other hand, if the mitzvah is to honor the deceased, then Sarah was left unburied so that Avraham could honor her with his hesped.

Although the Gemara rejects this proof, it ultimately concludes that the purpose of a hesped is to honor the deceased. Therefore, if the deceased requested no eulogies, we honor his/her request, and heirs are obligated to pay for eulogies, where appropriate.

Pre-Torah

You might ask, how can we derive halachos from events that predate the Torah? Didn't the mitzvos change when the Torah was given?

The answer is that since this mitzvah fulfills the concept of ve'ahavata le'rei'acha kamocha, love your fellow as yourself, we can derive from its mode of performance whether its purpose is to honor the deceased or, alternatively, the surviving family members.

Exaggerate a little

The hesped should be appropriate to the deceased; one may exaggerate very slightly (Rosh, Moed Katan 3:63). You might ask, how can any exaggerating be permitted? Isn't the smallest exaggeration an untruth? What difference is there between a small lie and a big one?

The answer is that there is usually a bit more to praise about the person than we necessarily know, so that, on the contrary, adding a bit makes the tribute closer to the truth (based on Taz, Yoreh Deah 344:1).

Ignoring a Request

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

The answer, as explained by the Noda Biyehudah's disciple, is that for a gadol hador to be buried without proper eulogy is not simply a lack of the deceased's honor, which he has a right to forgo, but also a disgrace to the Torah. Even though a talmid chacham may (in general) forgo the honor due him as a Torah scholar (talmid chacham shemachal al kevodo, kevodo machul [Kiddushin 32b]), this applies only to forgoing honor. He cannot allow himself to be disgraced, since this disgraces not only him but also the Torah itself (Shu"t Teshuvah Mei'ahavah, Volume I #174; see also Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 444:1).

We now understand why there are times when one obeys the request of a person to omit his hesped, and times when one may ignore it. Usually, we obey his/her request because of the general principle retzono shel adam zehu kevodo, the fulfillment of someone's desire is his honor. However, if a gadol hador requests omission of eulogies, and major authorities consider this a breach of respect for the Torah itself, they may overrule the gadol's request out of kavod for the Torah. (Of course, this implies that the

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

We now address the third question raised above: Is it true that one may not schedule a hesped within thirty days of a Yom Tov?

Hesped before Yom Tov

The Mishnah (Moed Katan 8a) forbids scheduling a hesped within thirty days before Yom Tov for someone who died over thirty days before Yom Tov (as explained by Rosh ad loc. and Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 447:1). What is wrong with scheduling this hesped, particularly since performing a proper hesped is such a big mitzvah?

The Gemara cites two reasons for this ruling, both explaining that some form of Yom Tov desecration may result from such a eulogy. Rav (according to our version of the text) explained the reason with an anecdote:

“A man once saved money in order to fulfill the mitzvah of aliyah la’reigel, traveling to the Beis Hamikdash for Yom Tov. A professional eulogizer then showed up at his door and convinced the wife that her recently departed relative deserved another eulogy. She took the money her husband had saved for aliyah la’reigel and gave it to the eulogizer. (This indicates that ambulance chasing is a time-hallowed profession.) At that time, Chazal decreed that one should not make a post-funeral hesped during the thirty day period before Yom Tov.”

The Gemara then quotes Shemuel, who cited a different reason for the ban: Usually, thirty days after someone’s death, he or she is sufficiently forgotten for people to not discuss the death during Yom Tov, which would diminish the festival joy. However, performing a eulogy during these thirty days refreshes people’s memories, and as a result, they discuss the passing during Yom Tov and disturb the Yom Tov joy (Moed Katan 8b).

The Gemara notes that there is a practical difference between the two approaches. According to the first approach, our concern only applies if someone hires a professional speaker, and there is no stricture against conducting voluntary eulogies. However, according to Shemuel, one may not conduct even an unpaid eulogy, since this may revive the loss for the close family and result in a desecration of Yom Tov.

