

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BARUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

One thing we always must keep in mind when studying Torah is that the Chumash, the Five Books of Moses, is not merely a set of laws, history, and insights. It is the Jewish people's way of connecting with G-d. The Ramban, Nachmanides, mystically writes in his introduction to the Chumash that each word and letter of the Chumash's text is 'A name of G-d.' When we study or recite the verses of the Torah, we are coming into contact with G-d's names.

What's in a name? And what's in a name of G-d?

A name is how we relate to another being. When we call our friend by his or her name, we initiate a relationship with that person for however long or short amount of time that we communicate with him or her.

When we study the Torah and recite G-d's names, we continuously communicate with and relate to G-d. We are calling out to Him by His names and connecting with Him by attempting to understand His Torah, His messages for us. He in return guides us in our learning. This is why the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law, suggests that we recite a short prayer before we study Torah, asking G-d to direct us in deriving proper and true insights. It has been said that "When we pray, we talk to G-d; and when we study, G-d talks to us."

So there are no extra words or sentences or paragraphs in the Torah. G-d does not get paid by the word. Yet we often come across passages of the Torah that seem to offer little insight to the common reader. This week's Torah portion has one such passage.

"These are the descendants of Yishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar, the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Yishmael with their names in order of birth. Yishmael's firstborn was Nevyoth, then Kedar, then Adbeel, then Mibsam. Then, Mishma, Duma, and Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Nafish, and Kedem." (Genesis 25:12-15)

What does G-d want us to derive from these verses? How is G-d talking to us in placing "His names" in the listing of Yishmael's sons? Why do we need to know and remember throughout history the names of Yishmael's sons? What is the message for us?

The only possible solution is that in order to relate to G-d properly, we must know who Yishmael is and what he is about. G-d values Yishmael as a nation and He wants us to see the depth that is within the Yishmael/Arab personality. Since Yishmael was a son of Abraham, he must possess a profound spiritual potential. Even while in the midst of fighting a necessary war against tremendous forces of evil, in the backdrop of our minds we should realize that there is potential spiritual good within Yishmael that is possible to access.

Where can we find this good?

Perhaps it is Yishmael's willingness to make sacrifices for the service of G-d. The Midrash tells us: (Sanhedrin 89b) "Yishmael said to Isaac, 'I am greater than you because you were only 8 days old when you were circumcised (and barely felt the pain). I was 13 years old!'"

Yishmael does indeed serve G-d with much faith, prayer and sacrifice. In fact, his very name means that G-d will listen to his prayers as a result of his suffering and sacrifice (Genesis 16:11).

And this personal sacrifice for what Yishmael perceives is the service of G-d exists today:

"Everybody hates death, fears death, but only the believers know about life after death and the reward after death. Remind yourself you will face many challenges. But you have to face them and understand it 100 percent... Obey G-d, and don't fight with yourself where you become weak, and stand fast; G-d will stand with those who stood fast. You should pray, you should fast. You should ask G-d for guidance, you should ask G-d for help.... Purify your heart and cleanse it from all earthly matters.

The time of fun and waste has gone. The time of judgment has arrived. Hence we need to utilize those few hours to ask G-d for forgiveness... Pray to G-d to forgive you for all your sins, to allow me to glorify you in every possible way.

Oh, G-d, open all doors for me. Oh G-d who answers prayers and answers those who ask you, I am asking you for your help. I am asking you for forgiveness. I am asking you to lighten my way. I am asking you to lift the burden I feel. Oh G-d, you who open all doors, please open all doors for me, open all venues for me, open all avenues for me."

These words could be the sermon of a holy rabbi on Yom Kippur. Instead they are the words of the

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evil, twisted Mohammed Atta taken from, "In Hijacker's Bags, a Call to Planning, Prayer and Death" by Bob Woodward, Washington Post, Friday, September 28, 2001; Page A01.

Such dedication, fighting for unimaginable evil. We must ask ourselves: where do we sacrifice for G-d in our own daily lives, fighting for the side of good?

This concept of recognizing value and potential goodness even in our enemies can be derived from the order of sacrifices that is brought on the Holiday of Sukkot. Throughout the holiday, we bring 70 sacrifices corresponding to the 70 nations of the world. (The Torah views the nations of the world as 70 roots with many other nations as branches.)

