

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**H**e was 137 years old. He had been through two traumatic events involving the people most precious to him in the world. The first involved the son for whom he had waited for a lifetime, Isaac. He and Sarah had given up hope, yet G-d told them both that they would have a son together, and it would be he who would continue the covenant. The years passed. Sarah did not conceive. She had grown old, yet G-d still insisted they would have a child.

Eventually it came. There was rejoicing. Sarah said: "G-d has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." Then came the terrifying moment when G-d said to Abraham: "Take your son, your only one, the one you love," and offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham did not dissent, protest or delay. Father and son traveled together, and only at the last moment did the command come from heaven saying, "Stop". How does a father, let alone a son, survive a trauma like that?

Then came grief. Sarah, Abraham's beloved wife, died. She had been his constant companion, sharing the journey with him as they left behind all they knew, their land, their birthplace and their families. Twice she saved Abraham's life by pretending to be his sister.

What does a man of 137 do -- the Torah calls him "old and advanced in years" -- after such a trauma and such a bereavement? We would not be surprised to find that he spent the rest of his days in sadness and memory. He had done what G-d had asked of him. Yet he could hardly say that G-d's promises had been fulfilled. Seven times he had been promised the land of Canaan, yet when Sarah died he owned not one square-inch of it, not even a place in which to bury his wife. G-d had promised him many children, a great nation, many nations, as many as the grains of sand in the sea shore and the stars in the sky. Yet he had only one son of the covenant, Isaac, whom he had almost

lost, and who was still unmarried at the age of thirty-seven. Abraham had every reason to sit and grieve.

Yet he did not. In one of the most extraordinary sequences of words in the Torah, his grief is described in a mere five Hebrew words: in English, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." Then immediately we read, "And Abraham rose from his grief." From then on, he engaged in a flurry of activity with two aims in mind: first to buy a plot of land in which to bury Sarah, second to find a wife for his son. Note that these correspond precisely to the two Divine blessings: of land and descendants. Abraham did not wait for G-d to act. He understood one of the profoundest truths of Judaism: that G-d is waiting for us to act.

How did Abraham overcome the trauma and the grief? How do you survive almost losing your child and actually losing your life-partner and still have the energy to keep going? What gave Abraham his resilience, his ability to survive, his spirit intact?

I learned the answer from the people who became my mentors in moral courage, namely the Holocaust survivors I had the privilege to know. How, I wondered, did they keep going, knowing what they knew, seeing what they saw? We know that the British and American soldiers who liberated the camps never forgot what they witnessed. According to Niall Ferguson's new biography of Henry Kissinger, who entered the camps as an American soldier, the sight that met his eyes transformed his life. If this was true of those who merely saw Bergen-Belsen and the other camps, how almost infinitely more so, those who lived there and saw so many die there. Yet the survivors I knew had the most tenacious hold on life. I wanted to understand how they kept going.

Eventually I discovered. Most of them did not talk about the past, even to their marriage partners, even to their children. Instead they set about creating a new life in a new land. They learned its language and customs. They found work. They built careers. They married and had children. Having lost their own families, the survivors became an extended family to one another. They looked forward, not back. First they built a future. Only then -- sometimes forty or fifty years later -- did they speak about the past. That was when they told their story, first to their families, then to the world. First you have to build a future. Only then can you mourn the past.



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Two people in the Torah looked back, one explicitly, the other by implication. Noah, the most righteous man of his generation, ended his life by making wine and becoming drunk. The Torah does not say why but we can guess. He had lost an entire world. While he and his family were safe on board the ark, everyone else -- all his contemporaries -- had drowned. It is not hard to imagine this righteous man overwhelmed by grief as he replayed in his mind all that had happened, wondering whether he might have done something to save more lives or avert the catastrophe.

Lot's wife, against the instruction of the angels, actually did look back as the cities of the plain disappeared under fire and brimstone and the anger of G-d. Immediately she was turned into a pillar of salt, the Torah's graphic description of a woman so overwhelmed by shock and grief as to be unable to move on.

It is the background of these two stories that helps us understand Abraham after the death of Sarah. He set the precedent: first build the future, and only then can you mourn the past. If you reverse the order, you will be held captive by the past. You will be unable to move on. You will become like Lot's wife.

