

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Yitzchok brought her (Rivka) into the tent Sara his mother (sic), and he took (i.e. married) Rivka and she became his wife” (Beraishis 24:67). A literal translation doesn't flow, but numerous commentators (see Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Radak and Chizkuni) tell us that it is normal for the Torah to speak in short form, with a more accurate translation being "into the tent [of] his mother Sara." Unkolis understands the "missing word(s)" differently, translating the verse as "and Yitzchok brought her into the tent, and he saw [that] she acted properly, the way his mother Sara did, and he married Rivka." Rashi follows Unkolis' translation, adding, based on Beraishis Rabba (60:16), the specific things that Yitzchok saw that reminded him of his mother: "there was a candle burning from Erev Shabbos to Erev Shabbos, and a blessing was present in the dough, and the cloud [of G-d's glory] was attached to the top of the tent."

The Midrash that would seem to be Rashi's source, though, lists more than three similarities between Sara's actions and Rivka's. "All the days that Sara was alive, the cloud was attached above the doorway of her tent; since she died, that cloud left, and since Rivka came that cloud returned. All the days that Sara was alive, the doors were opened wide (for guests); since Sara died, that wideness stopped, and since Rivka came that wideness returned. And all the days that Sara was alive, there was a blessing sent in the dough; since Sara died, that blessing stopped, [and] since Rivka came it returned. All the days that Sara was alive, the candle(s) would burn from the night of Shabbos and until the night of Shabbos; since she died, that candle stopped, and since Rivka came it returned. And since he (Yitzchok) saw her, that she did what his mother had done, she cut her challah in purity and cut her dough in purity, immediately 'and Yitzchok brought her into the tent.'" Why did Rashi list only three of the similarities between Sara and Rivka? (There are other differences as well, such as Rashi reversing the order of the things he listed, and his indicating that Yitzchok saw these things after he brought Rivka into the tent while the Midrash says that he brought her in after seeing these things. For now, though, we will focus on Rashi shortening the list.)

Chizkuni and Maharal tell us that the three things Rashi listed correspond to the three mitzvos of taking Challah (a portion of the dough separated for a kohain), lighting (Shabbos) candles, and keeping the laws of family purity. (Interestingly, even though their lists are not in the same order as each other, neither is in the same order as the corresponding actions listed by Rashi.) It is rather obvious how the lit candle(s) correspond to lighting Shabbos candles, and how taking Challah brings a blessing to the rest of the dough. The Chizkuni, who lists keeping family purity first, after listing all three mitzvos explains that the cloud is similar to the laws of family purity in that they both "stop and then return." The Maharal explains the connection for all three, with the cloud corresponding to the laws of family purity because the divine presence only rests where there is holiness and purity. Although he explains which concepts the four things listed in the Midrash correspond to, the Maharal suggests that Rashi may have limited his commentary to these three because of the mitzvos they correspond to. I'm not sure why the "doors being wide open" wouldn't correspond to the mitzvah of having guests, unless the Maharal means specifically mitzvos that are more relevant for women than men (see Shabbos 2:6). Bartenura says explicitly that Rashi referenced these three mitzvos for this reason, as does the Tzaidah Laderech.

[The laws of family purity being kept by Rivka does not necessarily mean that she was not likely to be only three when they got married (see Rashi on 25:20; also see Tosfos on Yevamos 61b, d"h Vechain, where an age of 14 is suggested); Several Tosafists (including Rokayach, Pa'anayach Raza and R' Chayim Paltiyel), based on a Midrash (see Torah Shelaimah 24:237), say that when Rivka fell off the camel (24:64) she was injured and started to bleed.]