Contemporary Problem or Not?

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

still stood. Yet the Gemara does not mention such a halachic difference between the two opinions.

The Ramban explains that, indeed, even the first opinion agrees that the prohibition exists also today. Since the story mentioned in the Gemara happened during the time of the Beis Hamikdash, the Gemara cites a case of someone saving up for aliyah la’reigel. However, the same idea applies to any funds that are to be used for Yom Tov. Thus, even though we have no Beis Hamikdash, the reason for the prohibition still applies, since celebrating Yom Tov in general is an expense people save for in advance. Thus, the concern still exists that in order to pay for the eulogy one might dip into one’s Yom Tov savings.

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

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

Eulogizing Children

Does one recite eulogies for children?

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

For which age does one perform a hesped?

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

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

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

Conclusion

The Torah begins and ends by describing acts of chesed that Hashem performed, the last one entailing His burying of Moshe Rabbeinu. Our purpose in life is to imitate

Hashem in all activities, until our personality develops to the point that we instinctively behave like Hashem. Fulfilling the mitzvah of hesped correctly, whether as a speaker or as a listener, develops our personality appropriately, and thus fulfills another highly important role in our Jewish lives.

### **The Vienna conversion affair**

#### **Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

*In the year 1969, the Jewish Agency succeeded in rescuing a few Jews from the USSR. Read what happened to them in Vienna.*

The Vienna conversion affair, most of which took place in the winter of 1970, was one of the most difficult polemics on the subject of conversions. Many members of the Haredi public and their rabbis opposed the religious Aliyah activists in the Jewish Agency, accusing them of wholesale conversions in violation of Halakha. The rabbis who supported these converts also received threats and were persistently attacked. From then on, any rabbi who wanted to support conversions according to the lenient halakhic opinion, had to take into account that the Haredi world would denounce him, and his good name would be irreparably slandered.

In 1969, the Iron Curtain that separated the Soviet Union from the free world was partially removed, and little by little, Jews were allowed to leave. After that, the gate was more widely opened, and for about ten years, about 200,000 new immigrants immigrated to the State of Israel. On their way to Israel, the immigrants first arrived in Vienna, the capital of Austria, and were accommodated for a while in a hotel rented by the Jewish Agency to receive them, and confirm their immigration.

With the arrival of the first immigrants to Vienna, members of the religious department of the Jewish Agency witnessed the phenomenon of mixed marriages, and consequently, also children who were not Jewish according to Halakha. It was impossible to separate the Jewish couples from their non-Jewish partners, therefore the clear policy of the Jewish Agency was to bring to Israel every Jew with his family members, even if they were not Jewish. Immediately upon their arrival in Israel, the Jews received Israeli citizenship, along with their family members. Following appeals to this policy, in 1970, the law of rights of Jewish family members was passed, including the section concerning grandchildren, and since then the Jewish Agency has been obligated to uphold this policy according to the law.

Since at this time, these were family members of Jews who decided to tie their fate with the fate of the Jewish people and immigrate to Israel, the members of the religious department at the Agency tried to convert them before they arrived in Israel. To this end, their stay in Vienna was extended, they were taught Judaism, and at the end of the process, converted.

The leaders of this plan were Rabbi Mordechai Kirschblum, Associate Chairman of the Aliyah Department at the Jewish Agency and the representative of the Mafdal religious party, together with Rabbi Shamai Ginzburg, one of the Torah luminaries of the generation. They received tacit approval for their initiative from the Chief Rabbinate, and instructed Reb Alter Meir Steinmetz to organize in the transit camp in Vienna, the study and conversion of those interested. The conversion abroad was essential, because upon coming to Israel, the immigrants were expected to assimilate into the country, without any need for conversion. In addition to this, the time spent in the transit camp was an ideal time for studying Judaism, without worries about earning a living, and other distractions.

