

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

**A**fter the death of Sarah, Avraham remarries to a woman named Keturah. Rashi, following Midrash, states that she was Hagar, the woman whom he had married earlier at the behest of Sarah herself and who became the mother of Yishmael. The Torah records for us that Avraham fathered further children with Ketura and that these children left the house of Avraham to found families and clans of their own in the Middle East. There is discussion in halacha regarding these bnei Ketura and their status vis a vis the Jewish people and Avrahams mission in the world. The bnei Ketura adopted many of Avrahams ways including hospitality to strangers and circumcision of males. However, the Torah makes it very clear that in no way are they the true heirs of Avraham in spiritual terms. It is Yitzchak and Yitzchak alone who inherits the blessings of Avraham and the responsibilities of the covenant entered into between Avraham and G-d, so to speak. Even in his lifetime, Avraham sends the bnei Ketura away from him and from Yitzchak. The bnei Ketura melt into the general milieu of the different tribes that populated the Middle East of that time. They never challenge Yitzchak nor assert any claim to the heritage of their father Avraham. It is almost as if they are satisfied at being ignored in the whole millennia-long struggle, regarding the advancement of Avrahams ideas and ways against idolatry and cruelty. Thereby they are assigned to the very anonymity that they seemingly craved.

I think that the lesson here is an obvious historical one. Many are delighted to claim great pedigree for themselves. But since in Jewish life pedigree comes with great responsibilities, with a binding covenant whose terms are inescapable and immutable, people are willing to renounce their pedigree rather than bear its responsibilities and obligations. The unwillingness or inability of the bnei Ketura to respond to the challenge of being the descendants of Avraham is what brings them to even lose that distinction of their illustrious pedigree. Throughout the Bible, the Jewish people are constantly reminded that they are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. This is not a matter of pride and hubris look how great my family is but rather a call to spiritual arms look at the great mission and

responsibility that has been thrust upon us precisely because of who our ancestors were. This is what the rabbis meant when they stated that a Jew must always ask ones self: When will my actions be of the same caliber of holiness and spirit as those of my forbearers? Pride in ancestry is necessary and commendable. But if it only remains a matter of pride without advancing the covenant, commitments and goals of those who went before us, then that pride of ancestry is almost worthless. It leads only to the fate of the bnei Ketura, assimilation, anonymity and eventually the disappearance of the knowledge of ones own ancestry itself. All of Jewish history testifies to this truism of Jewish life, both in individual and communal terms. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**Y**ears ago I was privileged to be in Rav Ahron Soloveichik's shiur (Torah class). Although most know him for his extraordinary Talmudic knowledge, it was his Thursday classes of Hashkafah in which he taught the portion of the week that I especially loved.

To this day I remember the class he gave on this week's portion. He asked a very simple question: Why did Avraham have to acquire land - the cave of Mahpelah in Hevron - to bury Sarah? Over and over G-d had promised the land to Avraham. The acquisition process seems unnecessary.

Here, Rav Ahron distinguished between legal ownership and psychological ownership. The former means that one has the legal contractual right to a particular object or piece of land. The latter means however, that the property which is mine was acquired through personal effort, extraordinary input and a serious expense of energy.

From this perspective, an inherited business is legally owned. It's the heir's even if the inheritor has not toiled in the business. But it is only psychologically mine if I have worked through my own efforts to create the business.

In this spirit, the Talmud declares that if one is given a bushel of apples to watch and the apples begin

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to rot, it is best not to sell them for good apples. The Talmud explains that the owner would prefer to have returned the original apples that he produced rather than those that were the work of someone else. (Baba Metzia 38a)

I can still hear Rav Ahron as he illustrated this point with a delightful tale. In Europe, Yeshivot were often engaged in good-natured competition. The Telshe Yeshiva was known for its sharp students who were geniuses in pilpul and whose logic sometimes turned on the splitting of a hair.

As the story goes, a student in a competing Yeshiva declared that in Telshe they'd even ask how tea became sweet. Is it the pouring of sugar into the water or is it the actual stirring. The conclusion reached in laughter was that at Telshe it would be said that it is the stirring that makes the tea sweet but with one prerequisite - that the sugar was first placed in the tea.

With a smile Rav Ahron declared that for him it is the stirring that is paramount. When you stir the tea you are using energy and thus you feel you have invested part of yourself in the making of the tea.

This difference between legal and psychological ownership especially resonates for me. I appreciate having had the opportunity to grow along with the congregation at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, and with the students at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. The Torah I treasure most is that which I have the privilege to work through-realizing what Rav Ahron would call psychological ownership.