Something of this deep truth drove the work of one of the most remarkable survivors of the Holocaust, the psychotherapist Viktor Frankl. Frankl lived through Auschwitz, dedicating himself to giving other prisoners the will to live. He tells the story in several books, most famously in *Man's Search for Meaning*. He did this by finding for each of them a task that was calling to them, something they had not yet done but that only they could do. In effect, he gave them a future. This allowed them to survive the present and turn their minds away from the past.

Frankl lived his teachings. After the liberation of Auschwitz he built a school of psychotherapy called Logotherapy, based on the human search for meaning. It was almost an inversion of the work of Freud. Freudian psychoanalysis had encouraged people to think about their very early past. Frankl taught people to build a future, or more precisely, to hear the future calling to them. Like Abraham, Frankl lived a long and good life, gaining worldwide recognition and dying at the age of 92.

Abraham heard the future calling to him. Sarah had died. Isaac was unmarried. Abraham had neither land nor grandchildren. He did not cry out, in anger or anguish, to G-d. Instead, he heard the still, small voice saying: The next step depends on you. You must create a future that I will fill with My spirit. That is how Abraham survived the shock and grief. G-d forbid that we experience any of this, but if we do, this is how to survive.

G-d enters our lives as a call from the future. It is as if we hear him beckoning to us from the far horizon of time, urging us to take a journey and undertake a task that, in ways we cannot fully understand, we were created for. That is the meaning of the word vocation, literally "a calling", a mission, a task to which we are summoned.

We are not here by accident. We are here because G-d wanted us to be, and because there is a task we were meant to fulfill. Discovering what that is, is not easy, and often takes many years and false starts. But for each of us there is something G-d is calling on us to do, a future not yet made that awaits our making. It is future-orientation that defines Judaism as a faith, as I explain in the last chapter of my book, *Future Tense*.

So much of the anger, hatred and resentments of this world are brought about by people obsessed by the past and who, like Lot's wife, are unable to move on. There is no good ending to this kind of story, only more tears and more tragedy. The way of Abraham in Chayei Sarah is different. First build the future. Only then can you mourn the past. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

"Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron in the Land of Canaan. And Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep over her." (Genesis 23:2) What was Sarah doing in Hebron? According to a simple reading of the text, Abraham, Sarah and Isaac lived in Beersheba. The text even tells us that Abraham had to "come" to weep over her; he apparently wasn't with her when she died.

In order to understand Sarah's whereabouts, it is first necessary to realize that her prophetic powers were greater than Abraham's. You will remember that when Sarah tells Abraham to banish the handmaiden and her son, the issue was "very grievous in the eyes of Abraham," but G-d says to the patriarch: "Let it not be grievous in your eyes. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her voice." (Genesis 21:10-12). Rashi cites the Midrash Raba, "We learn from here that Abraham was second to Sarah in prophetic power."

The truth of the words of the Midrash are borne out by the subsequent text. Abraham, being 10 years older than Sarah, was 137 when Sarah died; he lived

another 38 years - years when he was still vigorous enough to marry at least one other wife and father six sons (Genesis 25:1-6). Nevertheless, there is not one biblically transmitted conversation between G-d and Abraham during all these years. Indeed, the only recorded event is Abraham's desire to choose a wife for Isaac, but in the absence of Sarah he leaves the choice to Eliezer, his Damascene steward. Apparently, in no small measure Abraham was the *rav* (rabbi) because Sarah was the *rebbitzin* (rabbi's wife).

From this backdrop, let us take a fresh look at the drama surrounding the akeda. Abraham rises "early in the morning" to set out with Isaac, the two householders (Eliezer and Ishmael as previously mentioned), firewood, a slaughtering knife and a minimum of 10 days' supply of food and drink. It is inconceivable that they all left without waking Sarah. A discussion certainly ensued. "Where are you going?" asks Sarah. "To do G-d's bidding," answers Abraham. "What did G-d ask you to do?" asks Sarah. "To make a sacrifice," answers Abraham. "So why do you need our son, Isaac?" asks Sarah, "and where is the lamb?" she demands, with a nearly hysterical tremor in her voice.