This is because we see all nations of the world as important. Each has a specific role to fulfill in G-d's world and we pray to G-d, through these offerings, that He inspire them to true service of Him. It is especially on Sukkot that we do this because it is called in our prayers, "The Season of Rejoicing." When we are happy with ourselves, we look at the world positively and can see good in others, even other nations, even enemies, as well.

According to our Sages, Yishmael repented at the end of his life (Rashi 25:9). We hope and pray that we will see the modern Yishmael, the Arab nations, join with us in the proper service of G-d. © 2006 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Words have the power to express ideas. But as expressive as words can be, they can sometimes be limiting. Often music can give soul and meaning to ideas that words cannot.

This concept is also true with respect to the melody (trop) used to read the Torah. The tune actually acts as a commentary on the text itself.

The highest and most prolonged trop is called the shalsholet. The word shalsholet is from the word shalosh - three. The sound of this note curves upward and then down three successive times. Commentators suggest that when a shalsholet appears, it indicates a feeling of hesitation by a character in the text.

For example, when Mrs. Potiphar attempts to seduce Yosef (Joseph), Yosef refuses, va-yemaen.

(Genesis 39:8) Although saying no, Yosef, at first, may have thought about giving into temptation. The word va-yemaen has, as its trop, the shalsholet.

In last week's portion, the angels instruct Lot and his family to leave Sedom. The Torah then tells us that Lot lingered (va-yitmamah). (Genesis 19:16) Lot and his family were leaving their home. This could not have been easy. Even as they left, they hesitated. In the end, Lot's wife looks back and is overtaken by the brimstone and fire, turning into a pillar of salt. Atop va-yitmamah is the shalsholet.

In this week's Torah portion there is a less obvious shalsholet. Eliezer, Avraham's (Abraham) steward, is at the well, seeking a wife for his master's son, Yitzchak (Isaac). The Torah states "And he said" (va-yomar) (Genesis 24:12) the woman who will give camels to drink is kind and hence suitable for Yitzchak. Atop the word va-yomar is the shalsholet. One wonders why? What type of hesitation takes place in this moment?

Perhaps, deep down Eliezer, did hesitate. In his heart of hearts, he may not have wanted to succeed. Failure would mean Yitzchak would not marry, and Eliezer, being the closest aide to Avraham, would be the next in line to carry on the covenant. Alternatively, as the midrash suggests, perhaps, if he did not find a wife on this journey, Yitzchak would end up marrying Eliezer's daughter. Either way, lack of success on this mission, may have ended up personally benefiting Eliezer.

No wonder Eliezer's name never appears in the entire chapter. When he identifies himself to Yitzchak's future father-in-law Lavan, Eliezer declares, "eved Avraham anochi, I am Avraham's servant." (Genesis 24:34) It is extraordinary that Eliezer does not identify himself by name. But this omission makes sense as Eliezer works selflessly for Avraham, even at the risk of his own personal gain.

The Rambam notes that, in many areas, one who hesitates but in the end does the principled thing is on a higher level than one who acts without hesitation. Therefore, Yosef's hesitation doesn't mean he's less righteous, but rather, very human. And certainly, the act of Eliezer falls into this same category.

Most often, when people become involved in an endeavor they ask "what's in it for me?" Eliezer may have asked this most human question, but the message of the shalsholet is clear. There are times when we are called upon to complete tasks that may not be in our best self interest, but we must do them nonetheless. In a world of selfishness this musical note teaches each one of us the importance of selflessness.

Interestingly, the shalsholet looks like a crooked line that begins on the ground and reaches upward. It is telling us that personal feelings are real and human. But it is also teaching us that sometimes we should abandon those natural human inclinations

and reach beyond ourselves. Then we will be able to reach the heavens. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The parsha begins with the petira (passing) of Soro Imeinu. Chazal react (in the parsha's first paragraph of Medrash Raba) by quoting a pasuk in Tehlilim (37:18): "Yodei'a HaShem ye'mei temimim..." (ArtScroll: "HaShem knows the days of the perfect..."). (The word "perfect" here refers to tzadikim; i.e., individuals of extraordinary spiritual quality.)