#### **Establishment of the Beit Din for Conversion in Vienna**

Reb Alter Steinmetz acted effectively. He turned to Rabbi Dr. Akiva Eisenberg, the official Rabbi of Vienna and a Zionist activist in Austria, who was of a modern nature, and convinced him to head the conversion Beit Din. As a second judge, he recruited Rabbi Yosef Bruner, director of the Torah Talmud for boys and Beit Yaacov for girls of the Agudat Yisrael community in Vienna. He himself, was the third judge. At times, other judges participated. For any question they had, they turned to Rabbi Chaim Grinfeld, who was the rabbi of Agudat Yisrael in the city, who guided them, and supported their actions. In this way, 54 men and women were converted in Vienna between the spring of 1969, and the summer of 1970.

The Severe Attacks against the Beit Din and its subsequent closure

These conversions were done in a serious manner. The converts learned a lot of Judaism, accepted upon themselves the mitzvot, and in practice, they could even be expected to maintain a traditional lifestyle. However, according to the strict halakhic arbiters, who are of the opinion that one should not convert someone who is not expected to maintain a religious lifestyle, it was forbidden to convert them. In other words, these conversions were better than most of the conversions that were conducted in Jewish communities by the eminent rabbis who followed the lenient approach.

Despite this, the most serious claims were made against the conversions in Vienna. It was claimed that a “factory for conversions” was established there, and it was run by religious askanim (movers and shakers) from the Jewish Agency who surrendered to the secularists, and converted there “in wholesale”, in a “conveyor belt”, and that “hundreds of converts” who are nothing more than complete non-Jews, had already immigrated to Israel.

It was further claimed that after a few days of preparation, the non-Jews were begged and enticed to convert, without understanding the meaning of the matter, since the converts did not understand the language of those converting them. It was further claimed that the dayanim (judges) were frivolous, or innovators and reform who disdained halakha,

or laymen who were not qualified to be rabbis but only kosher overseers who had never specialized in halakha in general, or the laws of conversion, in particular.

For months, these and other claims were made and written by famous Rabbis, Rebbes, and Heads of yeshivas. They were published in posters that were distributed in thousands of copies, and printed on the front pages of the most important newspapers in Israel, in selected brochures and books, in recorded conversations, and in radio interviews. Following this, most of the Rebbes in Israel and heads of famous yeshivas signed the most serious pashquevillim (billboard posters) against the “conversion scandal in Vienna”. Finally, the Council of the Chief Rabbinate determined that all the conversions were questionable, and would be examined by the Rabbis of the Land of Israel.

The Beit Din for conversion in Vienna was closed, and from then on, men and women married to a non-Jewish spouse and their children, immigrated to Israel without conversion.

Who is the 'Infamous' Alter Steinmetz?

When I read the serious allegations against the Vienna converts and the harsh insults against Reb Alter Steinmetz, that he was a layman an ignoramus, and without authority, decided to establish a fictitious conversion factory, deep down I got the impression that he was a Zionist religious teacher and an idealist, and that the Haredim didn't understand that his intention was for the sake of Heaven. Recently, I told the members of the Har Bracha Institute, Rabbi Dr. Boaz Hutterer and Rabbi Tzuriel Halamish, who specialize in history, that they must find out who this Alter Steinmetz was, who, since that affair, had disappeared from the public scene.

By the Grace of God, the Treasure was Found

With the help of Heaven, the descendants of Reb Alter were located. They had established fine religious families, for example, one of his grandsons serves in a senior educational position. It turned out that from that episode until his last day, Reb Alter had been offended. Towards the end of his life, after he passed the age of eighty, he bought himself a computer, typed his life stories, attached the numerous documents and letters in his possession, and described the case of the Vienna converts in full.

The book has five hundred pages. He had planned to print it privately. In the month of July 1997, after the draft of the book had been printed in three copies, Reb Alter passed away, in a merciful death. Following that, during the troubles of moving, the computer on which the book was written was lost, as well as two printed copies. By the grace of God, the last copy remained with his daughter for some twenty-five years, and about a week ago, Rabbi Dr. Boaz Hutterer photographed the majority of it. Rabbi Tzuriel Halamish checked, and found that the documents he brought were accurate, as copies of them were found in the

State Treasury, and other persons who were involved in the affair, confirmed his words.