And so Abraham repeats G-d's precise command: "Take now your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and bring him up there as a dedication [ola] on one of the mountains which I shall point out to you" (Genesis 22:2). Sarah is beside herself. "You don't need the slaughtering knife," she cries. "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,' told Cain that 'his brother's blood is crying out from beneath the ground,' could not possibly have meant for you to slaughter our innocent Isaac. And besides, G-d promised you, in my presence, that 'through Isaac shall be designated your special seed.' I tell you that you are misinterpreting G-d's command."

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

In fact, Sarah was correct. Yes, G-d purposely conveyed an ambiguous command because our Bible is an eternal document, and subsequent generations of Jews - subject to exile, persecution and pogrom - would be forced to see their children slaughtered on account of their faith; these future fathers and children would find inspiration in the figures of Abraham and Isaac as symbols of devotion unto death, as ensigns of Jewish willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for G-d, Torah and Israel. But such martyrdom is not the ab initio desire of our compassionate G-d.

The sages of the Talmud (B.T. Ta'anit 4a) corroborate the thrust of the words I put in Sarah's mouth; they interpret a verse in the book of Jeremiah (19:5) regarding human sacrifice: "I did not command them, I did not speak of them, they did not enter My mind."

It is on this basis that Rashi comments on the word "And lift him up" (Genesis 22:2): "[G-d] did not say 'slaughter him' because the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want Isaac slaughtered; He merely said 'lift him up,' on the mountain to make of him a dedication, and once he [Isaac] agreed to be dedicated [in life], He [G-d] said he was to be brought down" (Bereshit Raba 56, 8). And indeed Isaac is referred to in the Midrash as a "pure dedication - *ola temima*" for the rest of his life.

If I may continue my fanciful "midrash," I would suggest that once Sarah realized that she couldn't convince her husband, her only recourse was to attempt to convince the Almighty to step in and prevent a tragedy. She leaves her home in Beersheba and goes to pray in Hebron, at the Cave of the Couples (Tomb of the Patriarchs, known in Hebrew as *Ma'arat Hamachpela*) where Adam and Eve were buried. It was important for her to pray in Hebron, because that was the place of the "Covenant between the Pieces" when G-d promised Abraham eternal progeny, and that was 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, and Abraham came there to bury, eulogize and weep over his beloved wife, without whom he understood that his life with G-d was over, but through whom the destiny of Israel had been secured forever.  
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#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he entire cycle of human life is portrayed for us in this week's Torah reading. The first part of the parsha deals with the inevitable reality of human mortality. The Torah teaches us the concept of Jewish burial - its simplicity and honesty, and the restorative treatment of grief. Avraham mourns the loss of his life's companion and support. The Torah does not tell us what he said in detail but it does tell us that he did eulogize her, for eulogies are for the benefit of the living as much as they are for the honor and memory of the deceased beloved one.

The Torah also records for us that Abraham wept at the loss he sustained. Weeping is not so much in style in our modern society. The funeral parlors in the Diaspora usually do all in their power to mask the reality of their business. Funerals are now called celebrations of life and other such phony euphemisms. In the medieval world death was real and a constant

presence in life.

Anyone who has visited Prague as a tourist will have the tower clock struck by the Angel of Death every hour indelibly etched in his mind and memory. But a life spent dwelling on death is pretty much a wasted life. The Torah instructed us to choose life. So, all of Judaism is life-centered. The true celebration of life never takes place at a funeral. It takes place in the everyday activities of life, in purposeful endeavors and in the promotion of the inestimable value of life.

Our current enemies celebrate death - suicide missions, hatred and murder. We have to continue to choose life, no matter what.

The bulk of the parsha deals with marriage and the process of finding the proper mate for life. Such a process is so complicated and fraught with significant possibilities of error and sadness. Therefore Judaism traditionally invoked Divine aid in seeking a mate in marriage.

And that it is what Eliezer, Avraham's servant and agent does in attempting to find the right wife for Yitzchak. But, he also tests her to see what her character truly is. How much compassion and kindness is within her persona and what type of wife would she make for the heir to Avraham's vision of monotheism and humanity - are the issues that Eliezer has to address in his search for a mate for Yitzchak.

If the beginning of the parsha deals with the proper and healthy attitude towards human mortality, the other part of the parsha deals with life, family and nation building. It teaches us that proper, moral, compassionate people are necessary for G-d's work to be accomplished in this world.

It also teaches that one must be willing to commit in order to build a successful marriage and an eternal family. Lack of such committed courage and fear of the unknown are the enemies of the continuity of the Jewish family and the survival of the Jewish people generally. This parsha has very important lessons to impart to us. ©2015 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd he took Rivka to be his wife, and he loved her, and Yitzchok was consoled over [the loss of] his mother" B'reishis 24:67. Since Sara (his mother) had died three years earlier (see Rashi on 25:20), it is bit curious that it took so long for Yitzchok to be consoled. The very notion that getting married was how he became consoled needs an explanation. Many commentaries connect Rivka's righteousness, and specifically how it matched Sara's, with his finally being consoled, but this too needs an explanation. Was

he inconsolable because the world was lacking someone on her spiritual level, and was therefore consoled when he saw that there was someone comparable to Sara?

The Midrash (Tanchuma Sh'mos 10) tells us that three of our forefathers, Yitzchok, Yaakov and Moshe were paired with their spouses through (literal "from") a well. And this is clearly true, as Eliezer met Rivka in Charan by a well (B'reishis 24:11-15), Yaakov met Rachel by the well in Charan (29:2-6), and Moshe met Tziporah by a well in Midyan (Sh'mos 2:15-16). However, when the Midrash references verses as proof texts that all three met their spouse through a well, rather than quoting the verse where Eliezer first met Rivka, it quotes a verse from when Yitzchok first met her (B'reishis 24:62), albeit before they actually met, "and Yitzchok came from coming from (or to) B'er Lachai Ro'ee." This is puzzling on several fronts. For one thing, when this well is mentioned, Yitzchok hadn't met Rivka yet. He "went out to the field to pray" (see Rashi on 24:63) after leaving B'er Lachai Ro'ee, and that's where/when he first saw Rivka (24:63) and she first saw him (24:64). Secondly, the location given attribution for the pairing should not be where they met after the match had already been made, but the location where the pairing was made (in this case, the well in Charan). Additionally, even if B'er Lachai Ro'ee was also (somehow) integral to the match being made, given the choice of mentioning a well, shouldn't it be the one in Charan? [Even though Sh'mos Rabbah (1:32) does mention the well in Charan, it is secondary to B'er Lachai Ro'ee (as after mentioning B'er Lachai Ro'ee it adds, "and also, Rivka was ready for Eliezer at a spring").] Why is B'er Lachai Ro'ee given such prominence, to the extent that it overshadows the well in Charan?

Last year (<http://tinyurl.com/noyzul4>) I discussed why Yitzchok was so drawn to B'er Lachai Ro'ee, even though its significance was the divine communication that Hagar, the mother of his half-brother (Yishmael), had experienced there. B'er Lachai Ro'ee was the location Avraham, and then Yitzchok, re-named B'er Sheva (see Ramban on 24:62), the place where Avraham offered food and lodging to everyone in order to help them recognize the Creator. Midrash Aggadah tells us that Yitzchok moved to B'er Lachai Ro'ee in order to be near Hagar. B'er Lachai Ro'ee is mentioned when Yitzchok was introduced to Rivka because he had just come from bringing Hagar back to his father so that he can remarry her (see Rashi). And if Hagar was living in B'er Lachai Ro'ee even before she remarried Avraham, she must have also been committed to bringing others closer to G-d (including relating her experience at B'er Lachai Ro'ee to them). Just as when Sara was still alive "Avraham converted the men and Sara converted the women" (see Rashi on 12:5), after Sara's death it was Hagar who "converted

the women.”

Aside from the reasons I presented last year, I would add one more reason why B'er Lachai Ro'ee was so important to Yitzchok. Although it would make sense for Yitzchok to be there in order to continue his father's mission (“converting the men”), another reason he wanted to be near Hagar might have been so that she can help him find an appropriate spouse, and mentor her after they were married. Yitzchok was very concerned about being able to find the right person to help him further the family's monotheistic mission, and had been counting on his mother, Sara, to help him find the right person to marry and to then show her what it means to be a Matriarch. After she died, he was hoping that Hagar, who knew firsthand how the “Avinu” household was run and was still involved in the family mission, could fulfill that role. This could be why Yitzchok wanted to be near Hagar, and why, after he heard that Eliezer was going to Charan to find a wife for him, he wanted Hagar to remarry his father (see Midrash HaGadol 24:62), as now she could mentor his wife from within the household. Until then, he was hoping that Hagar would find a star pupil to be his wife, after which she could mentor her, but if Eliezer came back with someone from Charan, Hagar would still be needed as a mentor.

It is therefore possible that the Midrash focused on B'er Lachai Ro'ee more than on the well in Charan because of the role Yitzchok thought Hagar would have to have in his marriage, a role based on his concern about finding and mentoring his spouse without his mother. This concern impacted his prayers to G-d about finding the right spouse, which might be another reason we are told that “he went out to the field to pray” immediately after mentioning B'er Lachai Ro'ee. When the Midrash refers to B'er Lachai Ro'ee regarding Yitzchok being one of the forefathers who were paired with their wives “from the well,” it could be referring to how the concerns that brought him to B'er Lachai Ro'ee (and Hagar) also brought extreme urgency to his prayers, which helped their being answered. [Additionally, even after meeting Rivka, Yitzchok had some serious concerns about her righteousness (see Torah Sh'laimah 24:237); it's possible that Hagar, who was with them when Eliezer returned from Charan if Yitzchok was in the process of bringing her back to Avraham, helped alleviate these concerns.]

Even though Sara had passed away years earlier, Yitzchok was constantly reminded of his loss because of his concern about finding the right spouse without her, and because he didn't know how to compensate for her ability to mentor his wife after they were married. However, after he married Rivka and saw that her actions matched those of his mother, and that the three miraculous “signs” that were always present when Sara was alive had returned (see Rashi on 24:67), these concerns went away. He had found

the right spouse even without his mother's help, and she didn't need her mentoring in order to attain the level of spirituality necessary to become a Matriarch. With these concerns no longer there, “Yitzchok was (finally) consoled over (the loss of) his mother.” ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**s he buys a burial plot for his wife Sarah, Avraham (Abraham) identifies himself as a ger toshav. (Genesis 23:4) The term is enigmatic. Ger means alien while toshav means resident. How could Avraham be both when those terms seem to be the opposite of one another?

On a simple level, Avraham tells the children of Heth that he initially came to their community as a stranger, but now he has finally settled in. Alternatively, the Midrash interprets Avraham declaring: “I am prepared to conduct myself as a stranger and pay for the burial plot. If, however, you rebuff me I will take it as a citizen who already owns the land that G-d had promised to His children.”

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik sees it differently. For him, Avraham is defining the status of the Jew throughout history living amongst foreigners. No matter how comfortable a Jew may feel among others, in the end, the Jew is a stranger and is viewed as an other by his neighbors.

Another thought comes to mind. Avraham was a very successful man. He introduced the revolutionary idea of monotheism—and, indeed is chosen to be the father of the Jewish nation. Still, as he buries his wife, he emotionally cries out that as accomplished as he may be, in the end he is vulnerable, with glaring weaknesses and frailties—just like everyone else. Hence, ger toshav resonates one's outlook on life. As much as one may feel like a toshav, like a resident who is in control of life, one, in the same breath is a ger, a stranger—here one day and gone the next.

Commenting on the verse recited every Friday night which speaks of the rivers dancing and the trees clapping hands, Rav Shlomo Carlebach said: “You know beautiful friends, the way we are living. One day I feel so good, the next day I'm in the lowest dumps. One day I'm so happy, the next day I want to commit suicide. I want you to know nature is very real. When a person says I'm happy, the tree says, 'hey, wait till I see you tomorrow.' One day I say I'm so holy, then the rivers will say wait till tomorrow. You know one day there will be a great Shabbos, a never-ending Shabbos. One day the whole world will be good forever. One day there'll be joy forever. So every Friday night when we receive Shabbos, I'm crying, I'm begging, Master of the world, let it be forever, let it be for real. You know my beautiful friends, so many houses are broken, so many hearts are broken so

many windows are broken because nothing lasts forever, nothing lasts forever. But this Shabbos, let it be, let it be, let it be forever let the rivers dance, let the trees clap hands...So we are begging, we are crying before the One, let it be, let this Shabbos be forever, let us hear the great trumpet, ba-hatzotzros be-kol shofar. Let us hear the great trumpet, let us hear the greatest message, from now on everything good and holy will be forever."

But until that time, nothing lasts forever. All joy, says the Talmud, must be tempered with trembling. We are all, in the words of Avraham a ger toshav, permanent, yet temporary. Such is the way of the world. ©2015 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 LABEL LAM

## Dvar Torah

"Avraham expired and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people." (Breishis 25:8) Here we discover a fascinating set of facts that are not nearly as morbid as one might think at first glance. There three ways or better yet three stages to what we call dying. Imagine a car driving on the highway. The car breaks down. Then the driver gets out of the car. Then he gets a hitch a ride home.

These are the three steps mentioned explicitly in the verse. "Avraham expired", that is his body ceased functioning. He "died" means that his body and soul separated. The word, "vayamas" (he died) may have its etymological roots in the word "yamoosh" which means "removed". The soul is effectively removed from its identification with the body. Then "he was gathered up to his people" which tells us that he entered into Olam Haba-the world to come!

The big question that the Chovos HaLevavos struggles with is, "Why does the Torah not tell us more about Olam Haba?" Wouldn't that be a fascinating topic!? Amongst the many answers offered in the Gate of Trust is that Olam Haba is not an absolute guarantee based upon the specific performance of a certain number of Mitzvos! It's not a business deal -- a quid pro quo! No, it's a relationship! How is the relationship measured?

A relatively newly married man struggling with Shalom Bais (peace in the home) approached his Rabbi for some advice. The Rabbi asked him if he had ever gotten his wife a bouquet of flowers on Erev Shabbos! He looked at the Rabbi curiously and admitted that he had not.

Then the Rabbi uncorked the first new big idea. "Make sure to get your wife fresh flowers every Erev Shabbos!" "That's it!" queried the newly wed. "No!" the Rabbi insisted. "You must write personal note and or

tell her something nice and flattering!" The poor young man looked at the Rabbi with bewilderment. "I have no idea what to say or recite!" The Rabbi then offered some nice not entirely cliché phrases that just might reach the desired mark. "Why am I the luckiest man on the face of the earth!?" "You are wonderful!"

Dutifully the student scouted out and selected an elegant bouquet prior to Shabbos and he chose a choice phrase that pays to recite at the appropriate moment. The moment arrived when he approached his wife on the eve of the Holy Shabbos and he presented the flowers. Her heart practically melted with joy and then she looked at as if right on cue and waited for him to say something, just as the Rabbi had predicted. He looked squarely in her direction and told her the following, "The Rabbi said I should say you are wonderful!"

Her smile collapsed into a sudden frown and he was almost back in the doghouse as before, but he did merit with the flowers a nice Shabbos dinner. Thinking about the words we pray momentarily before we say them may just add jet fuel of intentionality. Instead of saying, "The Men of the Great Assembly said I should say..."

The Chovos HaLevavos explains that Olam Haba is based on heart. The intoxicating flavor of this world is gifted for the external aspects of the Mitzvos but Olam Haba is hinging on the longing of a heart homeward bound! ©2015 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

### RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

## Perceptions

"I will adjure you by G-d, the G-d of the Heaven and the G-d of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from..." (Bereishis 24:3) The Akeidah was over. Sarah was gone. It was time to find a wife for Yitzchak. The first thing Avraham Avinu does after burying and mourning his beloved wife was send his trusted servant Eliezer back to Padan Aram in search of a shidduch for Yitzchak. Had Avraham Avinu actually been allowed to sacrifice Yitzchak then his life's work would have literally gone up in smoke.

Is finding a soul mate an easy thing to do? The Talmud says the following about the topic: "Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak said: When Resh Lakish elucidated [the subject of] Sotah, he said the following, 'They only pair a woman with a man according to his deeds...' (Sotah 2a)

According to this, it is not so much an issue of finding one's soul mate as it finding a good shidduch. Every Friday night families sing "Aishes Chayil" just before Kiddush because it lists all the traits of a valorous woman from a Torah perspective. According to Resh Lakish, how many of those traits a man's wife will have at marriage will depend upon his own spiritual worthiness at the time.

