

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd it was after the death of Avraham [that] G-d blessed his son Yitzchok” (Beraishis 25:11). If the point is that G-d blessed Yitzchok, then the fact that this blessing was given after his father’s death seems superfluous. Rashi brings two approaches to explain why the Torah mentions that this blessing took place after Avraham had died: The first, based on Sotah 14a, is that it wasn’t a blessing for success, but the blessing given upon comforting a mourner. Mentioning that it was “after the death of Avraham” clues us in that it was this blessing (nichum availim) that G-d made.

The second approach Rashi brings raises numerous questions. “Even though G-d gave over the ability to bless others to Avraham, he (Avraham) was afraid to bless Yitzchok, for he saw that Aisav will come from him. He said ‘let the owner of all blessings (i.e. G-d) come and bless the one whom He deems appropriate [to be blessed],’ and G-d came and blessed him (i.e. Yitzchok).” For one thing, did Avraham really have any doubt that Yitzchok was the one who would continue his mission? Who else could it have been? Did he have to wait to see whom G-d chose to bless to know that Yitzchok was the one worthy of the blessing, even if the wicked Aisav would come from him? Besides, Avraham himself had already indicated that Yitzchok was the one, as he gave him “everything he had” (25:5), including (as Rashi himself quotes) the legacy of the blessings! If he knew that Yitzchok was the one to get the ability to give blessings, how could he not have been the one to be blessed himself? Not only that, but after almost sacrificing Yitzchok, Avraham is told that “with blessings I (G-d) will bless you” (22:17), with (as Rashi points out) the double-expression of “blessing” meaning that both the father (Avraham) and the son (Yitzchok) will be blessed. So Avraham had already been told that G-d would bless Yitzchok. Why then was he afraid to bless him himself?

Another issue stemming from Rashi’s second approach is his possible source for it. There are numerous Midrashim that are very similar, but none that put it exactly the way Rashi does, and the differences are not insignificant.

The source closest to Rashi’s wording is the Midrash Tanchuma (Lech Lecha 4 or 5, depending on

the edition). After explaining how G-d had given over the ability to give blessings to Avraham, the Midrash tells us that he (Avraham) wanted to bless Yitzchok, but “saw that Aisav and Yaakov would come from him so did not bless him. Avraham said, ‘let the owner of the world come and bless whomever He wants.’” A parable is then given of someone hired to care for the king’s orchard. In this orchard is a life-giving tree that is intertwined with a poisonous tree, presenting a dilemma for this employee; if he waters the life-giving tree, he will automatically be watering the poisonous one. So he decides to leave it be and wait for the orchard’s owner to come and decide what he wants to do. “Similarly, Avraham said that he can’t bless Yitzchok since Aisav will come from him. Rather, [he said,] ‘I will leave it for the blessing’s owner (i.e. G-d) to do what He wants.’ After Avraham and Yitzchok were gone, G-d blessed Yaakov directly, as it says (35:9), ‘and G-d appeared to Yaakov again as he was coming from Padan Aram, and He blessed him.’”

Besides adding Yaakov’s name to the list of Yitzchok’s children (even though only Aisav caused the reluctance to bless), the resolution according to the Midrash Tanchuma was not that G-d waited until Avraham died and then blessed Yitzchok, but that He waited until both Avraham and Yitzchok died and then blessed Yaakov (thus avoiding Aisav completely). Obviously this Midrash is not addressing G-d’s blessing of Yitzchok in our verse, which is why Rashi couldn’t quote it completely. There are other Midrashim that use a similar approach to Avraham’s reluctance (e.g. Tanchuma Vezos Haberacha 9, where the parable is a vineyard rather than an orchard, and the fear of causing a blessing for Aisav is explained as being a problem because it will minimize the amount of blessing coming to Yaakov; and Pesikta d’Rav Kahana 1:12, where the parable is also a vineyard, and includes Avraham referencing his limited lifespan, after which the blessings will automatically go back to G-d to decide whom to bless), but if the reason for his reluctance is Aisav, then the resolution is always giving the blessing directly to Yaakov, thereby avoiding Aisav (by bypassing Yitzchok). Since Rashi is using Avraham’s reluctance to explain G-d’s blessing to Yitzchok, these Midrashim would seem to not be Rashi’s source.