With God's help, I will continue to tell the story of the great controversy about the conversions of Vienna.

A Few Words about Rabbi Alter Meir Steinmetz

Rabbi Alter Meir Steinmetz ztz'l (1909-1997) was born in the town of Borsa in the district of Maramaros in Transylvania. His family was wealthy, and connected to the Vizhnitz Hasidism. He himself studied under Rabbi Menachem Mendel Hager, the Grand Rebbe of Vishuv, and was even ordained by him as a rabbi. During his studies with the Rebbe, he lived for about a year in his home, and studied with his son in a chevruta (fellowship). He also studied in yeshivot with Rabbi Mordechai Brisk in Tushand, and Rabbi Eliezer David Greenwald (the 'Keren L'David') in Satmar.

To help with his family's business, he moved to Germany and continued studying Torah there in a modern Haredi community, and at the same time, he studied economics. Due to his great talent, he was fluent in six languages. After the Nazis came to power, he left Germany and returned to his parents' home. There he continued in Zionist activity, and was one of the leaders of Hapoel Mizrahi, founded the Bnei Akiva branch, and was a member of the Torah and Avodah movement in Siget and Oradea (Grossverdeen). In 1935, thanks to his resourcefulness, he was a partner in the Sitkov immigration organization, within the framework of which hundreds of families immigrated to Israel, some of them from the Maramaros district. He wrote at length about the Holocaust period in his book, beginning with the summer of 1944 when he was in the Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and other camps, and suffered severe torture.

Being a German speaker, he was appointed by the Nazis, may the name be erased, to be in charge of the camp in Mertzachtel, and with cleverness and dedication, he managed to save hundreds of Jews from death. Forty-two members of his immediate family were murdered in the Holocaust but he survived, emaciated and sickly, and two years passed before he recovered. After the Holocaust, he was persecuted by the Communist government for being a property owner, and for being a Zionist member of the board of the Mizrahi movement in Arad. In the end, all of his family's property was confiscated, and with great efforts, he managed to immigrate to Israel in 1950, without anything in his possession.

For more than twenty years (1952-1973) he worked as the person in charge of kashrut and religious needs in the Jewish Agency's Immigration Department. He was the father of three children, and lived in Bnei Brak until his death. Recognizing his righteousness, and knowing the truth of the facts in the case, the Rebbe of Viznitz, Rabbi Chaim Meir Hagar ztz'l, refused to agree to join his fellow Rebbes, who signed letters against the Vienna converts.

A Little about his Dedication to Saving his Brother

When the Germans were about to retreat, the deputy director of the Mertzbachthal camp revealed to him that an order had arrived to liquidate the camp, and to march all the Jews on foot, 15 kilometers a day with all their luggage, and to shoot anyone who could not walk, and leave them on the side of the road. He also revealed that anyone who was in the clinic, which was intended for people who were about to die and was located in a small nearby village, would not be taken to the march. The Wehrmacht man warned that if they found out that he had told him about the liquidation of the camp, they would kill them both. That night, Reb Alter gathered the doctors in the camp, and at great risk to their lives, evacuated more than 400 weak people to the clinic village, and thus saved their lives.

In his book there are photographs of letters written to him after the war by Jews he saved. One wrote: "Every time, you took me out by force, and I didn't understand why... therefore, glory to the Most High, and to you as a mitzvah messenger of the Merciful, I was saved from the gas chambers... I will never forget you." Another person wrote to Reb Alter that he was similar to "one of the police officers of the Israelites... who were struck by the Egyptians for not torturing the Israelites, and I remember very well that you, may you live long and well, were very much in danger, blessed is your share and righteousness in this world, and in the next."