And so it is with life. And so it is with that that is most precious. The more we toil, the more we struggle, the more it becomes ours.

No wonder Avraham acquires Hevron. And no wonder our nations sacrifice for Hevron makes many feel that Hevron is ours, not only legally but psychologically. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

**RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## Haftarah

**T**his week's haftarah teaches us an important lesson about Divine providence. Dovid Hamelech suddenly aged and withdrew from the affairs of his kingdom. This development created a significant void in the parliament and opened the door to minority groups

and conspiracy. Adoniyahu, a son of the king seized the opportunity and began grooming himself for the throne. This was in direct opposition to the king's wishes who publicly declared his son Shlomo as his successor. Dovid's choice was rooted in a prophecy received years earlier that he would be granted a son named Shlomo who would be his successor. In fact, Dovid secured this issue from the outset and promised Shlomo's mother, BasSheva, that her son would be the next king. Now, in Dovid's aged state this matter took a mean turn and Adoniyahu secretly and rapidly developed a strong following. The king's closest advisors discovered this plot and corroborated with Shlomo's mother to appeal to the king. After hearing the severity of the situation the king responded and ordered the immediate coronation of Shlomo. Adoniyahu's attempt gave rise to an unprecedented experience and Shlomo succeeded his father during Dovid Hamelech's own lifetime. These drastic measures reveal serious concern over Shlomo's actual reign.

The Sages reflect upon this situation and raise a perplexing question. Further in this chapter Scriptures tell us that Dovid Hamelech's order to anoint Shlomo met great trepidation. B'nayahu, the presiding member of Sanhedrin responded and said, "Let it be Hashem's will that the mission is successful." (M'lochim 1:36) The Sages question the need for a blessing at this point. It suggests that B'nayahu was uncertain of the mission's worthiness in Hashem's eyes. They question, "Didn't Hashem promise Dovid from the outset that Shlomo would be the next king?" Now that this prophecy was in the midst of fulfillment what could possibly affect it? They answer that although Hashem's original promise was but moments away from fulfillment many impediments would present themselves prior to its actual realization. (Breishis Rabba 76:2)

These words teach us an important lesson about Divine providence. Although Shlomo's reign was pre-ordained and promised to Dovid Hamelech these did not guarantee its reality. The sages explain that prophetic statements of this nature are subject to change. They are given in accordance to the individual's worthiness and depend upon his maintaining standards of piety and perfection. They draw proof to this from our Patriarch Yaakov who was severely frightened by his wicked brother Eisav's pending encounter with him. They explain that although Hashem promised earlier to protect Yaakov he did not feel secure. He was concerned that he may have unintentionally committed some fault and forfeited His protection. Apparently, Dovid Hamelech shared a similar concern that he may have forfeited some of his merits and no longer deserve that Shlomo be his successor. (see Maharzu's comment ad loc)

Ramchal however deduces a second dimension from this Midrash. He sternly warns us

against delaying to perform a mitzva and states, "When a mitzva opportunity presents itself one must immediately act upon it. There is no greater danger than this because every moment another impediment may arise and inhibit one from fulfilling the mitzva." He quotes the above Midrash and seems to interpret it in the following light. Although Shlomo's reign was pre-ordained and promised to Dovid Hamelech it remained subject to human action or the lack of thereof. Every act of mitzva is subject to opposition and challenge and must be enacted as soon as possible. The mere fact that one is lax in fulfilling a mitzva gives rise to his forfeiting its opportunity. Hashem's promise to Dovid merely meant that opportunity will be made available for Shlomo to succeed his father. Whether this would actually transpire depended on numerous factors. The greatest of them was Dovid Hamelech's commitment to this promise and his deliberate action towards its realization.

True, Hashem's plan called for Shlomo to reign but it required human involvement to bring it to fruition. When the appropriate moment arrived Dovid Hamelech was expected to do everything within his power to secure Shlomo's reign. Any delay of Dovid Hamelech could have caused him to forfeit Hashem's promise. Similarly, B'nayahu and the Sanhedrin were required to execute the king's order as soon as possible. Any delay in their process could give rise to unknown impediments and render their mission quite difficult to fulfill. B'nayahu, the head of Sanhedrin understood this well and consequently expressed his sincere plea to Hashem. He asked that it should be Hashem's will that Dovid's loyal servants faithfully respond to their call thereby securing their efforts with success. (see Path of the Just ch. 7)