There are other Midrashim (Beraishis Rabbah 61:6, Bamidbar Rabbah 11:2, Tanchuma Naso 9 or 17 and Midrash Tehillim 1:5) that do use G-d blessing

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Yitzchok as the resolution to Avraham's reluctance to do so himself. However, in all of these Midrashim Avraham's reluctance is not because of Aisav, but because of Yishmael. Avraham says he can't bless Yitzchok without blessing Yishmael (and Keturah's other children as well), so leaves it up to G-d, who, after Avraham's passing, blesses (only) Yitzchok.

These Midrashim would be a valid source to explain why G-d had to bless Yitzchok even though Avraham could have done it himself, but they apparently are not Rashi's source; Rashi doesn't mention Yishmael as the reason for Avraham's reluctance, only Aisav. So in addition to our earlier questions, we have one additional puzzle; why Rashi combined the ideas from very different Midrashim to explain our verse.

Targum Yonasan and the Midrash Hagadol add that Avraham's reluctance to bless Yitzchok without also blessing Yishmael was based on his fear that it would cause the latter to be jealous of, and start despising, the former. Apparently, had Avraham made it clear that his mission was going to be continued through Yitzchok's descendants, Yishmael would have thought that his descendants were unjustly overlooked. They would have considered Avraham's choice a poorly made one, and resented Yitzchok's children because of it. On the other hand, Avraham must have felt that if G-d Himself blessed Yitzchok, then they would more easily accept the decision, as G-d could not be mistaken. (Otherwise, how would delaying the "blessing" until G-d makes it have avoided the ill will that Avraham was afraid of.)

Avraham knew that Yitzchok was the one worthy of being blessed, and therefore gave him the ability to bless others. The only question was whether or not to bless Yitzchok directly, with Avraham deciding that it should be left to G-d. But changing who should give the blessing to Yitzchok (he or G-d) was only relevant in regard to his fear of Yishmael's resentment. Avraham had another fear as well; that blessing Yitzchok would cause some of the blessing that should eventually go to Yaakov to go to Aisav instead. So how could he bless Yitzchok?

Giving Yitzchok the ability to bless others doesn't mean that Aisav will be blessed, only that Avraham knew that Yitzchok was the one who would

continue his legacy. When G-d told him that He would bless Yitzchok, did He mean by blessing Yaakov, or by blessing Yitzchok directly? Surely the "owner of all blessings" could find a way to bless Yitzchok without having to bless Aisav too. A mere mortal, though, even one as wise and righteous as Avraham, would have a hard time doing that. It would be as impossible as watering a life-giving tree in a way that wouldn't nourish the poisonous tree that was attached to it. So what should he do? Bless Yitzchok despite the risk of automatically blessing Aisav, or deprive Yitzchok of his deserved blessing by having it go directly to Yaakov? Avraham was unsure, so left it up to G-d to decide.

When Rashi explains the possible meanings of G-d blessing Yitzchok after Avraham died, he doesn't want to (unnecessarily) limit it to the reluctance to snub Yishmael. Avraham's fear of blessing Aisav was also a factor, and although it didn't affect his knowing that Yitzchok was worthy of the blessing, it did impact his willingness to risk the possible adverse affects of blessing him. His dilemma was not whether to bless Yitzchok or Yishmael, but whether to bless Yitzchok or Yaakov, with Rashi explaining why he chose to bless neither. "He said 'let the owner of all blessings come and bless the one whom He deems appropriate [to be blessed],' i.e. either Yitzchok or Yaakov. "And G-d came and blessed [Yitzchok]." © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah portion begins: "And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years. These were the years of the life of Sarah." Why does the Torah, which does not waste words, add the seemingly repetitive verse, "These were the years of the life of Sarah"?

Rashi, the quintessential commentator, informs us that the message from the repetitive phrase is that all of the years of Sarah's life were equally good. How is it possible to say this about Sarah's life? For many years she was childless; she experienced famine and exile; she was taken captive by the Pharaoh of Egypt and later by Avimelech.