***Zionist visionary Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote in 1911 "Go to Hell!"***

*Jabotinsky's proud words still resonate today*

"Who are we, to make excuses to them; who are they to interrogate us? What is the purpose of this mock trial over the entire people where the sentence is known in advance? Our habit of constantly and zealously answering to any rabble has already done us a lot of harm and will do much more. The situation that has been created as a result, tragically confirms a well-known saying: 'Qui s'excuse s'accuse' (He who apologizes condemns himself).

"We think that our constant readiness to undergo a search without hesitation and to turn out our pockets will eventually convince mankind of our nobility; look what gentlemen we are—we do not have anything to hide! This is a terrible mistake. The real gentlemen are the people who will not allow anyone for any reason to search their apartments, their pockets or their souls. Only a person under surveillance is ready for a search at every moment. This is the only inevitable conclusion from our maniacal reaction to every reproach, to accept responsibility as a people for every action of a Jew, and to make excuses in front of everybody.

"I consider this system to be false at its very root. We are hated not because we are blamed for everything, but we are blamed for everything because we are not loved. We do not have to apologize for anything. We are a people as all other peoples; we do not have any intentions to be better than the

rest. We do not have to account to anybody; we are not to sit for anybody's examination and nobody is old enough to call on us to answer. We came before them. We are what we are, we are good for ourselves, we will not change and we do not want to."

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[Adding a few that just came out. CS:

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**Rabbi Daniel Stein**

**My Spouse, My Friend**

Under the chuppah, and throughout the week of sheva berachos that follows, we repeatedly bless the chosson and kallah, "Sameach te'samach reiyim ha'ahuvim ke'samechacha yetzircha be'gan eden mi'kedem" - "Let the beloved friends be happy just as You made Your creation happy in the garden of Eden, long ago." The comparison of marriage to friendship is rooted in the Gemara (Kiddushin 41a) which states, "It is forbidden for a man to betroth a woman until he sees her, lest he find something distasteful in her afterwards, which will cause him to resent her and violate that which the Torah says, 'And you shall love your friend as yourself' (Vayikra 19:18)." The assertion of the Gemara that the mandate to establish and maintain marital harmony is dictated by the pasuk, "And you shall love 'le'reiyacha - your friend' as yourself," implies that there is a substantive similarity between the spousal relationship and the bonds of friendship. Other than the superficial comparisons, how are marriage and friendship supposed to be alike? In what way is the familiar modality of friendship meant to guide a young couple that is aspiring to build a new life together?

There are two features of friendship, specifically implied by the term "reiyim ha'ahuvim" - "beloved friends," that every couple must adopt and embrace in order to create a successful marriage. A generic friend can be described as a "chaver," derived from the word "chibbur" - "connection", which connotes two individuals who have a shared history or common interest. However, a friend who is "reiyacha" refers to an intimate companion and partner with whom one shares more than just a casual association or occasional conversation.

Rav Hutner z"l, (Pachad Yitzchak, Michtavim 87) notes that the word "reiyah" is related to the word "teruah" - the broken sound of the shofar, and always signifies a smaller piece broken off from a larger whole. In the intervening generations between Noach and Avraham, Peleg begot a son named Re'u (Breishis 11:18). Just like "peleg" means "a faction", one party in a larger political system and population, so too the word "re'u" signifies a fragment of a bigger unit. In the pasuk, "And you shall love your friend as yourself," a fellow Jew is called "reiyacha", to convey



that we should consider all Jews as satellites of ourselves. This theme flows from the first half of that very same pasuk (Vayikra 19, 18) which prohibits taking revenge or bearing a grudge against another Jew. The Yerushalmi (Nedarim 9, 4) explains that just as it is obviously asinine for the left hand to take revenge against the right hand for cutting it accidentally with a knife, so too it is equally absurd and unproductive for one Jew to take revenge against his fellow Jew, since they are essentially two limbs of the same torso.