The Sages share with us a similar perspective about prayer and our false sense of security. Says Rabba bar Rav Shila, "One should daven to Hashem for a peaceful stay in this world up to the last bit of dirt thrown into his grave." (Mesichta Brachos 8a) The Sages are telling us that nothing is guaranteed in this world. One may enjoy a peaceful and tranquil life but things may drastically change during his last moments. In fact, even after one's life closes strife and quarrel can develop over his internment. One requires Hashem's assistance for virtually everything in life and afterwards and is not even guaranteed a peaceful burial. The Sages remind us that present predicaments are deceiving and should never be used to gauge the future. Our single answer is t'fila. After sincerely approaching Hashem we can at least hope that Hashem will respond and bring His intended plans to fruition.

This approach to Divine providence appears throughout this week's sedra. At the close of last week's sedra Hashem informed our Patriarch Avrohom that Yitzchok's ordained wife, Rivka was born. (see

Rashi to Breishis 22:20) Avrohom waited until for her to mature and then engaged immediately in securing this marriage. He summoned his devoted student and trustworthy servant Eliezer to fulfill this invaluable mission. He proceeded and bound Eliezer with an oath to faithfully adhere to his master's command. He sternly warned him to go directly to Avrohom's family in pursuit of a proper match and reiterated that under no conditions will Yitzchok marry a Canaanite lady or leave the land of Israel. Although Avrohom knew that Rivka was pre-ordained to marry Yitzchok he went to great lengths to secure this.

Indeed, the Sages reveal that Eliezer considered his daughter as an eligible candidate but Avrohom rejected the notion. Yet, this could give rise to Eliezer's bias and inhibit him from faithfully fulfilling his mission. Consequently Avrohom did everything in his power to secure that Yitzchok marry his pre-ordained spouse. (see Rashi ibid 24:39) True, Heaven decreed this marriage but this did not guarantee that it would happen. Who knows what could stand in the way and interfere with Hashem's proposal?! Avrohom therefore demanded from his trustworthy servant a heavy oath in attempt to secure his faithful fulfillment of his mission.

We learn from this the importance of capitalizing on our mitzva opportunities. They may often represent special privileges Hashem is granting us. However, such privileges are prone to opposition and impediments and we must therefore do all we can to secure their realization. As we have seen, the working formula for this is to immediately engage ourselves into action and pray to Hashem. After these we can hope that Hashem will respond favorably and bring His intended plans to fruition. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

*by Rabbi Amnon Bazak*

**O**ne of the prominent features of this week's Torah portion is the long repetition of the story of Avraham's slave (Chapter 24), first in the description of the Torah and then in the slave's retelling of the story to Rivka's family. The commentators have noted that there are small differences between the two versions that often are very significant, and that these differences are sufficient justification for repeating the story.

One difference between the two versions is the description of the dialogue between Avraham and his slave, after Avraham commands him to go to his own land and bring back a wife for Yitzchak. Here are the two descriptions:

The Torah: "And the slave said to him, Perhaps the woman will refuse to accompany me to this land. Shall I return your son to the land from which you came? And Avraham said to him, Take care not to

return my son to there. G-d, the Lord of heaven, who removed me from my father's house and my birthplace, and who spoke to me and vowed to me, saying, I will give this land to your offspring, He will send His angel before you. And you will take a woman for my son from there." [Bereishit 24:5-7].

The slave: "And I said to my master, Perhaps the woman will refuse to accompany me. And he said to me, G-d, whom I have followed, will send his angel with you and give you success, and you will take a woman for my son from my family and from my father's home. Then you will have fulfilled my oath, once you have come to my family. But if they do not give her to you, you will be freed from my oath." [24:39-41].

The clearest difference between the two descriptions is that the slave omits all the references in the original story to the possibility of bringing Yitzchak back to Avraham's original homeland. The Torah does not explain the reasoning behind the slave's question: Was it an innocent question, or did it involve a secret wish by the slave to return with his master to the homeland? In either case, Avraham was frightened by the idea, and he warned the slave twice to forget this idea completely.

It seems that the slave understood the message very well, and as a result he tells a modified version of the events. In his story, the meaning of the slave's question is also changed. It is no longer related to the possibility of bringing Yitzchak to the land if the woman refuses to come to him, rather it is a straightforward question: How can the slave give a promise about something that is not under his control? In view of this, Avraham's answer also changes: It no longer emphasizes (twice) that the slave should not bring Yitzchak to the other land but rather serves the purpose of easing the slave's mind and clarifying (twice) that he will not be held responsible if his request is refused.