Rabbi Zushe of Anipoli explained that Sarah mastered the attribute of constantly saying, "This too is for the good." Even those events that others might consider to be bad, she was aware that they were from the Almighty and therefore she was able to evaluate them as positive.

The quality of one's life is not dependent on external situations. There are people whose lives seem to run quite smoothly. Nevertheless, they tend to evaluate minor frustrations as tragedies and therefore view their lives in negative terms. The Torah ideal is to be aware that the purpose of your life is to perfect your character. Every life situation is an opportunity for growth. Sarah mastered this level of consciousness.

Therefore, at the end of her life, which was constantly devoted to growth, it could be said about her that all her years were good.

This lesson is most important for us to internalize. See the growth possible in every life event. In each difficult situation ask yourself, "How can I become a better person because of what happened?"
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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan

"Speech by the slaves of the patriarchs is more beautiful than the teachings of the offspring" [Rashi, Bereishit 24:42]. When Avraham's slave searches for a wife for Yitzchak, he invents a simple test of her good traits. There are four entrances to Avraham's tent, an open invitation for any "riffraff" to come in for food, drink, and lodging. In order to be worthy of joining such a home the candidate must show a similar trait of kindness. The slave turns to her and requests "a small amount of water from your jug" [Bereishit 24:17]. The girl of his choice will do even better and offer water for the camels, with all the extra trouble involved. Presumably, the move from a simple request to a gift of huge proportions will demonstrate that the girl is worthy of belonging to Avraham's household.

However, in spite of the great kindness involved in this test, evidently this is not the main element of beauty in the speech given by Avraham's slave. While the test is in the realm of good traits in this world, it is not at all at the same level as the "teachings of the offspring." The test demonstrates a very high level of human action, but it is not related at all to the Torah or to being close to G-d.

If we will sharpen our powers of discrimination, we will be able to sense a completely different process that is taking place. Note first of all that throughout this incident the slave makes no direct contact at all with his surroundings. At first he turns to the Almighty and prays to Him. He goes into the details of his request, how the young girl must respond to him so that he can be sure that she is the correct prospective bride. He turns to her in a courteous manner, but as soon as he sees that she fits in with the conditions that he established a sharp change takes place. As a man who grew up in a house full of kindness and charity, we might have expected him to react with good manners and thank her sincerely for her efforts. He should at least have told her who he was, and that she had just passed a very important test.

But the slave does not relate to her at all. He turns to G-d and thanks Him? "And the man bowed down to G-d" [Breishit 24:26]. It is almost as if the girl is invisible as far as he is concerned. She does not seem

to be relevant at all. The same thing happens when the slave is brought to her house to meet all her relatives. As soon as his request is approved, when the people say, "This is G-d's doing" [24:50], the slave no longer pays any attention to her. Once again he gives his thanks to G-d: "And he bowed down on the ground, to G-d" [24:52].

The conclusion is that the beauty of the speech of the slave is the fact that the Almighty appears in the simplest and most straightforward way as he proceeds along his path. For him, there is no duality in the material world. There are no internal and external factors. It is eminently clear to him that whatever happens in the world is nothing more nor less than kindness by the Almighty, who is being revealed in the home of Avraham. "There is no other like Him."

RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG

Weekly Thoughts

As a child I remember reading the *Hobbit*, by J R R Tolkien, (also author of 'Lord of the Rings'). In the book, the following riddle is posed to the lead character, Bilbo Baggins:

This thing all things devours:
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
Gnaws iron, bites steel;
Grinds hard stones to meal;
Slays king, ruins town,
And beats high mountain down.

Poor Bilbo sat in the dark thinking of all the horrible names of all the giants and ogres he had ever heard told of in tales, but not one of them had done all these things. He had a feeling that the answer was quite different and that he ought to know it, but he could not think of it. He began to get frightened, and that is bad for thinking. His tongue seemed to stick in his mouth; he wanted to shout out, "Give me more time! Give me more time!" but all that came out with a sudden squeal was, "Time! Time!"

Bilbo was saved by pure luck. For that of course was the answer.