This notion serves as the basis for the principle of collective responsibility amongst Jews known as "kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba'zeh" (Sanhedrin 27b, Shavuos 39a). If one Jew sins or performs a mitzvah it is as if all Jews have sinned or performed a mitzvah. Rav Yosef Bloch z"l (Shiurei Daas, Vol. 1 Page 155) comments that the language of the Gemara is deliberate and precise. Chazal do not say "kol Yisrael areivim zeh la'zeh" - "all Jews are responsible for one another" but rather "kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba'zeh" - "all Jews are responsible in one another", because each Jew is imbedded in his friend and part of the larger organism called Klal Yisrael[1]. The paradigm for this kind of arrangement goes all the way back to the marriage between Adam and Chava in Gan Eden where they were initially created and contained within the same physical body. Even after they were split into two separate beings the intention remained the same, for them to function as two parts of the same entity. In our blessing to the chosson and kallah to rejoice as "reiyim ha'ahuvim" - "beloved friends" we are reminding them that while they might have entered the chuppah as two individuals they should exit as one team, united in the spirit of mutual concern and responsibility and modeled after the template of Adam and Chava in their original iteration in Gan Eden - ke'samechacha yetzircha be'gan eden mi'kedem", where they were literally one person.

Presumably, the word "reiyacha" is also linked to the word "ra" - "bad", because the role of a friend is to be supportive during the good times as well as the bad. The concept of a friend is first mentioned in the Torah in Parshas Vayeishev. After Yehudah cast the deciding vote condemning Yosef, he was demoted in the eyes of his brothers, at which point "Chirah reiy'eihu ha'adulami" - "Chirah his Adullamite friend" appeared at his side. Subsequently, when Yehudah's wife passed away and he himself became entangled with his daughter in law Tamar, Chirah emerged again, to accompany and assist Yehudah at every step along the way. Rav Simchah Bunim of Peshischa z"l (Siach Sarfei Kodesh, Parshas Vayeishev) concludes from the timing and context of Chirah's entrance that a true friend is a confidant who is sympathetic and encouraging even during the darkest hour of personal failures and frustrations.

Every person should strive to be and acquire this kind of friend, as the Mishnah in Avos (1:6) advises "acquire for yourself a friend and judge all men favorably". The

Rambam (ad loc.) defines one aspect of friendship as "when a man has a friend to whom he can confide his soul, not keeping anything from him - not in action and not in speech. And he will make him know all his affairs - the good ones and the disgraceful - without fearing from him that any loss will come to him as a result." In order to become this kind of friend it is necessary to "judge all men favorably", that is to discover and reinforce the positive qualities that reside within every individual. Similarly, when we wish the chosson and kallah, "sameach te'samach reiyim ha'ahuvim", we are instructing them to be supportive of each other even in the face of adversity and failure, when times are "ra" - "bad". Again, the language here is deliberate and precise. "Reiyim ha'ahuvim" means "beloved friends", not "loving friends", because each spouse must be made to feel loved and cherished despite their shortcomings, as if they have a personal cheerleader who always has their back even after a loss or when times are tough.

On Thursday nights, Rebbe Shimon Kalish z"l, the Rebbe of Skernowitz, would venture into slums of Warsaw to distribute tzedakah. However, as he crouched down to put the money into each eager and needy hand, he would whisper into the ear of every recipient, "I would love to give you this as a gift but unfortunately I am only able to give it to you as a loan which I fully expect you to repay." If they hesitated upon hearing the terms, the Rebbe would add, "Do you accept? I am trusting you. I have confidence you will pay me back." One week, upon overhearing this exchange, the chasidim challenged the Rebbe, "Why did the Rebbe give it to them as a loan? There is no chance that they will pay the Rebbe back, and now, aside from their other troubles, they will likely also be delinquent on the debt and in arrears." The Rebbe responded, "If I were to give them a gift, they might have some money in their pocket for a day or two, but they would still have a broken spirit. By giving them a loan, and informing them that I fully expect to be paid back, I am repairing their perception of themselves. Wherever they go, my words will accompany them, whispering into their ear, "I relied on you, because I trust you and I believe in you." Nothing is more valuable than a friendly voice whispering in our ear words of encouragement and reassurance.