It is also not by accident that the slave diminishes the references to G-d, which were so strongly emphasized in the original. The long phrase, "G-d, the Lord of heaven, who removed me from my father's house and my birthplace, and who spoke to me and vowed to me, saying, I will give this land to your offspring..." is only relevant in the context of the original event, which is centered about the concept of Eretz Yisrael. When the slave repeats the story this is no longer at the center of attention, and the much shorter description is sufficient: "G-d, whom I have followed..."

**The Machpelah Cave: A Spiritual Focal Point and a Historical Site** by Noam Arnon, Spokesman for the Jewish Settlement in Chevron

We will take this opportunity of the Torah portion of Chayei Sarah to review the unique characteristics of the Machpelah Cave, for the benefit

of the tens of thousands of visitors in Chevron, and for those who will come in the future.

It is well known that the Machpelah Cave was the first Jewish acquisition in Eretz Yisrael, the final resting place of our forefathers. However, the sanctity of the site had been discovered thousands of years earlier. The Zohar teaches us that Adam himself smelled "the scent of the Garden of Eden" and saw the light of the Garden shining from the ground. Because of his yearning to return to the Garden, he dug out a cave, where eventually both Adam and Chavah were buried. Afterwards, the location of the cave was forgotten, until it was revealed to Avraham, who saw the special light of the Garden of Eden shining at the site. (Zohar, Bereishit 57; 127; New Zohar 79).

The Zohar and the Midrash expand the significance of this opening to the Garden of Eden. This is a point linking two worlds-this world, the physical one, and the world to come, the spiritual one. This is the meaning of the name Chevron, from "chibur," a connection. The Machpelah Cave is a point of transfer to upper level worlds, a place where the souls rise to their final heights. It is also the site where prayers rise, which is the reason that the Amidah prayer begins with a blessing in memory of our forefathers. This blessing must be recited with deep concentration, and without this direct intention the Amidah should in principle be repeated (Orach Chaim 101).

In addition, the Machpelah Cave has another characteristic. It is a unique archeological and historical site, one that draws to it hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. The cave is topped by a building that is one of its kind in the entire world: a Herodian-Jewish structure that is 2000 years old, complete and whole, which has been in continuous use as a site of gathering and prayer. This structure is the only remainder of the glorious Jewish construction from the days of the Second Temple. Its walls are the same as the walls around the Temple Mount. But these, to our sorrow, were destroyed, while the walls of the Machpelah Cave have been preserved. The site is constructed of dolomite stone which is extremely hard, the weight of the individual stones is dozens of tons, and most of the stones still have the original marks of the chisels. The fact that this structure is so well preserved is remarkable in view of the fates of other structures from the same era. A few days ago, a large headline in a local newspaper read, "The Remains of the Roman Empire are Disintegrating" [Maariv, 5 Cheshvan]. And that is what is happening in Rome, the capital of the empire.

The foreign conquerors built various additions on the side and on top of the original structure. The Arabs sealed the original entrance to the lower floor with a structure that they called "Yosef's Grave"-without any historical basis. The Crusaders added a fortifying wall outside and a church within the area. The

Mamaluks added towers to change the appearance of the site and divided the structure into separate rooms. And the Turks raised the walls. But all of these additions did not change the basic characteristics of the site- it is a very large and impressive Jewish structure from the time of the Second Temple. A visitor who has his own knowledge or joins a good guide can expect a unique experience, a "time voyage" far into the past, to the earliest times.

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**T**his week's Biblical reading opens with a strange and verbose dialogue that seems to go in circles. Abraham requires a burial plot for his beloved wife Sarah, who has just died. He asks "to be given the possession of a grave" (23:4), and he is immediately told that he can choose anyone he wishes (23:5). Here is where the discussion ought end: request granted. But apparently the patriarch is not satisfied; he insists on meeting a certain Efron ben Zahar, from whom he wishes to purchase a field with a two-story cave for "full money as a possession" (23:9). Efron seems most accommodating, wishing to give him the cave as a gift. Abraham remains dissatisfied, so Efron charges him four-hundred shekels of silver, and the purchase deal is consummated. What's going on? Why does Abraham insist on paying for what he can obtain free of charge? What happened to his Jewish "bargain-hunting" gene?