A look ahead in the text of the Medrash and of the Sfas Emes makes it clear that we will not be able to make progress in this ma'amar unless and until we clarify the meaning of "temimim" (or, "temimus"). So let us focus now on the meaning of these key words.

We can begin by deleting a total non-starter from our list of possible translations. In many contexts, "temimus" has the sense of "naivete". Not so here. That translation does not fit in the context within which the Sfas Emes is working (See below.) ArtScroll offers a more likely candidate; it translates temimim as "perfect". An even better translation would be: "complete", in the sense of "whole". In any case, on a non-pshat level, there is no need to choose between these different possibilities. Chazal do not see them as alternatives, and hence, as a source of tension. On the contrary, we can view them as complements. In fact, some drashos on this pasuk are based on the ambiguity and twofold meaning of the word "temimim".

Thus, commenting on that pasuk in Tehilim, the Medrash tells us: "Kesheim she'heim temimim, kach she'no'som temimim". That is: just as they (the tzadikim) are perfect, so too, are their lives complete—i.e., filled with good deeds. The Sfas Emes elaborates, telling us what particular "good deeds" Chazal have in mind here. Simply put: tzadikim elevate ("ma'alim") Time and Nature!

That is, when HaShem created the world, He built Time and Nature into it. This feature of creation introduced a potential killer problem. People might easily make the mistake of viewing Time and Nature as autonomous forces— in a world without HaShem's active participation. Fortunately, the tzadik can save us from that horrendous error. To help us gain a better understanding of what he is saying, the Sfas Emes cites a parallel case. We know that the presence of a tzadik raises the spiritual quality of the place where he or she resides. So, too, tzadikim raise the spiritual quality of the Time in the era in which they live.

How does this work? It operates via the temimus of the tzadik. To explain, the Sfas Emes offers an interpretation of what Temimus means, an

interpretation that—for me, at least—was brand new. He tells us that the ikar (the essence) of Temimus is "hisdabkus bashoresh she'lema'ala min hateva"; i.e., clinging to the root of reality, above Nature. In other words, Temimus is not naivete, but rather the sophistication of seeing Nature and Time accurately, in their true metaphysical context.

Continuing his exposition, the Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Devarim (18:13): "Tamim ti'heyeh im HaShem Elokekha" (ArtScroll: "You shall be wholehearted with HaShem"). The contrast is with the nations of the world who (Devarim, 18:14) "hearkened to... diviners". That is, the nations analyze Time and Nature rationally, and schedule their activities in accordance with their analysis ("hischakmus").

The Sfas Emes readily acknowledges that scientific analysis of Time and Nature has its place; for the cosmos is put together with logic. But we should go past the perspective that stops with science. Bnei Yisroel should recognize and be aware of HaShem's Presence in Time and Nature. The Sfas Emes takes this point further. Thus, he tells us that here we find our *raison d'être*—the reason for our very existence. As he phrases it: Bnei Yisroel were created for the purpose of elevating Nature; i.e., to clarify and be witnesses that HaShem is Master of Nature and Time. We bear testimony—to ourselves as well as to others—that HaShem directs Time and Nature. By being aware (emotionally as well as intellectually) of HaShem's Presence, we can transform those domains from neutral—if not hostile—contexts in our relationship to HaShem to becoming regions of Kedusha and Tahara. Hence, the terminology of "elevating" and "raising high" that we saw earlier.

Taking seriously the notion that we have a responsibility to bear testimony that HaShem conducts Time may sound "too Chassidish". The idea that Yiddishkeit includes educating the nations may seem "modern". The Sfas Emes hastens to bring information that can save us from such misconceptions. Thus, he quotes a pasuk in Yeshayahu (43:12): "Va'atem eidai... va'ahni Keil" (ArtScroll: "You are My witnesses... I am G-d"). One pasuk says it all. © 2006 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI LEVI COOPER

What do the Dead Know?

When we visit a cemetery or remember a lost loved one, we may find ourselves wondering whether the deceased are aware of us. Do they know what we are thinking about, what we are feeling? Do they empathize with our travails? Do they see our actions? Our talmudic sages are divided over the question: What do the dead know? They offer three approaches (B. Berachot 18a-19a).