If we recognize that we are all part of a larger network united in the service of Hashem, may we all be blessed to build and maintain healthy marriages and families where every member of the home feels loved and supported even when times are challenging.

[1] Cf. Medrash Tehillim (8:4) and Breishis Rabasi (38:12) where the language of "zeh la'zeh" is used.

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

date: Nov 17, 2022, 6:41 PM

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

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

Isaac and Rebecca

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

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

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

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

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

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

No Friction

What is more, with our other patriarchs and matriarchs we observe moments of tension (of course relative to their lofty and sacred stature). Sarah tells Abraham, "I am angry at you." [7] Rachel too complains to Jacob about her childlessness; "and Jacob became angry at Rachel, saying, 'Am I in the place of G-d?'" [8]

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

This was not because they never disagreed. To the contrary, the Torah states, that Rebecca loved Jacob, while

Isaac loved Esau. While Isaac wishes to bless Esau, Rebecca instructs Jacob to dress up like his brother and obtain the blessings for himself. [9] That could have easily resulted in a quarrel—but it did not.

Dawn and Darkness

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

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

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

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

Who was Abraham? "Abraham woke up early in the morning to the place where he stood previously," the Torah states. [14] Then again, when he is instructed to bring his son to Mt. Moriah, "Abraham woke up in the morning." The Torah rarely presents the details of daily life, unless they convey an important theme. Following a long and dark night, Abraham ushers in the morning for civilization. [15] Abraham instituted the morning (shacharis) prayer, topping into the unique spiritual energy of daybreak, when you stretch out your arms and embrace the new day.

Jacob, in contrast, embodies the night of Judaism. The kingdom of night is full of mystique, solitude, darkness, drama and romance. Jacob's life is riddled with darkness, uncertainty, loneliness, struggle and trauma, fraught with drama and mystery. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: [16] "Why do you say, O Jacob, why declare, O Israel, 'My way is hid from the Lord, my cause is ignored by my G-d'?"

No personality in the Torah is so connected with night as Jacob. In the middle of the night, the Torah relates, “Jacob remained alone, and a man fought with him till dawn broke.”[17] Jacob tells his father-in-law Laban: “Twenty years I have been with you... scorching heat ravaged me by day, and frost by night; sleep eluded my eyes.”[18] Jacob, says the Torah, “came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.”[19] He then dreams of a “ladder standing on the ground, but its top reaches heaven.”[20] Jacob taught the Jewish people and the world how to encounter the Divine during the turbulence and obscurity of night. “And Jacob woke up from his sleep and he said, ‘Indeed! G-d is present in this space, even if I did not know it.’”[21] Jacob feels the presence of G-d even in a space of darkness and adversity, even if his brain can’t always figure out how. Jacob created the evening prayer—the connection to G-d amidst the mystery and drama of nightfall. As the sun set again and yet again in his life, he traveled internally to discover the source of light from within.

#### The Monotony of Afternoons

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

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

It is the story of Isaac.

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

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

Isaac lived in one location, and he never left it. His was more of a simple life. The only thing the Torah really tells us about his vocation is that he grew grain and dug many a

well.[24] Isaac represents the long[25] and seemingly tedious “afternoon” of Jewish history.

Therein lies his singular uniqueness.

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

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

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

It is afternoon in your office. You need to respond to dozens of emails, catch the bank, return many a call, and still field a few annoying appointments. But you stand up to daven “mincha,” to connect with G-d. You are busy, stressed, and tired; yet you leave everything behind, and you take time out and try to break out of the routine to focus on truth, on G-d, on eternity. Here is where the power of Isaac lay, the still voice of dedication that never falters.[27]

#### A Tale of Three Marriages

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

When we meet our soulmate, a new dawn overwhelms our heart’s horizon. We are overtaken by the newness and freshness of the experience. We are excited, inspired, full of hope of what our joined future might look like. This is the “Abraham” of marriage, the morning—shacharis—of a relationship.