The following however seems to indicate that

even this is not sufficient to make the finding of one's "correct" spouse a simple matter: "Rabbah bar Bar Channah said in the name of Rebi Yochanan: It is as difficult to pair them as the splitting of the Red Sea..." (Sotah 2a)

Indeed, it says that even the great Aharon HaKohen did not marry his soul mate (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 8), though this had to do with his soul mate and not a lack of merit on his behalf. It also did not mean that he did not have a great marriage with his wife Elisheva either. He did. The Talmud, however, continues: "It is not so! Rav Yehudah has said in the name of Rav: Forty days before the creation of a child, a Bas Kol goes out and proclaims, 'The daughter of So-and-so is for So-and-so.'" (Sotah 2a)

This implies just the opposite. According to this opinion shidduchim are set in motion even before a couple is born, long before they even have a chance to accumulate sufficient merit to find each other. Matchmakers are just the ones who merit to be Heaven's messengers to complete the "deal." All a person has to do, according to this, is not do anything to ruin it, especially after the couple has married, as the Talmud concludes: "There is no contradiction. The latter statement [about the pairing of a couple prior to birth] refers to a first marriage and the former [about difficulty finding one's soul mate], to a second marriage." (Sotah 2a)

There is no difference of opinion after all. Everyone agrees that when it comes to one's first marriage, the shidduch was made in Heaven and in progress from before birth. It is just a question of going through the motions to make it happen and minimize the need for a miracle. Minimize, but not eliminate.

Should a person have to marry a second time, it is a different story. This is discussed in detail in Sha'ar HaGilgulim, which has a different take on the above gemora as well: "Know that when a man is new, that is, it is his first time in the world, then his soul mate is born with him, as it is known. When it comes time to marry her they make it possible for him [to do so] quickly, free of any trouble whatsoever. However, if this man committed a sin and needs to reincarnate because of it... and [therefore] his soul mate will also reincarnate... when it comes time to marry her, they will not make it possible for him [to do so] quickly, but after much trouble." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

In other words, though the Talmud explained itself as talking about the marriage to two different wives, the Arizal explained the Talmud to be talking about the same wife in two different lifetimes. In the first lifetime they will meet each other with the least amount of trouble. In the next lifetime, it will be more difficult to find one another, if at all, and the Arizal explained why: "Since he returned because of some sin there are 'accusers' who want to prevent her from him, causing them to fight. With respect to this it says, 'It is as difficult

to pair them as the splitting of the Red Sea.'" (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

Why did the person have to reincarnate in the first place? Though there are a couple of reasons for reincarnation, one of the main reasons is that the person sinned and died before fixing it up through teshuvah. Consequently, he has to do rectify his sin in his next lifetime. This does not sit well with the angels who are supposed to help him find his zivug, his soul mate. They figure, "Why should we help a person who sinned and had to reincarnate to fix it up? In fact," they apparently say, "let's make it as difficult as possible for him to find his soul mate the second time!" How much more so must they say this if a person has to reincarnate multiple times.

Rav Chaim Vital, in the name of his teacher, brings a proof for this explanation from the Talmud itself: "It is in the manner mentioned because it is called the 'second pairing,' that is, she is his real soul mate, but [since] they were already paired another time in a former life, now, in this reincarnation, it is considered to be the second pairing. The woman herself is the original one, but it is the second pairing. This is why it does not say 'second pair,' but rather the 'second pairing,' which refers back to the pairing and not the woman." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

Thus, even the language of the Talmud suggests that this is the explanation, at least on the level of Sod. It continues in Sha'ar HaGilgulim: "This will explain why sometimes a man marries a woman quickly and without any difficulty or fighting, and sometimes he does not marry a woman except with much arguing until they are married. Only after they are married do they achieve peace and tranquility, indicating that she is indeed his soul mate, but that it is the second pairing. If she was not his soul mate, there would not be peace after he married her." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

When a man and woman date one another they rarely think about much more than the here and now. People talk about "matches made in Heaven" and "soul mates," but the bottom line for most people is whether or not things are going smoothly. It's hard to imagine a couple breaking off a shidduch that is going well because of some suspicion that they might not actually be soul mates.

That's good, because there is no guarantee that a person will even find his or her actual soul mate this late in history. On the other hand, it is not so clear cut that a person should end a shidduch after encountering some rough waters on the assumption that they are not meant for each other. That may not be the case. It just may be the result of meeting each other for the second, third, fourth, or who knows many times.