The first approach, ascribed to Rabbi Hiyya, holds that the deceased know everything that is going

on in this world and even emote about their surroundings. Thus Rabbi Hiyya berated his colleague Rabbi Yonatan for walking in the cemetery with his tzitzit dragging over the graves: "Lift up your garment, lest the deceased say - 'Tomorrow they will be joining us and now they mock us!'"

In this vein, we are instructed not to enter a cemetery wearing tefillin or reading from a Torah scroll. According to some codifiers, it is not even permitted to enter a graveyard carrying a Torah scroll, even if this scroll is totally covered (Shulhan Aruch YD 242:4). Elsewhere, a similar restriction is cited regarding the reading of Shema in a cemetery (B. Sotah 43b). Likewise, we are enjoined to speak solely of matters that pertain to the deceased and avoid Torah discourse in the presence of the dead (B. Berachot 3b).

These restrictions fall under the rubric of the verse: "One who mocks the poor affronts his Maker" (Proverbs 17:5). Brazenly displaying the opportunities we have for fulfilling Divine Will mocks the enforced inaction imposed by death.

Thus the deceased are cognizant of their surroundings and may even feel insulted, envious and perhaps even spiteful.

Rabbi Yonatan, tramping through the cemetery with his blue-fringed tzitzit flowing behind him, was of a different opinion. He felt that the finality of death precluded any knowledge of worldly matters. Citing scriptural support, Rabbi Yonatan did not entertain that the deceased would feel any affront - or for that matter, anything at all - by his blatant tzitzit. The dead - he held - are unaware of the living. Later in the passage, however, we are told that Rabbi Yonatan retracted his original position, accepting the view that the dead could be cognizant of this world.

Rabbi Yonatan's initial approach may be the thrust of the colorful declaration of another sage: "Disparaging the deceased is akin to disparaging a stone," perhaps implying that the dead know nothing of our deeds, though possibly indicating that they merely do not care.

A middle position arises from an episode with the sons of Rabbi Hiyya, who traveled to their estates in distant villages. They stayed so long that they forgot the Torah they had studied and subsequently took pains to recall it.

Bemoaning their unfortunate plight, one brother turned to his sibling: "Does our deceased father, Rabbi Hiyya, know about our anguish?"

Despite having forgotten his learning, the other brother replied: "It is written 'His sons may attain honor and he - the deceased - will not know it' (Deuteronomy 17:6). No, our father is unaware of our distress."

The first brother countered: "Yet it is written 'But his flesh will pain him and his spirit will mourn for him' (Job 14:22) and sages have noted that the worm is as painful to the dead as a needle is to living flesh. The

dead, it seems, do sense the mortification of their bodies. Surely, our father must perceive our predicament."

The Talmud balances these texts: The deceased know of their own suffering, but are unaware of the pain of others. Further in the passage other exceptions are offered: Though the dead might not be fully informed of worldly goings-on, they may be updated by the recently deceased. Alternatively, Duma, the angel appointed over the souls of the departed, can announce to the deceased who will be joining them.

Thus, considering Rabbi Yonatan's retraction of his initial position, our passage seems to conclude that indeed the deceased are aware of at least certain worldly events.

Elsewhere, one of the commentators reaches the diametrically opposite conclusion on the basis of our passage (Tosafot, 12th-14th centuries, France-Germany): The dead know nothing of this earthly world. Considering a further passage, this commentator is willing to acknowledge one exception: The dead can be made aware of our troubles through prayer.

Alas, until our dying day we may never know the resolution to this conundrum. Yet the great rabbinic leader, legalist and suspected Sabbatean, Rabbi Yehonatan Eybeschuetz (18th century, central Europe), offers an appealing solution to the problem.

He begins by citing the classic talmudic maxim "These and those are the words of the living G-d" (B. Eiruvin 13b; B. Gittin 6b), referring to conflicting normative opinions and implying that even in an argument all positions reflect the Divine in some way. Building on this premise, Rabbi Eybeschuetz suggests that both opinions are true in that they are referring to two different kinds of people: Some of the deceased are aware of what is occurring in this world, while others are not.

Rabbi Eybeschuetz illustrates these two types: There are righteous people who live their lives caring for others, looking out for their neighbors and generally being interested in the public good and society around them. Such people continue after life to be aware of the physical world, as they were during their lifetime.

There are people, however righteous in private they may be, who distance themselves from others during their lifetime. Such people find no time to consider the plight of those around them, the welfare of others or be involved in communal ventures. In death, they continue to be unaware of their physical surrounds, as disconnected from this earthly world as they always were.

Rabbi Eybeschuetz tries to avoid any value judgment between these two personalities; both may be righteous people with altruistic goals. Their worldly demeanor, however, reverberates after their death.

As we go about our daily lives, it may be worth considering the proposition that our earthly conduct and

interaction with our environs may one day define our post-death existence. © 2006 Rabbi L Cooper. *Rabbi Levi Cooper teaches at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post and Up Front Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Sarah died in Kiryat Arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan. And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep upon her...” (Genesis 23:2)

What was Sarah doing in Hebron? Abraham, Sarah and Isaac had been living in Be'er Sheba, where the patriarch had made a treaty with Avimelekh King of the Philistines: "And Abraham planted an eishel tree in Be'er Sheba and he called out there in the name of the Eternal G-d of the world. And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for a long period" (21:33,34). The very next verse opens the following chapter with the story of the akedah (binding of Isaac), after which the Bible logically reports, "And Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Be'er Sheba. And Abraham dwelt in Be'er Sheba" (22:19). So what was Sarah doing in Hebron, to where Abraham had to travel in order to eulogize and bury her?

I believe it necessary to revisit the difficult incident of "the binding" (akedah) in order to understand. Rav Yosef Ibn Kaspi, the famed philosopher of the 14th century, maintains that the real message of the story is that our G-d - unlike Moloch, the bloodthirsty idol of the ancient world - does not countenance human sacrifices. From Ibn Kaspi's perspective, it is quite possible that Abraham's real test came with the second command of the angel, "Do not cast your hand against the lad and do not do anything at all to him:" perhaps the continuation of that verse is to be translated, "Now I know that you fear G-d because you did not remove (cause to be absent, to be taken away) your only son because of My (initial command - 22:12)." Abraham was way ahead of his times, but he could not help but be influenced in some way by his times. Perhaps he even expected that his new-found G-d would also exact the heavy price of his beloved son's life as a test of his faith and commitment!

It is even possible that the Sages of the Talmud are proposing just such an Abrahamic mind-set when they very boldly have G-d criticize Abraham's would-be sacrifice as having resulted from the Patriarch's misunderstanding (sic) of the initial Divine command. The Talmud (B.T. Taanit 4a) puts Abraham in the category of other misguided Biblical personalities who wrongly sacrificed their children: "(The prophet chides Israel for having acted in accordance with words which) 'I (G-d) have not commanded, I have not spoken, and

have not even entered My mind' - 'I have not commanded' applies to Meisha the king of Moab; 'I have not spoken' applies to Jephtha; 'have not even entered My mind' applies to Isaac, son of Abraham."

And is this not the interpretation of Rashi (ad loc) when he maintains that Abraham did not properly understand the Divine words: "I did not say 'slaughter him; I merely said 'bring him up and then bring him down...'?! The Hassidic Sfot Emet daringly suggests that the true meaning of the word Makom in the verse "It was on the third day (of their journey to Mt. Moriah for the binding) when Abraham lifted up his eyes and he saw the place (ha'makon) from afar" (22:4) is to be taken as G-d, as in our comfort greeting to a mourner (HaMakom menahem etchem...), and not as place. Abraham saw G-d from afar if he did not realize that our G-d could not possibly have commanded child sacrifice! And indeed, after this incident there is not one single direct conversation between G-d and Abraham recorded in the Bible - despite the fact that Abraham continues to live in his full strength for 38 more years!

Given all of this, imagine Mother Sarah awakening during this fateful night to the rustling and bustling noises of her husband and son preparing for departure on a journey. She's already suspicious, since Abraham had apparently neglected to inform her of what he understood to have been G-d's command. When she finally extracts from him the purpose of their nocturnal preparations, she must have pleaded, argued, remonstrated against the proposed mission. "How can you begin to believe that G-d would demand such a heinous act? Would the G-d who created every human being in His Divine Image expect you to destroy your own beloved son?" And then she might have even taken the offensive position, charging Abraham with always having sacrificed his son for what he perceived to have been the Divine charge, spending days and nights bringing idolaters closer to the Divine Presence and His teachings while neglecting the questions and needs of his own flesh and blood, the fruit of his loins. But all to no avail. Abraham walks out the door with Isaac.

Sarah must feel desperate. So she too set out on an early morning journey - but back to Hebron rather than Mt. Moriah. She must pray at the place where her ancestors Adam and Eve had been buried, in the Cave of the Couples; after all, they knew the pain of being left bereft of a beloved son in the bloom of his youth, Abel. Perhaps they would intercede with G-d for Isaac's life.

And perhaps she felt she had to return to Hebron, the place where she and Abraham had settled after their disappointing separation from Lot, when G-d promised them seed as numerous as the dust of the earth and where Abraham had established a Hurin thanksgiving for that promise. (Gen. 13:17,18); perhaps she felt she had to pray for Isaac's life in Hebron, where G-d entered into the Covenant between the Pieces with

Abraham, which guarantees progeny which will forge a nation (Gen. 15); and perhaps she felt she had to pray for Isaac's life in Hebron, where the three Divinely sent messengers had promised that in one year's time a male child, heir and guarantor of the Divine covenant, would be born to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18, with the oaks of Mamre being in Hebron, as we saw in 13:18). If Abraham hadn't argued with G-d, Sarah felt she must do so, at this fateful time and at the auspicious place of the Divine promise. The anxiety is apparently too great for Sarah to bear, and she dies in Hebron perhaps in the midst of her remonstrations with G-d. But in this instance as well, Sarah emerges as having had arrived at a deeper understanding of G-d's true will than had Abraham! © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah 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'lachim 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. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzchok" (Beraishis 25:5). Although he had 8 children, only Yitzchok was Avraham's spiritual heir. But it wasn't just his spiritual legacy that the others were excluded from, as Yitzchok inherited Avraham's physical belongings as well. Sara had previously sent Yishmael away (21:10), making sure that "the son of this maidservant will not inherit with my son, Yitzchok." Towards the end of his life, Avraham himself sent his other 6 children away, giving them "presents" (25:6).

What were these presents? The Talmud (Sanhedrin 91a) tells us that he gave them "shem tumah," lit. a "tamay" (spiritually unclean) name. The Talmud does not say "shaymos tumah" in the plural, even though the Torah says that Avraham gave them "presents," i.e. more than one present. Besides trying to understand this discrepancy, it seems strange that a person as holy as Avraham would give such unholy things to anyone, let alone to his sons.

Rashi on Chumash quotes the Talmud, without explaining what kind of "name" or "names" Avraham gave them. In his commentary on the Talmud, however, he explains it (them) to be "kishuf" (black magic) and "ma'aseh shaidim" (the activity of demons). This would explain how there were "presents" (plural), but not why the Talmud uses the singular word ("name") if there were really "names" (black magic and demons). We are also left wondering why Rashi doesn't just say "black magic and demons" or even "the activity of black magic and demons" (as some of the commentators paraphrase Rashi when they discuss his comments). Instead, he differentiates between the two by implying that Avraham gave over the ability to perform black magic and the nature of the activity of demons. Why the difference?

The Maharsha (on Rashi's comments on the Talmud) says that it is not difficult to say that Avraham taught them how to manipulate demons to do their bidding, but can't explain how, according to those that say that black magic is forbidden to all (even non-Jews, see Sanhedrin 59b-6a) he could teach them black magic. Let's try to understand why one is okay (even if not ideal, especially for the chosen nation), while the other might be problematic for anyone (even the other nations).

When one manipulates demons (by invoking the name of their demonic master), things that can normally be accomplished by humans are done for them by the demons. This particular human may be unable to do it, or it may be a superhuman feat. It can even be a "go fetch my slippers" situation where demons are used to get more things done at once or

out of laziness. But they are not things that go against G-d's laws of nature. The demons may be able to lift things that humans can't, but that is due to their strength (or strength in numbers), not because the law of gravity has been suspended.

