

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

Our parsha contains the most serene description of old age and dying anywhere in the Torah: “Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8). There is an earlier verse, no less moving: “Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and G-d had blessed Abraham with everything” (Gen. 24:1).

Nor was this serenity the gift of Abraham alone. Rashi was puzzled by the description of Sarah – “Sarah lived to be 127 years old: [These were] the years of Sarah’s life” (23:1). The last phrase seems completely superfluous. Why not just tell us that Sarah lived to the age of 127? What is added by saying that “these were the years of Sarah’s life”? Rashi is led to the conclusion that the first half of the verse talks about the quantity of her life, how long she lived, while the second tells us about the quality of her life. “They – the years she lived – were all equal in goodness.”

Yet how is any of this conceivable? Abraham and Sarah were commanded by G-d to leave everything that was familiar: their land, their home, their family, and travel to an unknown land. No sooner had they arrived than they were forced to leave because of famine. Twice, Abraham’s life was at risk when, driven into exile, he worried that he would be killed so that the local ruler could take Sarah into his harem. Sarah herself had to say that she was Abraham’s sister, and had to suffer the indignity of being taken into a stranger’s household.

Then there was the long wait for a child, made even more painful by the repeated Divine promise that they would have as many children as the stars of the sky or the dust of the earth. Then came the drama of the birth of Ishmael to Sarah’s servant Hagar. This aggravated the relationship between the two women, and eventually Abraham had to send Hagar and Ishmael away. One way or another, this was a source of pain to all four people involved.

Then there was the agony of the binding of Isaac. Abraham was faced with the prospect of losing the person most precious to him, the child he had waited for so long.

For a variety of reasons, neither Abraham nor Sarah had an easy life. Theirs were lives of trial, in

which their faith was tested at many points. How can Rashi say that all of Sarah’s years were equal in goodness? How can the Torah say that Abraham had been blessed with everything?

The answer is given by the parsha itself, and it is very unexpected. Seven times Abraham had been promised the land. Here is just one of those occasions:

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Raise your eyes, and, from the place where you are now [standing], look to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. . . . Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you” (Gen. 13:14-17).

Yet by the time Sarah dies, Abraham has no land at all, and he is forced to prostrate himself before the local Hittites and beg for permission to acquire even a single field with a cave in which to bury his wife. Even then he has to pay what is clearly a massively inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. This does not sound like the fulfilment of the promise of “all the land, north, south, east and west.”

Then, in relation to children, Abraham is promised four times: “I will make you into a great nation” (12:2). “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth” (13:16). G-d “took [Abram] outside and said, ‘Look at the sky and count the stars. See if you can count them.’ [G-d] then said to him, ‘That is how [numerous] your descendants will be.’” (15:5). “No longer shall you be called Abram. Your name shall become Abraham, for I have set you up as the father of many nations” (17:5).

Yet he had to wait so long for even a single son by Sarah that when G-d insisted that she would indeed have a son, both Abraham (17:17) and Sarah (18:12) laughed. (The sages differentiated between these two episodes, saying that Abraham laughed with joy, Sarah with disbelief. In general, in Genesis, the verb tz-ch-k, to laugh, is fraught with ambiguity).

One way or another, whether we think of children or the land – the two key Divine promises to



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Abraham and Sarah – the reality fell far short of what they might have felt entitled to expect.

That, however, is precisely the meaning and message of Chayei Sarah. In it Abraham does two things: he buys the first plot in the land of Canaan, and he arranges for the marriage of Isaac. One field and a cave was, for Abraham, enough for the text to say that “G-d had blessed Abraham with everything.” One child, Isaac, by then married and with children (Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born; Isaac was sixty when the twins, Jacob and Esau, were born; and Abraham was 175 when he died) was enough for Abraham to die in peace.

Lao-Tzu, the Chinese sage, said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. To that Judaism adds, “It is not for you to complete the work but neither are you free to desist from it” (Avot 2:16). G-d Himself said of Abraham, “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. 18:19).

The meaning of this is clear. If you ensure that your children will continue to live for what you have lived for, then you can have faith that they will continue your journey until eventually they reach the destination. Abraham did not need to see all the land in Jewish hands, nor did he need to see the Jewish people become numerous. He had taken the first step. He had begun the task, and he knew that his descendants would continue it. He was able to die serenely because he had faith in G-d and faith that others would complete what he had begun. The same was surely true of Sarah.

To place your life in G-d's hands, to have faith that whatever happens to you happens for a reason, to know that you are part of a larger narrative, and to believe that others will continue what you began, is to achieve a satisfaction in life that cannot be destroyed by circumstance. Abraham and Sarah had that faith, and they were able to die with a sense of fulfillment.