Marriage also has those special moments of moonlight mystery and drama. The passion and electricity that comes

from the unknown, from discovering the untold layers of depth in our spouse's soul; the special awareness that is born from dealing with darkness and uncertainty. This is the "Jacob" element of marriage, the evening—"maariv"—of a relationship.

But then there is the "mincha" of marriage—the simple, unromantic, non-dramatic, commitment of two people to each other, during the boring and flat days of life. Two souls holding hands together through the vicissitudes of life, in difficult times, in serene times, in monotonous moments and in thrilling moments. It is the loyalty and trust built over years of supporting each other.

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

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

#### A Tale of Two Loves

What is the difference between the two loves?

In the first love, born out of the ecstasy of a new passionate relationship, the shorter we are married, the more the love; the longer we are married, the more difficult to love. As the thrill wanes, boredom sets in, and we sometimes grow disinterested. In the latter Isaac-type love, it is the reverse: the longer we are married, the deeper we grow in love. We don't fall in love; we climb in love. The love becomes like a deep well, discovered in the depths of the earth, and its life-sustaining waters never cease to flow.

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

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

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

[1] Genesis 24:67

[2] Ibid. 2:24

[3] Genesis 16:2

[4] Genesis chapter 21

[5] Genesis 24:67

[6] Ibid. 29:18

[7] Ibid. 16:5

[8] Ibid. 30:2

[9] Ibid. 25:28, and chapter 27.

[10] Berachot 26b

[11] See Talmud ibid. Rabbi Yossi son of Rabbi Chanina said: The prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices... It has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Yossi ben Chanina: Avraham instituted the morning prayer, as it says, "Avraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood." Yitzchak instituted the afternoon prayer, as it says, "Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field at dusk." Yaakov instituted the evening prayer, as it says, "He encountered [vayifga] the place," and "pegiah" means prayer.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zaler, in his commentary Minchas Yitzchak to the Talmud ibid. adds a nice hint in their names: The second letter of our three forefathers are 'ב' (יצחק), 'ע' (יעקב), and 'ב' (אברהם), alluding to the Hebrew terms: "בוקר" (morning), "צהריים" (afternoon), and "ערב" (evening). These correspond to the time of day at that which each one instituted a different prayer.

[12] See Beis Yosef Orach Chaim Chapter 4: A man upon awakening in the morning is like a new creature, as it is written: "The souls are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:23). Cf. Likkutei Torah Behaaloscha Maamar Miksha.

[13] Maamarei Admur Hazaken Haktzarim p. 553.

[14] Genesis 19: 27

[15] See Ethics of the Fathers ch. 5

[16] 40:27

[17] Genesis 32:24

[18] Ibid. 31:38;40

[19] Gen 28:11

[20] Ibid. 12

[21] Genesis 28:16

[22] See Rambam Laws of Avodah Zarah chapter 1. Rashi Genesis 24:7. Introduction of Meiri to Pirkei Avos.

[23] Genesis 23:6

[24] Genesis chapter 26

[25] He also lives longer than his father and child: 180, not 175 or 147.

[26] Ibid. 24:63

[27] See Talmud Berachos 6b: One should always be careful to pray the Mincha prayer for Elijah was only answered (when he prayed for a fire to come down and

consume his sacrifice) during the Mincha prayer. Rabbi Moshe ibn Machir, in Seder Hayom, Page 32, explains: The prayer of Mincha deserves to be answered because it is a time that everyone is busy in their work and carried away with their doings and needs. Hence, when during such a time one instead runs after the needs of G-d and prays and

beseeches before the Master of the world—thus recognizing his Master's greatness, while seeing himself only as a dedicated servant devoted to His service—it is appropriate to recognize this humble man who is careful with the word of G-d whom it is fit to look at him.

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לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה  
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה