

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The death of a parent at any stage of life and at any age is a tragic and traumatic experience. I find that the grief is more profound for the surviving spouse than even for the surviving children. Children somehow find a way to move on with their lives. They factored in the inevitability of the death of a parent into their subconscious and thus usually were and are able to deal with their loss. Not so with the surviving spouse who never imagined being left alone and bereft especially in old age.

Abraham remarries Hagar/Keturah and even fathers children from her. But his concern and fatherly love is concentrated on his son Yitzchak, the son of his beloved Sarah. Through Yitzchak, Sarah is still alive and present in the life of Abraham. Abraham's concern regarding his son's being unmarried is somehow reinforced by the continuing subconscious presence of Sarah in his life.

The rabbis teach us that when Rebecca arrived at the home of Abraham and Isaac, the "presence" of Sarah returned with her. Her candles became lit again, her bread was once again blessed in her home and her spirit of holiness and G-dliness hovered once more in the tent of Abraham and Isaac. Rebecca was Sarah incarnate.

People say that men, so to speak, always seek to marry their mother. Rebecca becomes Sarah to both her husband Yitzchak and her father-in-law Abraham. This is one of the more amazing insights that this week's parsha offers for our consideration and education.

All of this is implicit in Abraham's instructions to his trusted servant and agent Eliezer. He tells him to find a wife for Yitzchak but she needs be descended from Sarah's family. Eliezer is not to take a woman from other genetic stock to be considered for marriage to Yitzchak. There are many explanations to these instructions given to Eliezer. But certainly the simple explanation and obvious insight is that Abraham is committed to find another Sarah through whom the Jewish people will be built and preserved.

Eliezer is apparently unaware of this insight, so he concocts an elaborate scheme as to which woman he will choose to bring back as a wife for Yitzchak. He is not looking for Sarah as much as he is placing his

mission in the hands of G-d to send him the proper woman. The Lord complies, so to speak, but it appears that Eliezer is never conscious that he is really looking for a Sarah.

That is why, according to Midrash, Eliezer harbors within himself hope that perhaps his own daughter, who is not Sarah by any stretch of the imagination, could be a potential bride for Yitzchak. It is the Lord, so to speak, that is in on the secret of Abraham's wishes and provides Yitzchak with a wife who brings him solace and closure after the death of his mother.

She is able to do so because of her uncanny G-dly ability to be Sarah in a spiritual and emotional sense. Perhaps this is why the parsha begins "these are the lives (plural) of Sarah" for Sarah lives on through Rebecca and through all Jewish women throughout the ages who emulate her and live by her value system and way of life. © 2010 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

“And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother. He married Rebecca, she became his wife, he loved her, and so Isaac was comforted after his mother" (Genesis 24:67). The Biblical portion of Chayei Sarah features two main stories: the burial of Sarah (Chapter 23) and the search for a wife for Isaac (Chapter 24). What connects these stories? Furthermore, two of the Torah portions which deal with death - this portion and the portion describing the death of Jacob - have names which express "life": Chayei Sarah and Vayechi. Why is this?

The simplest explanation is that the motif which unites both parts of our portion is the ideal of chessed - lovingkindness. Our sages have taught that "care for the dead is the truest form of lovingkindness, since it is given without any expectation of repayment" (Rashi to Genesis 47:29), and Abraham spares neither effort nor funds to acquire a burial plot for his beloved wife. Chessed also plays a central role in the selection of a wife for Isaac - the heir to the covenantal patrimony: Eliezer, entrusted with this delicate mission by his master Abraham, stands by a well and stipulates that

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the young woman who draws water for him and also offers to draw water for his camels will be the one designated by G-d for Isaac (Genesis 24: 12-14). Hence it is chessed which must direct an individual from marriage to grave.

I believe there is an even deeper meaning which informs both stories, and which also requires, and expresses, chessed. The Midrash connects the name Rivkah (Rebecca/"rvkh") with "hakever"("hkvr" - literally, "the grave"), which is Rivkah spelled backwards. And if the reader finds the link between this name and that word a bit startling, I would remind you that throughout the Tractate Nidda, the word kever (grave) is used as a synonym for womb (rehem)! What is the connection between "grave" and "womb," which seem to relate to opposite life experiences?

As soon as the search for a wife for Isaac is concluded, the Bible records: "And Isaac brought her [Rebecca] into the tent of Sarah his mother, and so Isaac was comforted after his mother" (Gen. 24:67). Rashi cites a famous midrash, "'And he brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother,' and behold she became the image of Sarah his mother, that is to say she became Sarah his mother: for as long as Sarah was alive, a light remained burning from Sabbath eve to Sabbath eve, a blessing was to be found in the dough, and the Divine cloud remained attached over the tent; once Sarah died, all these ceased, and when Rebecca arrived, they all returned" (Bereishit Raba 60: 16).

The three "gifts" initially brought by Sarah and continued by Rebecca express the three commandments specifically directed to married women: the commandment to kindle the Sabbath lights (an illumination which speaks of familial peace), the commandment of challa (which the matriarchs extended to mean an "open house" of hospitality) and the commandment of nidda and mikve (which leads to family purity and stability). Each of these expresses the lovingkindness of giving of oneself to others, to one's family and to one's spouse. And of course the merging of the personalities of Sarah and Rebecca expresses the continuity of generations, the Jewish ideal of children maintaining the values and lifestyle of their forebears.

In a profound sense, the future is predicated upon the past; it is the "graves" of our ancestors which inspire the lives of their progeny, and grandchildren who

bear the names and ideals of their forebears. Now we can understand why these Biblical portions which seem to be dealing with death are actually announcing continued life into a glorious future of redemption. G-d promised Abraham that through him all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3); however, the blessing will only be fulfilled through the progeny who have been influenced by his teachings and deeds.

As Abraham's tent was blessed through Sarah, Isaac's tent was blessed through Rebecca. And so Jacob/Israel summons his children to his deathbed so that he may reveal "what will befall them in the end of days" (Gen. 49:1). Although he doesn't specifically prophesy, he does bless and define his sons, each of whom is to develop into a tribe. He also singles out Judah, from whom the scepter of majesty shall not depart until the period of redemptive peace, when Israel will become the gathering place for all nations (Gen. 49:10). This is the meaning of our praise in the Amida prayer to the G-d "who performs acts of lovingkindness, the possessor of everything, who remembers the lovingkindness of the ancestors, and brings redemption to the children of their children for the sake of His Name with love." © 2010 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'lochim 1:36) The Sages question the need for a blessing at this point. It suggests that B'nayahu was uncertain of the mission's worthiness in Hashem's eyes. They question, "Didn't Hashem promise Dovid from the outset that Shlomo would be the next king?" Now that this prophecy was in the midst of fulfillment what could possibly affect it? They answer that although Hashem's original promise was but moments away from fulfillment many impediments would present themselves prior to its actual realization. (Breishis Rabba 76:2)

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

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

True, Hashem's plan called for Shlomo to reign but it required human involvement to bring it to fruition. When the appropriate moment arrived Dovid Hamelech was expected to do everything within his power to secure Shlomo's reign. Any delay of Dovid Hamelech could have caused him to forfeit Hashem's promise. Similarly, B'nayahu and the Sanhedrin were required to execute the king's order as soon as possible. Any delay in their process could give rise to unknown impediments

and render their mission quite difficult to fulfill. B'nayahu, the head of Sanhedrin understood this well and consequently expressed his sincere plea to Hashem. He asked that it should be Hashem's will that Dovid's loyal servants faithfully respond to their call thereby securing their efforts with success. (see Path of the Just ch. 7)

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

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

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

We learn from this the importance of capitalizing on our mitzva opportunities. They may often represent special privileges Hashem is granting us. However, such privileges are prone to opposition and impediments and we must therefore do all we can to

secure their realization. As we have seen, the working formula for this is to immediately engage ourselves into action and pray to Hashem. After these we can hope that Hashem will respond favorably and bring His intended plans to fruition. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Rashi (Beraishis 23:2), based on numerous Midrashim, tells us that Sara's death is connected to the Akaidah, when Avraham almost offered their son, Yitzchok, as a sacrifice: "For through being informed about the Akaidah, that her son had been arranged to be slaughtered and he almost wasn't slaughtered, her soul flew out of her and she died." Rashi's main point is that Sara's death occurred as a result of being told what had happened, or almost happened, to her beloved only son. However, the wording Rashi uses has led to much discussion (and speculation) as to what Rashi meant, and which aspect of what happened (or almost happened) caused Sara's soul to leave her. Most of this discussion centers around Rashi saying that Sara heard that he "almost wasn't slaughtered" rather than that he "was almost slaughtered." How could Rashi say that Sara heard that he "almost wasn't slaughtered," which has the connotation that in the end he was slaughtered, if Avraham was told not to follow through and Yitzchok survived?

It would be fair to suggest that any commentary on Rashi that doesn't comment on his wording didn't find it peculiar, and understands the Hebrew words "u'ch'mat shelo nishchat" as "was almost slaughtered." Maysiach Ilmim says that even though the literal translation is "almost wasn't slaughtered," Rashi preferred stretching the literal meaning because it would be inappropriate to say the word "was slaughtered," even if it was preceded by the word "almost." (I'm not sure why preceding the word "slaughtered" with "was not" is okay if using "almost" before it isn't. Perhaps moving the word "was" next to "not" rather than being next to "slaughtered," thus avoiding the expression "was slaughtered," makes a difference.) Although there are several possibilities given as to why Sara's soul left her if she knew that Yitzchok had survived the ordeal, most understand it in a rather straightforward manner; hearing what had almost happened, and what Yitzchok must have gone through before he eventually wasn't slaughtered, was too much for her to take.

Of those that try to explain the peculiar wording of "was almost not slaughtered," the most widely quoted approach is that of the Maharai (a later Tosafist, author of "T'rumas HaDeshen"). He suggests that whomever was telling Sara what had happened was about to tell her how it ended, but she died before he was able to. The "almost" doesn't refer to Yitzchok not being

slaughtered, but to Sara being told that things worked out in the end, i.e. "he almost told her that Yitzchok wasn't slaughtered, but before he did, her soul left her." This works well with the way the situation is described in Pirkay D'Rebbe Eliezer (32), as it was Satan who was telling her what had happened (and he purposely delayed telling her how it ended to make it more dramatic and heart-wrenching). However, Vayikra Rabbah (20:2) is among the Midrashic sources that say that it was Yitzchok himself who told his mother what had happened; if Yitzchok was there telling her what happened, Sara must have known that he survived the ordeal! The same is true of the Midrashim (i.e. Tanchuma, Vayera 23) that say it was Satan disguising himself as Yitzchok; if Sara thought it was Yitzchok, she couldn't have died because she never heard how the story ended.

There are some Midrashim (e.g. Pirkay D'Rebbe Eliezer 31) that say that by the time the angel told Avraham not to slaughter his son, it was too late, and Yitzchok had already died. His soul was then returned to him, so he did survive, but saying that he was slaughtered would be accurate as well. Some sources say blood was spilled by Avraham's knife (without killing him), and some that say Yitzchok's soul left him out of fear, but even if it wasn't the knife that caused Yitzchok to (temporarily) die, since his death was the direct result of Avraham raising his knife to slaughter him, it could be said that Yitzchok was "slaughtered." Rashi could be alluding to this part of the story; upon hearing that even though the angel tried to stop Avraham from slaughtering Yitzchok, and he "almost wasn't slaughtered," in the end he was "slaughtered" (and then resurrected).

Rabbi Sh'lomo Kluger z"l (Imray Shefer) discusses what upset Sara so much that her soul left her. He explains, based on Rambam's Introduction to the Mishna, that there is a difference between a promise made directly by G-d and one that was made through a prophet. Unless accompanied by an oath, the fulfillment of a promise is contingent upon it still being deserved at the time of its fulfillment. However, if the promise was relayed through a prophet, because it not being fulfilled could (mistakenly) be attributed to the prophet being a false prophet (rather than to the promise no longer being deserved), any promise made through a prophet is always fulfilled. Therefore, Avraham was able to reconcile G-d asking him to sacrifice Yitzchok with His promise that the Chosen People would come from Yitzchok; Avraham had heard this promise directly from G-d, and perhaps he had sinned and no longer deserved its fulfillment. On the other hand, Sara had heard this promise from Avraham. From her perspective, it couldn't be rescinded, and upon hearing that Yitzchok would have been slaughtered if the angel hadn't intervened, she couldn't reconcile it with G-d's promise to her through Avraham.

Since this promise was made to both Avraham and Sara, Rabbi Kluger's approach would seem to have a major flaw. If being made to Sara through Avraham made the promise irreversible, the fact that from Avraham's perspective it came directly from G-d is irrelevant. Rabbi Kluger tries to address (or sidestep) this issue by pointing out that the promise was much more important to Sara than to Avraham, as Avraham had other sons through whom the Chosen People could be descended whereas Sara did not. Nevertheless, it would be impossible for Yitzchok to both survive because of how the promise was presented to Sara and be slaughtered because it was said directly to Avraham. It is possible that Avraham realized that the promise couldn't be rescinded since Sara heard it through him, and (part of) the test for him was to follow G-d's commandment even though it could not be reconciled with the promise (which is the way some understand the test). Either way, attributing Sara's death to her inability to reconcile G-d's commandment with His promise means that she failed the same test that Avraham passed, a suggestion I am quite uncomfortable with without a major source for it. (It could be suggested that after learning that Yitzchok would have been slaughtered had the angel not stopped Avraham, a doubt entered her mind about the accuracy of Avraham's prophecy, and this notion, or the notion that she had a momentary doubt about Avraham's prophecy, was what upset her so. However, this might also be unfair speculation without having a source for it.)

What is possible, though, is Rabbi Kluger's suggestion that Sara thought Avraham might have slaughtered Yitzchok had the angel not stopped him. One of the reasons given for G-d testing Avraham, despite knowing the outcome beforehand, is so that others will know what a high level Avraham was on. Among the "others" who would "now know" Avraham's great loyalty to G-d were the angels, who (until then) didn't understand why G-d thought Avraham was even greater than they were (see Sefornu on 12:12). It was therefore only after the angels were convinced that Avraham would go through with slaughtering his son that one of them called down to Avraham and told him not to do it. If the instructions not to slaughter Yitzchok only came after the angels were convinced he really would have, the timing of those instructions was dependant on when this realization occurred. Upon hearing what had happened, Sara understood how close Avraham came to slaughtering her son before the angel stopped him. (It makes no difference if the angel was following G-d's instructions when he called down to Avraham; since G-d wouldn't have issued the instructions until the angels knew Avraham would in fact sacrifice Yitzchok, if they wouldn't have realized it until after he was slaughtered, the order not to wouldn't have been issued.)

If, instead of translating the Hebrew word as "almost," we translate it as "just a little," we have another way of explaining Rashi's words. Realizing what a "small amount" of time had been left for Avraham to "not slaughter" Yitzchok, i.e. how close he came to going through with it, Sara's soul left her body. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

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 shalshet 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 shalshet 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 © 2010 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 Tehilim (37:18): "Yodei'a HaShem ye'mei temi'mim..." (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'heye 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'etre*-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 Chassidisch". 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. © 2010 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Abraham, the sages were convinced, was a greater religious hero than Noah. We hear this in the famous dispute among the sages about the phrase that Noah was "perfect in his generations," meaning relative to his generations: "In his generations" - Some of our Sages interpret this favorably: if he had lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. Others interpret it derogatorily: In comparison with his generation he was righteous, but if he had lived in Abraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance. [Rashi to Gen. 6: 9]

Some thought that if Noah had lived in the time of Abraham he would have been inspired by his example to yet greater heights; others that he would have stayed the same, and thus been insignificant when compared to Abraham, but neither side doubted that Abraham was the greater. Similarly, the sages contrasted the phrase, "Noah walked with G-d," with the fact that Abraham walked before G-d.

"Noah walked with G-d" - But concerning Abraham, Scripture says (Gen 24:40): "[the Lord] before Whom I walked." Noah required [G-d's] support to uphold him [in righteousness], but Abraham strengthened himself and walked in his righteousness by himself. [Rashi to Gen. 6: 9]

Yet what evidence do we have in the text itself that Abraham was greater than Noah? To be sure, Abraham argued with G-d in protest against the destruction of the cities of the plain, while Noah merely accepted G-d's verdict about the Flood. Yet G-d invited Abraham's protest. Immediately beforehand the text says: Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." (Gen. 18: 17-19)

This is an almost explicit invitation to challenge the verdict. G-d delivered no such summons to Noah. So Noah's failure to protest should not be held against

him. If anything, the Torah seems to speak more highly of Noah than of Abraham. We are told: "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6: 6). Twice Noah is described as a righteous man, a tzaddik: Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with G-d.(6:9)

The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation." (Gen. 7: 1) No one else in the whole of Tenakh is called righteous.[1]How then was Abraham greater than Noah? One answer, and a profound one, is suggested in the way the two men responded to tragedy and grief. After the Flood, we read this about Noah: Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank some of the wine, making himself drunk, and uncovered himself in the tent. (9: 20-21) This is an extraordinary decline. The "righteous man" has become a "man of the soil." The man who was looked to "bring us comfort" (5: 29) now seeks comfort in wine. What has happened?

The answer, surely, is that Noah was indeed a righteous man, but one who had seen a world destroyed. We gain the impression of a man paralyzed with grief, seeking oblivion. Like Lot's wife who turned back to look on the destruction, Noah finds he cannot carry on. He is desolated, grief-stricken; his heart is broken; the weight of the past prevents him from turning toward the future.

Now think of Abraham at the beginning of this week's parasha. He has just been through the greatest trial of his life. He had been asked by G-d to sacrifice the son he had waited for, for so many years. He was about to lose the most precious thing in his life. It is hard to imagine his state of mind as the trial unfolded. Then, just as he was about to lift the knife, came the call from heaven saying, Stop. The story seemed to have a happy ending after all.

But there was a terrible twist in store. Just as Abraham was returning, relieved, his son's life spared, he discovers that the trial had a victim after all. Immediately after it we read of the death of Sarah. The sages said that the two events were simultaneous. As Rashi explains: The account of Sarah's demise was juxtaposed to the binding of Isaac because as a result of the news of the "binding," that her son was prepared for slaughter and was almost slaughtered, her soul flew out of her, and she died. (Rashi to Gen. 23: 2)

Try now to put yourself in the position of Abraham. He has almost sacrificed his child. And now, as an indirect result of the trial itself, the news has killed his wife of many years, the woman who stayed with him through all his travels and travails, who twice saved his life, and who in joy gave birth to Isaac in her old age. Had Abraham grieved for the rest of his days, we would surely have understood - just as we understand Noah's grief. Instead, we read the following: And Sarah died in Kiriat-arba - that is, Hebron - in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for

her. And Abraham rose up from before his dead . . . (Gen. 23: 2-3)

Abraham mourns and weeps, and then rises up and does two things that secure the Jewish future, two acts whose effects we feel to this day. He buys the first plot - the field and cave of Machpelah - in what will one day become the land of Israel. And he secures a wife for his son Isaac so that there will be Jewish continuity.

Noah grieves and is overwhelmed by loss. Abraham grieves, knowing what he has lost, but then rises up and builds the Jewish future. There is a limit to grief: this is what Abraham knows and Noah does not.

Abraham bestowed this singular ability on his descendants. The Jewish people suffered tragedies that would have devastated other nations beyond hope of recovery: the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile; the destruction of the Second Temple and the end of Jewish sovereignty; the expulsions, massacres, forced conversions and inquisitions of the Middle Ages; the pogroms of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries; the Shoah. Yet somehow the Jewish people mourned and wept, and then rose up and built the future. This is their unique strength, and it came from Abraham as we see him in this week's parasha. Kierkegaard wrote a profound sentence in his Journals: "It requires moral courage to grieve; it requires religious courage to rejoice." [2] Perhaps that is the difference between Noah the righteous, and Abraham the man of faith. Noah grieved. Abraham knew that there must eventually be an end to grief. We must turn from yesterday's loss to the call of a tomorrow we must help to be born.

[1]Kierkegaard, *The Soul of Kierkegaard: Selections from His Journal*, (edited Alexander Dru), Dover Publications, 67.

[2]Amos uses the phrase, "they sold the righteous for silver" (Amos 2: 6), which the sages understand as a reference to Joseph, but the text itself does not say so explicitly. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrاند

The Ramba"n writes that the Torah elaborates on all the details of Avraham's purchase of the burial plot for Sarah "In order to inform us of the mercies of G-d (Chasdei Hashem) with Avraham, who became a Prince of the L-rd in the land into which he came to live." The Chitites treated Avraham with great respect and were honored to give his family a prime burial spot in the finest part of their territory. The entire populace gave him the title Adoni [master] such that yet in his lifetime we witness fulfillment of the blessing "I will Bless you and I will make your name great". [Bereshis 12:2]

The Ramba"n continues in the very same paragraph: And our Rabbis say that this was one of Avraham's tests-that he sought a burial place for his own wife in the land that he was promised by G-d and yet he was not able to acquire the land until he purchased it at a great price with great effort. He did not

question G-d about this and thus passed his final nisayon [test].

Are these two comments of the Ramba"n not self-contradictory? The Ramba"n begins the comment by saying that the parsha is written to tell us that the story illustrates the great respect everyone had for Avraham. But then the Ramba"n says that the parsha documents a test that Avraham endured- expending great effort and great expense to find a burial spot for his wife! Furthermore, how can there be another "test" after the test at the end of last week's parsha-the nisayon of Akeidas Yitzchak [the binding of Yitzchak] --

The events in this week's parsha may be upsetting and difficult, but as a test, they are very anti-climactic. Is this an appropriate climax to the tests that Avraham endured during his life of devotion to the Almighty? Rav Simcha Zissel Brody says that there is no contradiction in the Ramba"n and in fact the Ramba"n coming to answer this very question of why the purchase of a burial plot was considered a "test". The tests presented contradictions to Avraham.

Avraham was told to go to the Land of Canaan and good things would happen to him. But as soon as Avraham arrived, "there was a famine in the land". This was an apparent contradiction to G-d's promise.

G-d told Avraham he would have a son who would be the founder of the Jewish people. Then G-d told Avraham to take the son and slaughter him. This was an apparent contradiction to G-d's promise.

The burial of Sarah contains that element as well. Avraham was promised that the entire land would be his and now he has difficulty even buying a plot for his beloved wife. This too is a contradiction. However, this test has an added element. The test was whether, while undergoing stress and distress of nisyanos, Avraham would also simultaneously be able to perceive the great mercies and kindnesses that G-d had wrought for him. There are 3 ways that a person can handle life's tragedies. He can suffer troubles and tragedy and then throw away religion. Alternatively, he can suffer these fates and stoically accept it all as punishment. Finally, he can see the trouble and tragedy, but even within the tragedy, he is able to see the Mercy. This is the ultimate test of a human being's faith.

This is why the test of Sarah's burial was even greater than the previous tests. It contained the element of contradiction that was also present in the previous nisyanos, but it also contained another element. It contained the challenge to be impressed by the way the Bnei Ches treated him (even while they were giving him a hard time) and the challenge to recognize the Divine Providence which allowed him to be valued and treated as a "Prince of the L-rd in their midst."

Seeing the Chessed and the Favors of G-d while in the midst of one's troubles is a tremendous attribute and indeed amounted to the pinnacle of Avraham's spiritual accomplishments. © 2010 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org