The Levush says that it makes sense for Rashi to list only these three mitzvos and to leave out having guests, since Rashi only uses Midrashim to explain "peshat" (the straight-forward meaning of the verse), while the Midrash is working in the realm of "derash," where the verse is expounded upon to learn additional things. Since the verse mentions the "tent of Sara" before telling us that Yitzchok married Rivka, it must be referring to things that Yitzchok saw in Rivka even before they got married. She wasn't able to serve guests with Yitzchok's items until after she was his wife, so Rashi couldn't include the doors being wide open. This could explain Rashi's order as well; when Rivka

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first entered the tent she lit candles, her next step would be to make food (for the family), and then she would go to the mikvah before they got married. The Midrash, on the other hand, might be listing Rivka's qualities in order of their importance (or reverse importance). It could also explain why it goes back to Rivka "cutting the dough in purity," which would be included in the dough being blessed, after mentioning the four qualities, as this was the only thing Yitzchok saw before she even entered the tent. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z"l, suggests that the reason Rashi omitted the fourth similarity is because Eliezer had already told Yitzchok how outstanding Rivka was at taking care of guests (see Rashi on 24:66), so he didn't need to see her "in Sara's tent" to know about this aspect.

[I found it interesting that the "wide open door policy" which was a staple of Avraham and Sara's tents disappeared after Sara died. Granted, Avraham was shorthanded, having lost his wife and then sending his main servant on a mission to find a wife for Yitzchok. Did Avraham refrain from waiting on guests because he no longer had a partner to serve the females while he served the males (see Rashi on 12:5)? If this was the case, it provides an interesting context to Yitzchok bringing Hagar/Keturah back to remarry Avraham (see Rashi on 24:62), as now Avraham would have a female who was very familiar with the way Avraham and Sara treated their guests to host the women.]

These commentators all assumed that the Midrash listed four similarities between Sara and Rivka, and therefore addressed why Rashi omitted the fourth one. The Yeday Moshe and the Eitz Yosef (commentaries on Midrash Rabbah) both reference the same source, and say that the Midrash actually lists five similarities. They count "cutting the Challah" (done when a piece of dough was cut from the larger mass of dough for Challah) and "cutting the dough" (when a piece of dough was cut off from the larger mass to be made into a loaf of bread) as a fifth "similarity" (and not mentioned only because it was the reason the dough was blessed). They learn out that there were five similarities from the extra "Hay" of the word "ha'ohelah" ("to the tent"), which has the numerical value of five. If the Midrash is "darshening" the five similarities based on the letter "Hay," we can easily understand why Rashi avoids this "derasha" in his explanation of the verse's wording. Once Rashi is not tied down to five similarities,

it makes sense that he would pick the three aspects that apply more to women, and were only evident when she "entered the tent."

It is also possible that Rashi only chose things that indicated that Rivka's righteousness received divine approval. Keeping the doors wide open and cutting the dough in purity are certainly praiseworthy, but were done by Rivka without Yitzchok possibly knowing how pure her motives were. The candles remaining lit from week to week, a blessing being found in the dough (either by it fermenting faster than the norm or by producing more bread than expected), and the divine presence being back (the cloud) all indicated that G-d acknowledged how righteous Rivka was. Therefore, Rashi tells us that after seeing these three things (which Rashi knew occurred from the Midrash), Yitzchok married Rivka. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In the long chapter of Genesis 24, we read of how Abraham instructed his servant to travel to Aram-Naharaim, where the rest of his family was located, to choose and bring back a wife for Isaac, his son. It is an extraordinary passage. Isaac takes no part in the process. We do not read that his father consulted him; that he gave his consent to the arrangement; or that his views entered into the episode in any way. All we read, when Abraham's servant returned with Rebecca, is that:

"Isaac conducted her into the tent and took her as his wife. So she became his wife, and he loved her and was consoled for the death of his mother" (24:67).

It is yet another detail in the general picture we have of Isaac as a figure in the shadow of Abraham, who does what his father does rather than strike out in any new direction of his own.

Esau and Jacob are different. They choose their own marriage partners. Yet once again there is an emphasis on parental wishes. Of Esau we read: "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. This was a source of bitter grief to Isaac and Rebecca" (26:34-35).

Jacob, by contrast, "obeyed his father and mother" by going to Paddan Aram to find a wife from his mother's family (28:7).

The question that arises from these episodes—especially that of Isaac—is to what extent they are normative. Do they constitute a precedent? Does a parent have a right, in Judaism, to determine who their children will marry? May a child choose a marriage partner against the wishes of a parent? In the case of conflict, whose view do we follow?