Black magic, on the other hand, defies the very nature of things, thereby contradicting G-d's intent for the world. What was supposed to be a stick is now (or appears to be) a snake. This is a far more serious offense, and may therefore be prohibited for all (Jews and non-Jews).

Hakesav Vehakabalah takes a very different approach, saying that Avraham taught his sons which names were not names of G-d so that they would not worship a false deity inadvertently, thinking that it was really another way to refer to the Master of the Universe.

While explaining how Avraham could teach them names of "tumah," it doesn't address why the Talmud says it was a "name of tumah" rather than "names," or why it is considered more than one present (i.e. the ability to avoid idol worship). Additionally, saying that Avraham gave them presents implies that he gave them something positive, rather than teaching them how to avoid something negative.

Perhaps it can be suggested that Avraham did both (gave them something positive while helping them avoid something negative). He taught his sons "the activity of demons," i.e. the name of the head demon through which they could summon its underlings to do their bidding. It was one name (the head demon) that allowed them to do many things. At the same time, Avraham was afraid that they might go beyond using demons into the realm of black magic, so also taught them how to distinguish between the two in order to help them avoid it. Avraham therefore taught them how to take advantage of "the activity of demons" by teaching them the "name" of the demon master, and taught them about black magic to prevent them from confusing the two. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After Avraham pays Efron for the Machpelah Cave, we are told, "And the field belonging to Efron, in the area of Machpelah, in front of Mamrei, the field together with the cave in it, and all the trees in the field within the entire boundary, was affirmed as having been sold to Avraham, in front of the children of Chet, including those at the gates of his city." [Bereishit 23:17-18]. Then, the Torah adds, "Afterwards, Avraham buried his wife Sarah" [23:19]. At first glance, this should probably have been the end of the passage. However, instead the Torah continues, repeating what was already written. Sarah was buried "...in the cave of the Machpelah field, in front of Mamrei, which is

Chevron, in the land of Canaan. And the field and the cave within it were affirmed as belonging to Avraham as a gravesite from the people of Chet." [23:19-20]. This repetition is harder to understand in view of the fact that verse 19 gives more identifying signs of the site than what was given in 17-18. At first, we are only told, "in the area of the Machpelah, in front of Mamrei," but the later verse adds more detail, "in the cave of the Machpelah field, in front of Mamrei, which is Chevron, in the land of Canaan." If it was necessary to pinpoint the site so accurately, why wasn't this done in the first verse?

The answer is that evidently verses 17-18 are not part of the sequence of the story as it is being told. The verse before this tells us what Avraham did: "And Avraham listened to Efron, and he weighed out for Efron the money that he had talked about..." [23:16]. And then after a skip, we continue with Avraham's activities: "Afterwards, Avraham buried his wife" [23:19]. It is only in this later verse that we are given the details of the site of the cave, since this is the continuation of the description of the events.

As is well known, the usual practice in a sale of land involves a bill of sale, which serves as a proof of purchase. For example, this is the way Yirmiyahu describes the purchase of land from his cousin Chanamel: "And I wrote it in a book and signed, and I chose witnesses, and I weighed the silver in a scale. And I took the signed bill of sale..." [32:10-11]. It is reasonable to assume that Avraham also did not give the money without a written document. As the sages wrote, "He agreed with the sons of Yevus to buy the Machpelah Cave from them as a binding sale in gold and in writing, as an eternal gravesite" [Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 35].

Thus, perhaps verses 17-18, which break the sequence of the story, are simply a quote from the bill of sale of the Machpelah Cave, and this is the reason for the unique phrases-"...the field together with the cave in it, and all the trees in the field within the entire boundary..." On one hand, it gives details of the purchase-the field, the cave, the trees and the boundary-as is common in a bill of sale. On the other hand, there is no need to give geographical details-"...in the cave of the Machpelah field, in front of Mamrei, which is Chevron, in the land of Canaan"-since this information was well known to those who witnessed the document. And it also explains the repetition in the passage, because the Torah interrupts the sequence of the story in order to quote the bill of sale.