How is someone supposed to know if the person he or she is getting along with is in fact the "right" person, or that the person they are fighting with is not the "wrong" person?

It's simple: Consult a prophet. If you can't find one, then take a lesson from this week's parshah and Eliezer's tactic: "[Eliezer] said, 'O G-d, the G-d of my master Avraham, please cause to happen to me today, and perform loving kindness for my master, Avraham. I am standing by the water fountain, and the daughters of the people of the city are coming out to draw water. And it will be [that] the young girl to whom I will say, 'Lower your pitcher and I will drink,' and she will say, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels,' You will have designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak, and through her may I know that You have performed loving kindness with my master.'" (Bereishis 24:12-14)

Though it is true that we are not supposed to test G-d, we can enlist His help. We can pray to him to help us meet someone who is kind and respectful, and we can ask G-d to help us sort out the emotional issues. Love is not the only one who is blind sometimes, and not every couple that has a rough start has a rough end. People change over time, or very little at all.

Eliezer may have had an ulterior motive when setting up his little shidduch test, perhaps indicated by the cantillation that usually suggests hesitation. He had hoped, at one point in time, that his own daughter would merit to marry the son of his master. Avraham explained that it was not possible, since they were Canaanite descendants.

What Eliezer was really indicating with his test was that matching people is a very major thing with very major consequences, far more and too big for which another human can take responsibility. This is also the purport of the following Midrash: "A Roman aristocrat once asked Rebi Yosi bar Chalafta, 'In how many days did your G-d create the world?'

"He answered, 'In six days.'

"She then asked, 'What does G-d do since the days of Creation?'

"He answered her, 'He sits and makes couples, the daughter of So-and-so to So-and-so...'

"She told him, 'That is His occupation? Even I can do this. I have many servants and handmaids, and I can quickly pair them.'

"He said to her, 'It may be simple in your eyes, but in the eyes of G-d it is like splitting the sea!'

"Rebi Yosi bar Chalafta left. What did she do? She took 1,000 servants and 1,000 handmaids and stood them in [two] rows. She said, 'So-and-so should marry her, and she should marry him,' pairing them all in a single night.

"The next day they came to her with bruised heads, black eyes, and broken legs. She asked them, 'What happened to you?'

"A female would say, 'I don't want him!' and a male would say, 'I don't want her!'

"She immediately sent for Rebi Yosi bar Chalafta and said, 'There is no G-d like your G-d. Your

Torah is truthful, praiseworthy, and beautiful.'" (Bereishis Rabbah 68:4)

There are several questions that should be asked on this midrash. The main point though is clear: G-d is the Master Matchmaker. It requires His help to arrange it, and His help to constantly maintain it throughout the years. ©2015 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states: "He (Isaac) married Rebecca, she became his wife, and he loved her (Gen. 24:67).

Why does the Torah relate that first she became his wife and then tell us that he loved her?

What often passes for "love" in western civilization is either blind passion, infatuation, or at best, self-love. Neither of these are a basis for an enduring relationship. Passion dissipates fairly soon and self-love may be rather easily frustrated. There is no wonder that the divorce rate is 40% or higher!

The dynamics of a couple "falling in love" is like this: The man sees in this woman a person who he feels can satisfy his emotional needs, and she sees in this man someone who can satisfy her emotional needs. This would seem to be the ideal basis for a lasting relationship, but note -- the man is motivated primarily by his personal interests, and the woman is motivated primarily by her personal interests.

Although, they profess love for each other, the reality is that they each love themselves, and the other is but someone whom they expect will please them. Should anything occur -- the other partner is not pleasing them as they had expected, or if they meet someone who they think can better please them -- the relationship is at risk of falling apart.

In a traditional Jewish marriage, the basis for marriage was the responsibility to establish a family to whom the couple could transmit our heritage. Certainly, the relationship was to provide satisfaction for both partners. However, if the level of satisfaction was not what each might have wished, the basis of the relationship was not weakened, and agreement could more easily be reached. There was a common goal and purpose to the marriage rather than self-seeking interests. This enables the development of a more mature love.

That is why the Torah tells us this order. The love develops after she became his wife. Two people dedicated to a goal, to each other, to the marriage will focus on the good in each other and experience love.

*Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. ©2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