The issue arose in the Middle Ages. We must remember that we are talking about an era in which parental authority, as well as respect for age and tradition, were far stronger than they are now. Normally

it was expected that a child would act in accordance with the will of his or her parents.

Indeed, as late as 1680, Sir Robert Filmer (in his Patriarcha) argued for the divine right of kings on the basis of the absolute authority-even the power of life and death-of parents over children, and did so on the basis of biblical texts.

Strikingly, though, the halakhists did not follow this line. Writing in the thirteenth century, Rabbi Shlomo ibn Adret (Rashba) argued that getting married is a positive command, and parental wishes may not override the fulfilment of a command by a child, since the wishes of G-d take precedence over those of human beings.

In addition, the Talmud states that "Forty days before a child is formed, a heavenly voice declares: the daughter of X to the son of Y." Marriages are made in heaven, and presumably the child is in a better position than his parents to recognise his soul-mate.

As for Isaac, Rashba's explanation is simple. Isaac was a "perfect offering", a child of special sanctity, who (unlike Abraham and Jacob, both of whom travelled to Egypt) was not allowed to leave the land of Israel. Had this is not been so, says Rashba, he would certainly have undertaken the journey himself to choose a wife (Rashba, Teshuvot ha-meyuchasot le-Ramban, 272).

R. Joseph Colon (Maharik, 1420-1480), considering the same issue, refers to a responsum of Rabbenu Asher in which the author rules that a son is not bound to obey his father if he tells him not to speak to X with whom the father has a dispute. The command to love your neighbour overrides the command to obey your parents. Since the love of husband and wife is a supreme example of love-of-neighbour, it too takes priority over a parent's wishes.

There is a further consideration. Children are bound to revere and honour their parents and do them service, specifically in matters that concern their welfare. It does not extend open-endedly to deferring to their wishes in matters relating not to them but to others, including the child itself.

Elaborating on this position, Rabbi Elijah Capsali gave the following ruling in a case where a father forbid his son to marry the woman whom "his soul desired": "Though the command of filial honour and reverence is inexpressibly great... nonetheless it appears in my humble opinion that if the girl about whom you ask is a proper wife for the aforementioned Reuben-that is, there is in her or in her family no blemish-then the command of filial honour and reverence is irrelevant, and the son is not to abandon her so as to fulfil his father's command.

"For it is nearly certain that this father virtually commands his son to violate the Torah... for we see (in the Talmud) that a man ought not to marry a woman who does not please him. So that when the father commands his son not to marry this woman, it is as

though he commands him to violate the Torah; and it is well known that the son is not to obey his father in such cases...

"Now, if we were to decide that the son is obliged to obey his parents and marry, though his heart is not in the match, we would cause the growth of hatred and strife in the home, which is not the way of our holy Torah- most certainly in this case, where he loves her. Indeed, we can cite in this situation: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song of Songs 8:7). Were he to marry another whom he does not desire, his entire life would be painful and bitter.

"Moreover we may also argue that the Torah obliges the son to filial honour and reverence only in matters that affect the parents' physical well-being and support... but in matters that do not affect the parent in these areas, we may say that the Torah does not oblige us to be obedient. Therefore, the son is not obliged by the rules of reverence and honour to accept his father's command in the matter of marriage." (See Gerald Blidstein, Honour thy Father and Mother, pp 85-94)

On the basis of these responsa, R. Moses Isserles rules (Rema, Yoreh Deah 240:25): "If the father objects to his son's marriage to the woman of his choice, the son is not obliged to listen to his father."

What we see from all these sources is that Jewish law-despite its immense emphasis on honouring parents-also insists that parents make space for their children to make their own decisions in matters affecting their personal happiness. The rabbis extended to parents nothing like the absolute authority attributed to them by figures like Sir Robert Filmer. Abraham did not command his servant to find a wife for Isaac because he believed he had the right to make the choice, but because he knew that Isaac was not allowed to leave the land and make the journey himself. There is great wisdom in this approach. The Jewish family is not authoritarian. It is based, rather, on mutual respect-the child's respect for those who have brought them into the world, and the parents' respect for the right of an adult child to make his or her own choices free of excessive parental interference. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI HERSHEL SCHACHTER

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The avos were commanded to live in Eretz Yisroel. Today we also have this mitzvah, and therefore one may only leave Eretz Yisroel when the conditions there are unreasonable. If one simply can not make a living in Eretz Yisroel, and will have to live off of charity, and in chutz la'aretz he will be able to make a living, there is no mitzvah of yishuv Eretz Yisroel, because that is an unreasonable situation.

Likewise the Talmud says that one who wants to learn Torah in a specific yeshiva in chutz la'aretz, and

will not be happy at any of the yeshivas in Eretz Yisroel, or one who fell in love with a girl from chutz la'aretz and will be broken hearted if we insist that he may not leave Eretz Yisroel, may leave for the sake of lilmud Torah or lisa isha, because the alternative is simply unreasonable.

In this week's parsha we read that Avraham Avinu sent Eliezer to chuta la'aretz to arrange a shidduch for Yitzchok. Avraham emphasized to Eliezer that under no circumstances may he allow Yitzchok to leave Eretz Yisroel. Why couldn't Yitzchok leave Eretz Yisroel? Isn't it the case that for the purpose of a shidduch one is permitted to leave Eretz Yisroel?

The explanation for this is given by Rashi in next week's sedra. Yitzchok always followed in the footsteps of his father Avraham-maintaining the masorah. The Torah tells us that he dug the exact same wells that Avraham had dug and called them by exactly the same names that Avraham had. So its no surprise that when there was a famine during the lifetime of Yitzchok, he prepared himself to go down to Egypt-just as his father Avraham had done years earlier. On his way to Egypt, Hashem appears to him in Gerar and tells him he may not go to Egypt. On the occasion of akeidas Yitzchok, Yitzchok was consecrated as a korban, and if a korban is taken outside of its "designated location" it becomes pasul. During the times of the Beis Hamikdash, the designated location for kodshei kodoshim was the azara, while the designated location for kodshim kalim was all of Yerushalayim. In the days of the avos, the azara and Yerushalayim had not been consecrated, so the designated location for all korbaos was Eretz Yisroel. Although at the time of a famine Avraham Avinu was permitted to leave Eretz Yisroel, Yitzchok, a consecrated korban, was not.

It is interesting to note that this halacha (that a korban will become pasul if it's removed from its designated location) only takes affect after shechita, which constitutes the first avodah done to the sacrifice. On the occasion of the akeida, no avodos were actually done to Yitzchok. But nonetheless, since the ram which was offered in place of Yitzchok was slaughtered, that shechita was considered as if it had been done to Yitzchok himself. Yitzchok Avinu had the halachic status of a korban on which avodos were done.

Even the avodah of haktara which was performed on the ram was considered as if it had been done to Yitzchok. Towards the end of the tochacha in parshas Behar the Torah states that Hashem will remember the covenant that He entered into with Yaakov; as well as His covenant with Yitzchok; and He will also remember His covenant with Avraham. Rashi on that pasuk quotes from the tana'im in the Sifra that the verb "to remember" only appears in connection with Yaakov and Avraham, but not in connection with Yitzchok. The reason for this is that one only has to use his memory to recall someone (or something) who is

not in front of him. The avodas hahaktara that was done to the limbs of the ram was considered as having been done to Yitzchok, and Yitzchok's ashes are piled up on the mizbeach right before Hashem. Therefore there is no need to remember him.

Avraham Avinu did not misunderstand his instructions regarding the akeida. He was to consecrate his son Yitzchok as a korban olah. Under normal circumstances the avodos of any olah must be done to that particular korban, and here the malach indicated to Avraham that the avodos done to the ram will be considered as if they had been done to Yitzchok. Yitzchok was not only considered as a korban upon whom the first avodah (of shechita) had already been performed, but even the final avodah (of haktara) done to the ram was also halachically carried over to Yitzchok. © 2009 Rabbi H. Schachter & TorahWeb Foundation

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 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 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 (sharp analysis) 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. © 2009 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Death is not only tragic for those intimately affected it also always poses problems of succession and reorganization of the family, company or institution. Avraham and Sarah, the founders of the Jewish nation pass from the scene in this week's parsha. They are succeeded by Yitzchak and Rivka and in fact the majority of the parsha concerns itself with how Yitzchak marries Rivka and they establish their new home together.

In personality, temperament and action Yitzchak and Rivka differ markedly from Avraham and Sarah. Whereas Avraham and Sarah devoted themselves to reaching as many outsiders as they could and were actively engaged in spreading the idea of monotheism in the surrounding society, Yitzchak and Rivka seem to take a more conservative approach. They attempted to consolidate what they accomplished and to build a family nation rather than to try to attract more strangers to their cause.

As we will see in next week's parsha the struggle of Yitzchak and Rivka is an internal family struggle as how to raise Eisav and Yaakov and guarantee the continuity of the ideas and beliefs of Avraham and Sarah through their biological offspring. Eventually it is only through Yaakov that Avraham and Sarah continue and become the blessing that the Lord promised that they would be. The world struggle that engaged Avraham and Sarah becomes a struggle within Avraham and Sarah's family itself.

It becomes abundantly clear that the main struggle of the Jewish people will be to consolidate itself and thus influence the general world by osmosis, so to speak. The time of Avraham and Sarah has passed and new times require different responses to the challenges of being a blessing to all of humankind.

There are those in the Jewish world who are committed to "fixing the world" at the expense of Jewish traditional life and Torah law. Yet the simple truth is that for the Jewish people to be effective in influencing the general society for good there must be a strong and committed Jewish people. King Solomon in Shir Hashirim warns us that "I have watched the vineyards of others but I have neglected guarding my own vineyard."

The attempted destruction and deligitimization of the Jewish people or the State of Israel, G-d forbid, in order to further fuzzy, do-good, universal humanistic ideas is a self-destructive viewpoint of the purpose of Judaism. Without Jews there is no Judaism and without Judaism there is no true moral conscience left in the world. Therefore it seems evident to me that the primary imperative of Jews today is to strengthen and support Jewish family life, Jewish Torah education and the state of Israel.

We are in the generations of Yitzchak and Rivka and therefore we have to husband our resources and build ourselves first. We have as yet not made good the population losses of the holocaust seventy years ago! If there will be a strong and numerous Jewish people then the age of Avraham and Sarah will reemerge. The tasks of consolidation of Jewish life as represented by the lives of Yitzchak and Rivka should be the hallmark of our generation as well. © 2009 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

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Sarah died in Kiryat Arba which is Hebron in the Land of Canaan. And Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep over her” (Gen 23:2)

When the dramatic events of the Akeda were over, Abraham and Isaac made their way home together to Be'er Sheva. So it's surprising that at the beginning of this week's reading, we find Abraham traveling to Hebron to bury his wife there. What was she doing in Hebron? And why did Abraham have to make a special journey to arrange her burial and "to eulogize and weep over her." Weren't they together when she died?

In order to understand Sarah's whereabouts, and the relationship between our first patriarch and matriarch, we must first recall that Sarah's prophetic powers were greater than those of Abraham. When

Sarah sees Ishmael the son of Hagar mocking her son Isaac, she tells Abraham to banish his first born son with his mother - Hagar, "since the son of this handmaiden will not inherit together with my son, with Isaac", Abraham is deeply troubled by this demand - but G-d assures him that it is the right thing to do - "Let it not be grievous in your eyes... Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her voice." (Gen 21:10-12). Rashi is sensitive to the Bible's hint that Sarah's abilities as a prophetess were superior to Abraham's not only in this instance, but at all times. So Rashi cites the Midrash Rabbah, "we learn from here that Abraham was second to Sarah in prophetic power."

Although Abraham outlived Sarah by 38 years and remained vigorous enough to remarry and father six more sons (Gen 25:1-6), he clearly missed Sarah's prophetic abilities and her support. From the moment that Abraham lovingly buries his wife, the Bible does not record a single instance in which G-d spoke to him and none of his actions are judged significant enough for the commentators to note that "the deeds of the forbears presage the activities of their descendants." Indeed, from this time on, we hear little more of Abraham except for his search to find a suitable wife for Isaac. Here too, Abraham who once rose early in the morning to perform the Akeda now leaves most of the work to his steward Eliezer, deferring to his judgment in this crucial matter. It seems that, in no small measure Abraham was the Rav because Sarah was the rebbitzen and without her he was sorely lacking.

From this perspective, we can reexamine the dramatic events of the akedah. Abraham gets up early in the morning to accompany his son Isaac, and the two house-lads Eliezer and Yishmael to Mount Moriah. The Bible tells us that they carried, firewood, and a slaughtering knife as well as supplies that they must have needed for the long trek to Mount Moriah. It's hard to imagine that they left the house with all these provisions without Sarah knowing or suspecting anything. Perhaps a discussion took place between husband and wife. "Where are you going?" Sarah would have asked. "To do G-d's bidding," he might have answered. "What did G-d ask you to do?" she would have queried. And when Abraham explained that he was off to perform a sacrifice without even bringing a lamb with him, Sarah would probably have wanted to know why he was leaving the house with his precious son but no other object worthy of sacrifice. "Where is the lamb?" she might have asked, with a trembling, terrified tremor in her voice.

As Abraham repeats to his wife, G-d's command; "Take now your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and bring him up there as a dedication (olah) on one of the mountains which I shall show you" (Gen 22:2). Sarah would have been beside herself; "You don't need the slaughtering knife," she may have cried. "You are misinterpreting G-d's words. The Almighty G-d, who taught us that 'one who sheds

innocent blood shall have his blood spilled, since the human being was created in the Divine image,' (Genesis 8:6) The Lord of Creation who told Cain that 'his brother's blood is crying out from beneath the ground' (Genesis 3:10), could not possibly have intended you, his beloved Abraham, to slaughter our innocent and pure Isaac whom G-d gave us and who he promised would be your successor; 'through Isaac shall be designated your special seed' (Genesis 21:12). I, too, am a prophetess, and I tell you that you are misinterpreting G-d's command."

Abraham refuses to listen. After all, he heard G-d's words, and olah - although built upon a verb which means to ascend and to dedicate - in actual practice means "a whole burnt offering." Abraham has no choice but to disregard his wife's pleas and leave the house with Isaac, the firewood, and the slaughtering knife - hearing Sarah's muffled sobs as he closes the door.

In fact, Sarah the greater prophet was correct. G-d purposely conveyed His command in a way which was open to different interpretations because our Bible is an eternal Divine document. The willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son would be profoundly relevant to subsequent generations who witnessed their own children slaughtered on account of their Jewish faith. These future martyrs would draw great inspiration from the figures of Abraham and Isaac as symbols of total devotion; ensigns and banners of Jewish willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for G-d, for Torah, for Israel. But such martyrdom is not the ab initio desire of our compassionate G-d. "You shall live by the Torah not die by it" (BT Yoma 85b), even if it may be necessary for us to do so in extreme situations.

The Sages of the Tamud (B.T. Taanit 4a) corroborate the interpretation I took the liberty of placing in Sarah's mouth in order to explain the dramatic turn of events. As Abraham stands over his son with the knife poised to sacrifice him and the angel orders Abraham to stay his hand and not to harm the boy at all; the rabbis interpret a verse in the book of Jeremiah (19:5) regarding human sacrifices: "I did not command them, I did not speak of them, they did not enter My mind;" 'I did not command them' - refers to the sacrifice of the son of Mesha, king of Moab; 'I did not speak of them' - that was the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter; 'They did not enter My mind' - that was the sacrifice of Isaac, son of Abraham."

It is on this basis that Rashi comments on the word "And lift him up" (Gen 22:2): "(G-d) did not say 'slaughter him,' because the Holy One blessed be He did not want Isaac to be slaughtered; He merely said 'lift him up,' upon the mountain to make of him a dedication, and once he (Isaac) agreed to be dedicated (in life), He (G-d) said that he was to be brought down" (Bereshit Rabbah 56,8). And indeed from then on the Midrash refers to Isaac as a "pure dedication-olah temimah."

If I may continue my fanciful interpretation," I would suggest that once Sarah recognized that she was unable to convince her husband, her only recourse was to attempt to convince the Almighty to intervene and prevent a tragic killing. She leaves her home in Be'er Sheva and goes to pray in Hebron, at the Cave of the Couples where Adam and Eve, the first two human beings were buried. They knew the pain of losing a child, they would understand a mother's tears and they might intercede before G-d. Sarah also understood the profound significance of Hebron as the setting of the "Covenant between the Pieces" where G-d promised Abraham eternal progeny, and the place where G-d had sent his messengers to tell Abraham that he and she would miraculously have a son "through whom his special seed would be designated."

Sarah prayed until her heart gave out. She died in Hebron, but Isaac and the Jewish future lived on. So Abraham came to Hebron to bury, eulogize and weep over his beloved wife, understanding that her intuition was correct and her prophetic qualities were greater than his. Abraham and Sarah could leave the world knowing that Isaac would live on and the destiny of Israel had been secured forever. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

If old people could live their lives over again, would they do things any differently? Would they once again expend so much time and energy on building castles and mansions in which to pass the fleeting moments of their brief sojourn on this earth? Or would they instead turn away from material pursuits and focus on the great treasures of the spirit?

Most likely not.

When the Torah, in this week's portion, sums up Sarah's life, we are told, "And the days of Sarah's life were one hundred years and twenty years and seven years, these were the years of Sarah's life." What is the meaning of the repeated phrase "these were the years of Sarah's life"?

According to the Midrash, the Torah is telling us that all Sarah's years were equal in their goodness. She did not awaken to righteousness in her ripe old age. She was good from the very beginning, and remained good consistently throughout her whole life.

This is considered extraordinary praise for Sarah, a very uncommon achievement. Most people, however, are not like that. They spend their youth in an oblivious daze, often without even a passing thought about their inevitable mortality. Why is this so? Why do people behave as if they are going to live forever?

The commentators explain that it is a simple matter of denial. Coming to terms with the reality of all our existence, that life is but a poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no

more, would require making some hard and difficult choices. It would require a reduction in material indulgence and a heightened awareness of the spiritual side of life. But our desire for physical pleasure is too strong to be denied, and therefore, we refuse to think about our ultimate responsibility and accountability. We refuse to acknowledge the inevitable end of all journeys until it is staring us in the face. But by then, we have missed the best opportunities of our lives.

Sarah's greatness lay in the clarity of vision that led her to cherish every year of her life as if it were her last.

A young man was living an aimless life in a sleepy seaside town, whiling away the hours with all sorts of frivolous activities. It happened once that a great sage arrived in the town for a short stay. One day, the young man saw the sage walking with his disciples.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "Can I ask you a quick question?"

The sage peered at him for a few moments, taking his measure.

"Ask your question, young man," he said

"Could you tell me the meaning of life?" asked the young man.

"Life, my young friend, is like a postcard," the sage replied. "Did you ever notice that the edges of the postcard are always crammed with text while the beginning has a lot of space. At first, people do not realize how limited they are in space, but when they get near the end they suddenly try to cram everything in. Just as a postcard is limited in space, life is limited in time. Unfortunately, young people like you have a tendency to waste it."

In our own lives, we often stop and ask ourselves where the years have gone. We are so busy getting settled and established that we do not have the time to really live. Worse yet, when we do have a little spare time, we lack the emotional and spiritual stamina to spend it in a way that will bear long term rewards. Instead, we indulge ourselves with physical pleasures that vanish by tomorrow, leaving nothing of value behind. But let us stop and reflect for a moment. None of us will live forever. So what will be the sum total of our lives when it is time to go? The decisions we make now will determine the answer. Material pleasures and indulgences will not appear on that bottom line, only the accomplishments of the spirit. © 2009 *Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Chaye Sarah records two major transactions, which begs us to wonder about their connection. The Parsha starts with Avraham insisting on paying for his plot of land in which to bury his wife. After much negotiating, Efron agrees to accept payment for the plot. The Parsha then goes into even

greater detail describing the efforts of Avraham's servant in finding a suitable wife for Yitzchak, his son. What's the connection, other than then technically both being "transactions"?

One possibility is that the dialog of the first transaction could be the requisite to the completion of the second! In other words, Avraham had to understand and negotiate a FAIR transaction where both sides benefit before he could find a wife for his son. This requirement says a lot about what it takes to find a suitable mate: Give! If you find yourself taking more than you're giving in a given relationship, you need to insist on adjusting it! If any marriage is to work, the first ingredient is mutual respect, which breeds mutual giving. It is this fact that Avraham mastered before venturing to find his son a wife, and it's this lesson that we should master before venturing to find our own mates. © 2009 Rabbi S. Ressler & torah.org

RABBI DANIEL TRAVIS

Integrity

“Please go ahead of me, my lord. I will lead my group slowly...” (Bereshith 33:14)

Yaakov said this as a sign of respect to show that he was concerned that he should not waste Esav's time because of his family's slow pace. (Seforno on Bereshith 33:14) One must be extremely careful not to waste other people's time, a precious and irreplaceable commodity. There are occasions when it is theft to waste someone else's time, such as an employee whose time belongs to his boss. In other settings it is not considered stealing to infringe on someone else's time, however it is included under the Torah injunction, "You shall not cheat your friend." (Vayikra 25:17)

A prevalent example of this is "butting" ahead of someone else in line. The halachah recognizes the right of someone to maintain his position in line, and by going in front of him or asking someone else on line to take care of something for you, you are infringing on that right. If however, the person has some extenuating circumstance, e.g. he is an ill or elderly person, or he will incur a large loss of money because of the wait, it is proper to let him go to the front of the line, although one is not obligated to do so. (Meiri on Sanhedrin 32b)

Similarly, it is permitted to ask someone else to take care of an errand before that person gets in line. Since there is no set rule about how long each person is allotted, he is not considered to have infringed on anyone's rights. However even this has its limits, and one should not take up an unreasonable amount of time. It is unfair for other people in the line to have to wait while one person takes care of the needs of numerous people. (Mishpatei HaTorah 1:84)

Countless opportunities arise each day in which people can show that they value their friend's time. If a person makes an appointment with someone else, it is

a true sign of concern for them to show up at the scheduled time. The Chazon Ish once disbanded a minyan when he heard that it would cause one of the members of the minyan to be late for an appointment. (Brought in MiDevar Sheker Tirchak 143.) Another common situation is returning an item to its proper place, especially when it concerns books of Torah in a Beith Medrash. (Kriana D'Igrassa 2:59) The principle to remember in every situation is that if it would bother you to have to spend your time in such a way, you should not expect others to have to do so. (Pithchei Choshen 9:13:30) © 2009 Rabbi D. Travis & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And (Avraham) spoke to Efron in the ears of the people of the land, saying, 'If you will only listen to me, I want to give the money for the land; take it from me and I will bury my dead there.'"

Rashi tells us that Avraham said to Efron, "The money is completely ready for you. I wish that I had already given it to you!" Why was Avraham so anxious to give the money to Efron?

The Torah contrasts Avraham's attitude towards money with Efron's. Efron had a strong desire for money and was very exacting to get a high price for his land even though he spoke of his generosity. Avraham, on the other hand, was eager to pay his debt before it was actually due. He did not want to keep money that was not his even for a very short while. Therefore, he said, "I wish I had already given it."

There are some people who keep procrastinating when it comes to paying back debts or paying for an item they have bought. They are basically honest and would never think of cheating anyone. However, they find it extremely difficult to part with their money. Therefore, they keep pushing off returning money that is due to others. Learn from Avraham to feel pleasure and joy of fulfilling the mitzvah of paying off a debt! Based on *Growth Through Torah* by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