Rav Elhanan Samet drew my attention to the studies of Prof. Moshe Veinfeld and Ezra Tziyon Melamed, who reveal that in the ancient Middle East only a resident citizen - in this case, a bona fide Hittite - could purchase land which would become his eternal possession which he could bequeath to his descendants. Abraham is not interested in a temporary grave-site which would revert to Hittite property after his death, Abraham wants Sarah's remains to be the patrimony of his progeny eternally. Hence he is requesting special treatment even though he is an alien resident (*ger toshav*), a Hebrew and not a Hittite; he wants an eternal possession of a grave, that he can bequeath to his descendants, for which he will gladly pay. (*Ahuzat Keser*, the possession, eternal ownership, of the grave). And such a concession can only be made - and given - with the permission and in the presence of all the Hittite together, in a public forum, a town meeting.

Abraham is initially refused this request. Although the denial is couched in most complimentary terms - "a prince of G-d are you in our midst" - Abraham is unequivocally informed that although no one will withhold his gravesite from him, the grave will have to remain the eternal possession of the Hittite who owns it. Abraham can use or borrow anyone's grave that he wishes, but he will not have it as his

possession, it will not become an inheritance he will be able to pass on to his descendants.

Abraham tries again. He wishes to meet Efron, who apparently owns the last parcel of Hittite land. Abraham now asks to be able to purchase the end of that estate, with a two-story cave upon it which can become a mausoleum for Sarah (and later on for himself as well, and for his children and grandchildren); and the patriarch is willing - nay insistent - to pay "full money", but it must become his "possession of the cave," a piece of land that he truly owns and that he can pass down to his future generations (23:9).

Efron once again tries to pawn the land off as a gift - it will cost you nothing, you can use it in your lifetime as a burial plot, but you will not own it; Abraham insists on purchase. He pays a sum which would ordinarily acquire 150 dunam of land, but at the end of the negotiation, "the field of Efron which was of two stories..., the field and the cave which was on it..., went up as an acquisition to Abraham in the presence of the Hittite... for the possession of a grave..."(23:17-20). It became Abraham's possession, an inheritance which he could bequeath to his descendants.

Abraham's request reverberates through the millennia and speaks to us in a most timely manner. The Hebrew is addressing the Gentile who has inhabited the land he was promised by G-d: Give to me the right to bequeath this land to my descendants; I shall pay for it in any way you wish to exact payment, in demim (money) or, if it G-d forbid be necessary, in dam (blood). But don't do me any favors; I am willing to do whatever I must do to acquire it as my possession.

The fact that the very first plot of land "acquired by right of ownership" in Israel is the grave-site of Sarah is fraught with profound significance; Israel is the land of our continuity, the place of our eternity. It was never meant for temporary use by our people; it is our eternal homeland. And just as Abraham insists on paying for Sarah's grave - so that it can never revert back to any other Gentile owner - so does King David insist upon paying Arvona the Jebusite for the land which was to become the Temple Mount: "Nay, I must purchase, yes purchase it from you, for a price, so that I not make my offerings to the G-d of whole burnt offerings free of charge (without the legal right of ownership)." (Samuel 2, 24:24); and again, "Nay, I will purchase, yes purchase it for full silver (cash money, Kesef Male, chronicles 1, 21:24).

From this perspective, we can well understand why our Talmudic Sages derive the husband-wife acquisition - engagement (*Kinyan Kidushin*) by means of a wedding ring from Abraham's acquisition of Efron's field for Sarah's burial plot by means of a financial transfer. A Jewish marriage is an eternal relationship of responsibility which extends even beyond the spouse's lifetime; a Jewish marriage portends continuity from generation to generation; the relationship of the nation

of Israel to the land of Israel is an eternal one, which extends from generation to generation.

How ironic it is that the two sacred places whose purchase contract by Israel is recorded in the Bible - the Cave of the Couples and the Temple Mount - remain the most hotly contested areas in Israel by our Arab neighbors?! © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

### What's Bothering Rashi?

**T**he parsha relates two main stories. The first, Sarah's death and burial. The second, Abraham's looking for, and finding, a wife for his son, Isaac. When his servant, Eliezer, arrives at Rebecca's home, Lavan, her brother, greets him and welcomes him. We find the following: "And the man came into the house and he unfastened the camels, he gave straw and fodder to the camels and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him." (Genesis 24:32)

"And he unfastened"-RASHI: "He loosened their muzzles, for he had sealed their mouths, so they (the camels) should not graze in other people's fields."

Can you see why Rashi needed to interpret the verse this way? What was bothering him?

An Answer: If Eliezer had to unfasten the camels, apparently they were muzzled.

But why were they muzzled? These muzzles shouldn't have been necessary. Since Eliezer was taking the camels on a long trip into foreign territory, he would be travelling along land that was most likely public property ("hefker" in Hebrew). So the muzzles were not warranted. This unfastening was what was bothering Rashi. How does his comment deal with this?

An Answer: Rashi tells us that these muzzles were Abraham's idea. Abraham was particularly careful not to have his camels feed freely, since some of the fields might belong to a private owner, and this would then constitute theft.

The Ramban asks a question on this interpretation. Rashi's source was the Midrash, and the Midrash itself (which the Ramban cites) questions the interpretation that Abraham muzzled his camels so that they would not graze in private property.

It cites the famous case of the Talmudic scholar, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. He had animals that "instinctively" would not eat grains that had not been tithed. He did not need to muzzle his animals. So they ask, certainly Abraham's animals were no less righteous than Pinchas ben Yair's animals! Why did Abraham have to muzzle his animals?

Can you think of an answer?

By the way, the Midrash gives no answer, implying that, in fact, Abraham did not muzzle his animals. Also, according to the Ramban, the animals were not muzzled. He interprets the "unfastening" in our verse to unfastening their saddles or the ropes with

which one camel was tied to another, which was customary to do on long journeys. But can you think of an answer for Rashi? Hint: Can you see any difference between Pinchas ben Yair's case and Abraham's?

An Answer: One simple difference between Pinchas ben Yair's case and Abraham's is that Pinchas ben Yair was concerned about his animals' eating untithed grains. This was a problem for his own righteousness. He was concerned about this transgression but at the same time he also trusted his animals, because they had, so to speak, absorbed the holy influence of his household. If he was satisfied that this was sufficient "protection" that his animals should not transgress the sin of eating untithed food, that's fine.

But Abraham had to be more cautious since the problem here was theft from another's property. In such a case it wasn't just Abraham's righteousness that was at stake, it was another person's possessions. Abraham couldn't rely on the "instinctive righteousness" of his camels. He had to muzzle them. So Rashi's comment is quite reasonable. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

#### RABBI DOV KRAMER

### Taking a Closer Look

**W**hile it's common for the Torah to use the word "years" twice when telling us how long someone lived (i.e. Mesushelach lived for "9 and 60 years and 900 years," for a total of 969 years), we are told that Sara lived for "100 years and 20 years and 7 years" (Beraishis 23:1), using it three times. Rashi tells us that each mention of the word "years" has its own message; Sara was as sin-free at 100 as she was at 20 (as until 20 G-d does not exact punishment) and as naturally beautiful at 20 as she was at 7 (when make-up is not necessary-see Chizkuni and others).

Similarly, Avraham was "100 years and 70 years and 5 years" old (25:7) when he passed away. Just as the three mentions of the word "years" teaches us about Sara's qualities, Rashi explains that Avraham was the same at 100 as he was at 70, and the same at 70 as he was at 5-without sin. (Some manuscripts add that he had the same strength at 100 as he did at 70 and was as sinless at 70 as he was at 5.) The problem, the Ramban points out, is that Yishmael was "100 years and 30 years and 7 years" old (25:17) when he died, and we know that Yishmael was not always sin-free. This would indicate that mentioning the word "years" three times does not mean that all the years were comparable in righteousness. How can the extra mention of the word "years" mean something in the cases of Sara and Avraham if it doesn't by Yishmael?

Many commentators point to the subtle nuances in the complete verses to explain the difference. "And Sara's life was 100 years and 20 years and 7 years, the years of Sara's life." The seemingly

superfluous "the years of Sara's life" tells us that they were "all equal in goodness" (Rashi). It is the addition of these words, combining all her years in one expression, that teaches us that all the "years" previously mentioned were comparable. How were they comparable? She was the same at 100 as at 20--without sin (et al). The same can be said for Avraham. "And these were the days of the years of Avraham's life that he lived, 100 years and 70 years and 5 years." Wouldn't it have been enough to just say "and these were the years that Avraham lived?" Why did the Torah add "the days of" the years? This extra phrase combines all of Avraham's "days" in one expression, teaching us that they were all comparable in righteousness. Otherwise, one might think that mentioning "years" three times infers there were differing periods of their lives. However, this does not explain why the Torah uses the word "years" three times by Yishmael. Shouldn't the Torah have described his age as it does everybody else's?