Time is such a precious commodity. At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, following the death of Sarah, we are told that she lived for "one hundred years, twenty years and seven years." The repetition of the word years tells us that every moment of her life was complete - in terms of good deeds - she did not waste a moment, using every opportunity to its fullest.

A Rabbi once asked somebody what time the morning Shacharit service started. "Oh, 9:10 or 9:15am", was the reply. "Which is it?" the Rabbi asked. "What difference does it make?" "You can accomplish a lot in five minutes." We find a similar concept regarding Abraham, whom the Torah tells us was "old and come along in days". When Abraham aged, he did not merely pass through the days of his life; he accumulated them.

Each day was fully utilized, so that they were fully possessed by him.

Time is so precious. The noted sage, the Chofetz Chaim, who lived in the last century, was said to have told his students that he became a Talmid Chacham (learned scholar) in five minutes. How? All those five minutes' here and there - if utilized correctly they add up to a lot.

Like Sarah and Abraham, may we all use and cherish each and every minute of every day to the fullest. I think I have taken up enough of your time! Use it wisely! © 2003 Rabbi M. Wollenberg shabbatshalom@mail.com

THE AISHDAS SOCIETY

Shabbat Shalom

by Rabbi Micha Berger

It is interesting to note that Judaism's holiest sites were not conquered but bought. This week's parashah opens with Avraham purchasing the Ma'aras Hamachpeilah and the fields around it. Later, Yaakov buys the city of Shechem from Canaanite princes, the sons of Chamor (Breishis 33:19). Similarly, Shmuel II concludes with David Hamelech purchasing the Temple Mount in Jerusalem from Aravnah the Jebusite.

R. Aharon Soloveitchik (Logic of the Mind, Logic of the Heart) calls this kind of acquisition "chazakah", holding. It comes from Hashem's commandment to Adam "to guard the garden and keep it". (Breishis 2:13) This is the gift of reaching unto things through cultivation, work and dedication.

The other kind of acquisition R. Aharon calls "kibbush", grasping. This kind of activity comes from Hashem's other imperative to Adam, "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and kivshuhah—subdue it". (Breishis 1:28)

In approaching Bnei Cheis, Avraham describes himself as "ger vitoshav anochi imachem—I am a stranger and a resident amongst you". Avraham lived in two worlds, in the spiritual as well as the physical. He was amongst the Bnei Cheis, but also apart from them. This gave Avraham two tools: chazakah and kibbush.

The Western World is based on "might makes right", "the hand of Eisav", "kochi viotzem yadi asa li es hachayil hazeh - my might, and the strength of my hand won me this battle"—the spirit of kibbush. Avraham didn't feel the need to enforce his will with power, it was okay for him to be a ger.

Without kibbush society would not progress. We would have no new science or engineering, no new territory, evil would not be vanquished. But kibbush must have limits. While Hashem did command "vikivshuhah", He certainly wanted man to rise above the level of warring tribesmen.

R. Aharon finds in this distinction the source of the gender differences in halachah. Males have a

tendency toward uncontrolled kibbush, while women are more focused on chazakah. This places women on a higher spiritual plane than men. When a woman says "she'asani kirtzono—for He has made me according to His Will", it is implied that men are further from that Will than she is. The reason for the extra mitzvos and extra ritual placed on males is to reign in that uncontrolled kibbush.

R. Chaim Soloveitchik holds that there is a distinct difference between the sanctity of Eretz Yisroel that came with the first commonwealth and that of the second.

The first Temple did not create a permanent kedushah (holiness). The reason given is "that which was acquired through conquering is lost through conquering. The First Commonwealth built on land acquired in the wars of the days of Yehoshua and the Shoftim (Judges), was itself conquered.

The Second Commonwealth was merely an immigration of a group of Jews who decided to live in the land as Jews. It is predicated on the mitzvos done there, the education of children raised there. That kind of sanctity can not be undone. "Kidshah lisha'atah vikidshah liasid lavo - it was sanctified for its time, and sanctified for all time to come". Even today, Har Habayis (the Temple Mount) has the sanctity of the Temple.

R. Aharon understands his grandfather's words in the light of this distinction. The first commonwealth was founded on kibbush. It therefore had an inherently inferior kedushah. The second commonwealth was built by chazakah. When Hashem tells Zecharia, "Not by force and not by might but by My spirit", He is saying that the second Temple should be built on chazakah, not kibbush, to lead to a permanent sanctification.

R. Yoseph Ber Soloveitchik zt"l, explained the meaning of kinyan, acquisition, in a speech given to the student body of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in the Spring of 1985. He noted that the root /quph-nun-hei/ means to manufacture. This is because originally people owned what they made, the animals they raised, the plants they planted. The need for people to acquire things they were not personally able to make, lead to trading, barter, and eventually money. To purchase things is called "liknos", from the same /quph-nun-hei/ root, because money is just a surrogate for manufacturing things yourself.

What this means is that once something is acquired by purchase you have also acquired its entire history. The person who sold it to you has effectively declared that "all I have done to increase its value was as a surrogate for you doing it yourself".

Using R. Yoseph Ber's insight we can extend R. Aharon's concept of chazakah to things acquired by commerce as well. To buy something is to exchange a token of the chazakah you have put into something else, and trade it for chazakah on this object.

By combining these ideas, we understand why Chevron, Har Habayis and Shechem were bought. Buying is a means of chazakah. It is inherently holier than if our claim were based on military victory.

The same idea can be used to understand why the Gemara in Kesuvos (2a) asserts that the form of marriage is identical to that of a kinyan. This idea is proven from a gezeirah shavah (a comparison of terms) between the phrase "ki yikach ish ishah—when a man takes a woman" (Devarim 22:13), and Avraham's offer to Efron "nasati keseph hasadeh, kach mimeni—I have placed money for the field, take it from me" (23:13). In both cases the expression of "kichah—taking" is used.

The halachah is not teaching that women are ch"v bought and sold like chattel. In the case of Chevron, Avraham was acquiring the entire field—from the beginning of time until the end. By making marriage assume the same form as a kinyan we are acknowledging that the bride and groom were literally made for each other, and hopefully will remain together until the end of time. By using the form of chazakah, the marriage, Kiddushin, is on a higher plane.

In Avos 4:1, Ben Zomah says "Who is a gibor, a warrior, one who is koveish his yeitzer, his inclination [toward evil]". This is a proper use of kibbush, to vanquish evil, to change it into a tool for serving Hashem. It is interesting to note that the one who uses kibbush is called a "gibor".

We find the term gibor in a prophecy about the messianic age. "How much longer will you stray, backslidden daughter, and remain hidden and withdrawn? For Hashem has created something new on the earth, nekeivah tisoveiv gever—woman shall encircle man." (Yirmiah 31:20-22)

At the end of history, the Jewish people, the fallen daughter, the ger vitoshav, will return to Hashem. The principle missing in this galus, the balance of kibbush and chazakah, will be restored. Nekeivah tisoveiv gever, from gibor. As man realizes that he is a spiritual being, the nekeivah, the feminine side, chazakah, will be restored to supremacy. © 1996 Rabbi M. Berger and The AishDas Society

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Abraham rose from beside his dead and spoke to the Hittites saying, 'I am a resident stranger among you, sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial.' And the children of Het replied, 'Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead.'” (Genesis 23:3-61) After chronicling the death of Sarah, this week's Tora portion, Chayei Sarah, records Abraham's lengthy and involved negotiations to acquire a burial site for his wife. Bowing before the Hittites,

Abraham goes on to explain that if they really want to help him bury his dead, they should ask Ephron to agree to sell the double cave at the edge of his field.

Ephron, however, repeats what the others have said. He doesn't want to sell. "I have already given you the field. I have given you the cave that is there ... Bury your dead." [Genesis 23:11]. But again Abraham is reluctant. He bows before Ephron, beseeching him to sell the land. He wants no gifts, he wants to pay. Finally a price is mentioned, 400 silver shekels, comparable to \$50,000 in modern exchange an exorbitant sum for a burial plot.

Abraham's behaviour is inexplicable. We wonder why he goes through so much trouble to buy Sarah's burial site. Why doesn't he take the gift being offered? Her lifeless body in a shroud, Abraham must be distraught and broken, which makes it all the more perplexing why he refuses their offer and goes through the demeaning and humiliating experience of beseeching, bowing down, and begging the Hittites to sell him what is basically a worthless piece of land, not very arable and therefore not worth very much to them, this double cave at the edge of the field. Would it not make more sense to thank the Hittites for their kindness and get on with the burial?

Even more, why should the purchase of a burial plot, a subject that people rarely discuss, receive such an extraordinary amount of attention in the Tora?

Perhaps we can better understand the significance of this episode by turning to Abraham's own poignant description of himself as a "resident-stranger," which at first glance sounds paradoxical. Abraham had managed to be at the same time a resident, living in Canaan together with all the Hittites, yet a stranger, belonging to a different faith community with its own destiny.

But the Hittites wanted this "mighty prince" to become a part of their culture completely, and what they had failed to do until now, my late teacher and colleague, Rabbi Moshe Besden, explains, they now believed could be achieved by bringing him in through the back door, so to speak, the door of death.

Since time immemorial, the one inalienable right a citizen had in any given locality was the right to a grave, which is how people knew their remains would be eternally linked to the land in which they were buried. Both Jacob and Joseph die in Egypt but their remains are brought back to Israel.

This phenomenon was not unique to biblical figures. In Pritchard's [Ancient Near Eastern Texts](#), for example, we read of an Egyptian traveler making a last request for his body to be returned to the land he was born in so that he would be buried in his own soil. One wanders the entire earth, but the earth one is buried in connects one to a particular eternity. In Hebrew, the words *vayesaf el amav* or "he died," literally means "he was gathered to his nation," [Gen. 25:17].

Thus when Sarah dies, accepting the offer of a free plot would have brought her into the Hittite nation because she was being buried in Hittite earth and not Jewish soil. Through his wife's new link to the Hittites, Abraham also would become less a stranger-resident and more of a permanent-resident. In death, Abraham and Sarah would be swallowed up, and therefore his insistence on purchasing a plot of land guarantees that these two nations, one already in existence and the other in the seed of an idea, shall not mingle, even in death. Sarah not only has the honour of being the first matriarch, but she becomes the first presence in the first Jewish cemetery in the world.

Until now Abraham had been an exemplary guest in their land. Not only rich but righteous, not only a person of noble character but gracious, wise, generous, and though the Hittites may be insulted by his refusal to bury his dead in the land they offer, Abraham holds his ground. We can respect and like each other, we can support each other's civil rights, but let's never forget our fundamental differences.

And so his insistence on paying this sum of money at a time when he should not have had to personally deal with "funeral parlours" only serves to dramatize to what extent this purchase is actually the refusal to assimilate, a total rejection of the Hittite way of life.

Some 25 years ago, at the funeral of my great-uncle, I was standing outside the gates of a cemetery in Brooklyn. As a Kohen, I am forbidden to enter the cemetery, and as I remained at the gates I saw an older woman leaning on the hands of a Roman Catholic priest as she stumbled around in shock, asking everyone where she could find a rabbi.

Her husband was dying of cancer, she explained, and his last request was to be buried as a Jew although he had converted to Catholicism 45 years earlier when they were about to marry. Faithfully attending church every Sunday all these years, they had even been blessed with a son who had chosen to become a priest and she pointed to the man she was leaning on.

"Does this mean that our whole 45 years together was a lie," she cried out, utterly confused, "that my husband is still a Jew?"

How could I console her when I heard the echo of a universal truth in her husband's request? Despite the torment and soul-searching he must have gone through considering his son's priestly collar and his own life, he still wanted to be "gathered unto his people," and return to "Jewish" earth. Perhaps for 45 years he was a resident stranger within his own house, but in the end he tried to redeem the most significant part of his being.

One of the greatest challenges facing modern Israel is finding our unique identity. At times it might seem easier to accept the gifts from the "Hittite" nations

who seem to want nothing better than for us to become like them. When it comes to burial plots, they'll give it to us for free. Gripped by memories of near genocide and surrounded by many who would not be very upset if we simply disappeared, modern Israel history can be seen as the evolution of a nation in constant struggle and search for its identity, borrowing from many cultures but often frightened and overwhelmed by its own. What Abraham taught his descendants is the moral message of not to be taken in by appearances. Today's gift can bury us tomorrow. We must proudly insist on our own unique culture and identity, not only in death but especially in life. © 1989 Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Years 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 Machpelah in Chevron - 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 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 pre-requisite - 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 especially appreciate having had the opportunity to grow along with our congregation and with the students at our new Rabbinical School. 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 Chevron. And no wonder our nations sacrifice for Chevron makes many feel that Chevron is ours, not only legally but psychologically. ©2000 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.

STEVEN TOPLAN

Avraham's Final Test

*(based on a shiur by Rabbi M. Wruble)**

Chaya Sarah marks the end of "Avraham's Story." Although the 10 trials ended with Akeidas Yitzchak, we can learn a very important lesson from one of his final challenges - the death of Sarah. The 10 trials were trials of his emunah - faith. The tests of his midah of chasidus, however, was never as specific as his tests of emunah. His midah of chasidus was never a question. Avraham was always known as a gomel chesed, therefore no specific tests were required. But, just as Akeidas Yitzchak was Avraham's ultimate test of emunah, the ensuing events were probably the ultimate test of his chasidus.

Interestingly enough, Vayera ends with Yitzchak being elevated like a korban, and Chaya Sarah begins announcing Sarah's death. Rashi specifically indicates that her death was the direct result of the Akeida. Upon hearing the news of Yitzchak's near sacrifice, "...her soul left her and she died." (Rashi, Berashis 23:2).

Could you imagine Avraham's feelings as he approaches home? Avraham was probably almost bursting with joy and exhilaration. He probably couldn't wait to tell Sarah all about the spectacular events that just took place - Yitzchak's elevation, Hashem's conversation with him, the ram miraculously appearing, etc. But, what does he find? His wife for almost 100 years has died...

A few years ago, my grandfather almost 90 years old, was about to have angeoplasty surgery. The night before the surgery, I made a special trip from Baltimore to Philadelphia to see him and possibly say my last "good-bye." For a young person, this surgery has a low risk level, but when you perform this surgery on a 90 year old man, the risk to his life is great. Can his frail arteries handle the delicate procedure? The same surgery that could give him life could also be the cause of his death. One wrong move, and his delicate arteries would burst.

As I was about to leave and return to Baltimore, I saw my grandmother, a young 85, crying as she held her husband's hand. They had been married for over 60 years at this point. This too may very well be their last words to each other. At least they could say good-bye...

Avraham and Sarah never had the opportunity my grandparents had. They didn't have a last good-bye, a last hug or even a last "I love you." Imagine the emotions running through him! Sadness? Anger? Imagine the tears running from his eyes!

No sooner does he find out about Sarah's death (Ber. 23:2) does the chumash tell us that Avraham goes to buy Maras HaMachapla (Ber. 23:3). Not once do we even see a hint (in the text or through the mefarshim) of ANY emotional breakdowns. He is calm, cool and collected. He handles the negotiations with Efron with tremendous clarity and control. This was probably the ultimate test of Avraham's midah of chesed. Avraham was in a situation that anyone would have understood if he wasn't "himself." Despite all of the personal troubles, despite how he could have rationalized abnormal behavior, he still treated everyone with a smile and with kavod - respect. This is truly a lesson of a lifetime.

Chazal tell us that the reason for the destruction of the first Bait HaMikdash was Avodah Zara - Mitzvot bain Adam L'Makom (Commandments between man and Hashem). That golus lasted only 70 years. Chazal go on to tell us the reasons for the destruction of the second Bait HaMikdash were Mitzvot bain Adam L'Chaveiro (Commandments between man and his fellow man). That golus is still going on. Avraham was tested on both grounds - his faith and his personal ethics. He passed both tests with flying colors. **In memory of Sima bat Shmuel Zev, o"n, my other grandmother.*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha represents the constant human drama of death and renewal, of grieving over what has been irretrievably lost and soldiering on to make life productive and meaningful. To Avraham the husband, Sarah is irreplaceable. He remarries and has many children from that union but he is constantly

reminded of G-d's statement that only through Yitzchak, the son of Sarah, is he guaranteed continuity of his ideas and values and immortality.

Sarah will live on only through Yitzchak, and Avraham realizes that his future is also dependent solely on Sarah's immortality. Perhaps that is why the parsha is entitled Chayei Sarah - the life of Sarah - when the parsha deals apparently only with the death of Sarah. For it is the life, so to speak, of Sarah after her death, that she still lives on through her son Yitzchak that is the centerpiece of the parsha.

There is a basic human drive within all of us that reflects itself in our wanting to be remembered after we are no longer alive on this earth. I saw once the most poignant tombstone inscription I ever read over the grave of a young woman who died in her twenties. It simply stated: "Please don't forget me."

Avraham weeps and grieves and eulogizes his beloved Sarah. But he cannot guarantee her memory will be part of the Jewish experience. Only Yitzchak can do that and that is why the bulk of the parsha then describes the effort to find for a proper mate for Yitzchak that will validate Sarah's heritage and values. Avraham's true eulogy for Sarah lies in helping Yitzchak reestablish Sarah's tent and life mission.

Rashi points out the well-known Midrash that when Rivkah entered the tent of Sarah, all of the spiritual greatness that was present in Sarah's tent and disappeared at the time of her death reappeared with the entry of Rivkah into Yitzchak's life.

Sarah is truly irreplaceable but her continuity is assured because of Yitzchak and Rivkah. No human being is truly replaceable but no human being is indispensable to the continuity of G-d's mission and work on this earth. The next generation is always charged with building upon the legacy that it received from previous generations. Its task is not only that it should create a society that will remember it but that that society will also remember all of the previous generations that preceded it.

Yitzchak and Rivkah will be remembered eternally only if through them Avraham and Sarah are also remembered and preserved. This concept is undoubtedly the source of the Ashkenazic custom of naming new born children after their deceased ancestors. The new baby is immediately challenged to represent and remember, so to speak, the past generation that has departed.

The parsha describes for us the life of Yitzchak but it is entitled Chayei Sarah, the life of Sarah, for only in Yitzchak's life does Sarah truly live on. Thus every Jewish home that carries forth the traditions of Jewish life and values is transformed into the tent of our eternal mother Sarah. © 2008 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI ZEV S. ITZKOWITZ

A Byte of Torah

“[E]liezer] said, I am Abraham's slave.” (Genesis 24:34) How did Rebecca's family react to the news that Eliezer was merely Abraham's slave? They fell down in shock: If Abraham's slave is like this, surely Abraham himself is much more so (Midrash)! In other words, Eliezer, in his appearance and mannerisms reflected the qualities of his master, Abraham.

We tend to think that we act in a vacuum - if our actions don't affect anybody else, they're alright; whatever we say or do only reflects upon ourselves, and nobody else. However, we all are part of communities and interact with other people. Our behavior reflects back upon the community we belong to, for good or, G-d forbid, for bad. May we strive to act in such a way that we bring honor to Hashem, ourselves & our communities. © 1995 Rabbi Z. Itzkowitz

YITZ WEISS

Focus on the Positive

“T hese were the days of the life of Sarah: one hundred years and twenty years and seven years....” On this verse Rashi comments, “all were equal in goodness.”

My uncle, Rabbi Aaron Boxer, once related a question he'd heard about Rashi's statement. How is it possible to say that all the years of Sarah's life were 'for good?' In her life she had many significant challenges: she had difficulty conceiving, she had stress with Yishmael, Yitzchak was nearly sacrificed, etc. Does that represent a life in which every year can be called "all equal in goodness?"

He answered that according to Sarah, who understood everything in her life to be part of a divine plan, everything was *always* for the best. In that light, she saw only the good in everything.

I loved the answer, but I'd like to suggest a corollary. Perhaps Sarah recognized each significant challenge as such, but regardless she *chose* to view each facet of her life in a positive light. Confident in the knowledge that everything G-d does is for the best, she made a conscious effort to focus only on the positive.

Given the financial and political climate of our times, this is a lesson we can all take to heart. No matter the challenges we face, we always have the power to find and focus on the positive.