Although Yishmael was far from perfect, causing Sara to have him thrown out of Avraham's house (21:9-21), he eventually repented fully. Rashi tells us this in several places (see 15:15), including twice in our Parsha. When Avraham died, Yishmael gave Yitzchak precedence at the burial, showing us that he did teshuvah (25:9). Also, the expression used describing Yishmael's death (25:17) is one used only for the righteous. Despite the poor choices made when he was younger, Yishmael was a tzadik for at least 48 years, and possibly more. (He was 89 when Avraham died, and reached the age of 137-- I mean 100 and 30 and 7.) After describing the ages of Sara and Avraham in such an obviously different way, it would have been a blatant change to revert to the standard way of stating how old one was at the time of death. Even though all of Yishmael's years were not of comparable righteousness, once the Torah used the word "years" three times for Sara and Avraham, it had to do the same for Yishmael. If we are expected to treat people equally even if there were some past indiscretions (see Rambam's Laws of Repentance 7:8), how could the Torah not do the same? Subtle nuances in the verses are necessary to teach us that Avraham and Sara were consistently righteous, but blatant differences would undermine the message of treating people properly. Just as we should not hold a grudge against someone who, at one time, wronged us, the Torah had to show us that it doesn't either. Therefore, the Torah uses the same method to tell us how old Yishmael was, even though he was not righteous for his entire life.

This lesson might have been specifically taught to us through Yishmael. The Ralbag (Beraishis 17:18) says that Avraham asked Hashem if Yishmael's descendants can "live before you," i.e. be in His innermost circle. This request was granted, indicating that there will always be at least some descendants of

Yishmael serving Hashem. Rabbeinu Bachya (Devarim 30:7) describes how eventually (after Moshiach comes) "Yishmael" will join with us, converting to Judaism. After all these years, and especially after the most recent of events, it will be quite hard for us to put aside past grievances and accept Yishmael's descendants. Yet this is precisely what we might be expected to do.

May we have the strength to view others as they are, not as they once were, so that when the world becomes filled with the knowledge of Hashem we can all join together to do His will. © 2001 Rabbi D. Kramer

### RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

## Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar by remarking that HaShem created time. This seemingly casual observation is actually a matter of great importance. For one thing, this comment implies that the Sfas Emes could imagine a world without time. Such a mental feat of imagination is beyond the capacity of most of us. (Thus, for example, I have the impression that even so imaginative a literature as Science Fiction has not had the capacity to work with worlds without time.) And note the Sfas Emes' immediate reaction to the fact we live in a world with time. He views the existence of time as a manifestation of HaShem's Presence. Here is another example of the Sfas Emes's capacity to see HaShem everywhere.

Note further implications of the Sfas Emes's observation that HaShem created (more accurately, constantly creates--i.e., present tense) time. The fact that HaShem creates time leads us immediately to recognize that HaShem is "lema'ala min ha'zeman" (literally, 'above time'), and hence, not bound by its constraints. Thus, we can understand, in principle, how "Shamor Vezacor" could be "bedibur echad".

Finally, there is another way to appreciate the importance of our being aware that time is something that HaShem creates. That other way is to consider the implications that follow if we adopt the opposite perspective. An example is Aristotle's assertion that on the contrary, "the world is eternal." That apparently innocent statement, coming from someone with Aristotle's authority, led people to kefirah (apostasy). For, "if the world is eternal" there exists a source of creation aside from HaShem. Unfortunately, inaccurate metaphysics leads to misconceived physics. In this case, the people who adopted Aristotle's inaccurate metaphysics ended up adopting destructive life-styles.

The Sfas Emes continues, quoting the first Medrash Rabba on this parsha. That Medrash, in turn, cites a posuk in Tehilim (37:18): "Yodei'ah HaShem ye'mei temi'mim, ve'nacha'lasam le'olam tiheye." (ArtScroll: "HaShem knows the days of the perfect; their inheritance will be forever.") This Medrash focuses our attention on two of this ma'amar's key themes: One

key theme involves zeman (time) -- how to perceive it and how to relate to it. The other key theme is the role of the tzadik-in this case. exemplified by Sara Imeinu. (Note the Sfas Emes's gender-free view of the tzadik).

In an earlier ma'amar, the Sfas Emes told us that HaShem's Presence in space is hidden (olam = "hidden"). Now he educates us further, telling us that the tzadik has the responsibility of piercing the veil of chitzoniyyus (things' external appearance). That piercing enables us to live our lives in active awareness of the penimiyus (the inner reality) -- i.e., the Presence of HaShem. Now the Sfas Emes is telling us that we have the same responsibility of seeing through the veil of chitzoniyyus that hides HaShem's Presence in time. That is, just as HaShem created space (olam), so too did He create time. And just as one can be oblivious of HaShem's Presence in the world of space, so, too, can one miss perceiving HaShem's Presence in the events that unfold in time.

To clarify what he is saying, the Sfas Emes refers us to a posuk in Mishlei (13:16): "Kohl arum ya'aseh beda'as; u'kesil yifrosh iveles." (ArtScroll: "Every clever person acts with knowledge; but the fool broadcasts his foolishness.") To understand how this clarifies matters requires a digression. Hence, we digress.

The Sfas Emes begins this digression by making an amazing statement. To an outside observer, the lives of the tzadik and the rasha (the 'kesil') may appear identical. For, both the tzadik and the kesil are involved in olam hazeh. But, in fact, there is an important difference. The tzadik integrates the penimiyus with the chitzoniyyus; i.e., life's internal reality-of HaShem's Presence-with life's external appearance-of HaShem's absence. Now comes the promised clarification: The Sfas Emes reads the word "beda'as" in the posuk from Mishlei as "integrates" or "unifies."

As you see, the Sfas Emes is going back to the primal meaning of the root "yda": namely, to cling to, to unite, to integrate. Thus he reads the posuk as telling us that the tzadik views life accurately, including both the chitzoniyyus and the penimiyus. By contrast, the kesil is "poreish," separates, from reality. Thus, a fool/wicked person lives with a distorted view of reality, for he fails to see the world's penimiyus.

The Sfas Emes continues with this reading of the Hebrew root "yda" as "bringing together." This perspective leads him to offer an insight on the meaning of the phrase "yishuv hada'as". This state, which often eludes us, refers to conducting oneself in a deliberate, thought-through manner. The Sfas Emes explains that reaching a state of yishuv hada'as requires that we unify our actions with our thought.

The Sfas Emes also applies this approach to clarify a key concept in Yiddishkeit, the concept of "temimus". As you may remember, the Sfas Emes followed the Medrash Raba in quoting a phrase in

Tehilim (37, 18) --"yemei temimim". Quoting that pasuk raises the question; What does the word 'temimim,' or more generally, the much lauded quality of "temimus" actually mean? The Sfas Emes answers that "Temimus" is a state in which one's thought and action are one. In other words, a person who is "tamim" has escaped from the tension and confusion of thinking one thing but doing otherwise ; i.e., from cognitive dissonance.

Now the Sfas Emes moves on to another point. Why does the Torah (Bereshis, 23:1) use the complex phrasing of "Vayiheyu chayei Sara shenei chayei Sara..."? That is, "Sara's life was 127 years, the years of Sara's life"? A simpler, more direct statement would have been "Sara lived 127 years." The Sfas Emes answers that the Torah is working here with an allusion brought to mind by the two sound-alike words-"chayei" and "chiyus". Thus, the Torah is telling us that during her life ("chayei Sara"), the chiyus (vibrancy, vitality) of the entire world was due to her, the tzadeikes, Sara Imeinu. And similarly for other tzadikim in other epochs.

How does the tzadik deliver this remarkable achievement? By his teaching and by his example, a tzadik can enable people to perceive real reality (in which HaShem's Presence is manifest), which is hiding behind "reality" (in which HaShem seems to be absent). Thus the tzadik can raise everyday life to a higher level of kedusha.

What about a take-home lesson from this ma'amar? One potential lesson follows directly from our recognition that HaShem is "lema'ala min hazeman" (not bound by the constraints of time). The Torah tells us to emulate our Creator. How can we apply that commandment in this context?

The following possibility comes to mind. People often let the weather govern their state of mind. Thus, on a cool day in the summer, they are in good spirits. And on rainy days, they are more likely to take a negative outlook on life. Such an approach is understandable; but it is also extremely regrettable.

Why is it regrettable? Because in surrendering his/her state of mind to the weather, a person loses autonomy-the freedom that HaShem gave us to determine our own moods. I suggest that we make an effort to be "lema'ala min hazema"-autonomous beings, whose state of mind is above-and independent of the day's particular weather conditions.

To help us achieve this freedom-and thus to resemble our Maker more closely-we even have a posuk in the Torah. In fact, as a daily reminder of that goal, this helpful pasuk is included in the parshiyos contained in tefilin. That posuk (Shemos, 13: 4) says: "Hayom ahtem yotze'im, bechodesh he'aviv." ("Today you are leaving [the state of slavery in Egypt] -- on a day in spring.") This posuk is telling us that if we will it, every day can be a spring day! © 2005 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org