To be happy does not mean that you have everything you want or everything you were promised. It means, simply, to have done what you were called on to do, to have made a beginning, and then to have

passed on the baton to the next generation. “The righteous, even in death, are regarded as though they were still alive” (Berakhot 18a) because the righteous leave a living trace in those who come after them.

That was enough for Abraham and Sarah, and it must be enough for us. © 2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"A**nd Abraham was old, well-stricken in age...” (Gen. 24:1) In addition to their shared ideals, the symbiotic relationship between Abraham and Isaac includes a remarkable likeness in physical appearance. Interestingly, one of the consequences of their physical similarity is the basis for one of the most curious statements in the Talmud. On the verse in our portion, “Abraham was old, well-stricken in age”, our Sages conclude that at this point in time, the symptoms of old age were introduced to the world [Talmud Bava Metzia 87a].

The reason? People seeking out Abraham would mistakenly address Isaac, and those seeking out Isaac would approach Abraham. Disturbed by the confusion, Abraham pleads for G-d's mercy to make him look old, and Abraham's plea is answered: a 120 year-old man will never again look like his 20 year-old son!

How do we understand why Abraham was so upset by this case of mistaken identities? After all, what's wrong with being mistaken for your son? Doesn't every aging parent dream of slowing down the aging process and remaining perpetually young?

We find the answers hidden between the lines of this teaching, in which the dialectic of the complex relationship between father and son is expressed. Despite our desire for closeness between the generations, a father must appear different from his son for two reasons.

First, it is so that he can receive the filial obligations due to him as the transmitter of life and tradition. This idea is rooted in the Biblical commandment that the younger generation honors the elder. In fact, the last will and testament of Rabbi Yehudah the Pious (12th Century Germany) forbade anyone from taking a spouse with the same first name as that of their parents. This, explained Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik zt'l, was to avoid giving the impression that a child would ever address a parent by their first name. We may be close to our parents, but they are not to be confused with our friends.

Second, the son must appear different from his father so that the son understands his obligation to add his unique contribution to the wisdom of the past. Abraham pleads with G-d that Isaac's outward appearance should demonstrate that he is not a carbon copy of his father, but rather a unique individual. After

all, when Isaac becomes a patriarch himself, he will represent the trait of gevurah, that part of G-d's manifestation of strength and justice that provides an important counterbalance to Abraham's trait of hesed (loving-kindness).

Abraham, the dynamic and creative world traveler, stands in contrast to the introspective and pensive Isaac, who never stepped beyond the sacred soil of Israel. With great insight, Abraham understood that unless the confusion in appearance ceased, Isaac might never realize the necessity of "coming into his own" and developing his own separate identity.

A Talmudic teaching of the pedagogic relationship between grandparents and grandchildren illustrates the importance of the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between the generations. Rabbi Hiya bar Abba states, "Whoever hears Torah from his grandchild is equivalent to having received it from Sinai!" [Kiddushin 30a] This concept reveals that the line between Sinai and the present can be drawn in both directions. Not only do grandfathers pass down the tradition to their children and grandchildren, but grandchildren pass the tradition up to their forebears.

We can and must glean insights into the Torah from the younger generations. Consider the fascinating Talmudic passage that describes how, when Moses ascended on High to receive the Torah from the Almighty, the master of all prophets found G-d affixing crowns (tagim) to the holy letters of the law [Talmud, Menahot 29b]. When Moses inquired about their significance, G-d answered that the day would arrive when a great Sage, Rabbi Akiva, would derive laws from each twirl and curlicue.

Whereas Moses was given the fundamentals, namely the Biblical words and their crowns (corresponding to the laws and methods of explication and extrapolation), Rabbi Akiva, in a later generation, deduced necessary laws for his day, predicated upon the laws and principles that Moses received at Sinai.

This is the legitimate march of Torah that Maimonides documents in his introduction to his commentary of the Mishna, and it is the methodology by which modern-day responsa deal with issues such as electricity on the Sabbath, brain-stem death/life-support, and in-vitro fertilization, and more. The eternity of Torah demands both the fealty of the children to the teachings of the parents and the opportunity for the children to build on and develop that teaching. This duality of Sinai enhances our present-day experience.

Abraham prays for a distinctive old age to enable Isaac to develop his uniqueness. Sons and fathers are not exactly the same, even if many fathers would like to think that they are. Only if sons understand the similarity, and if fathers leave room for individuality, can the generations become truly united in Jewish eternity. ©2016 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**O**ur matriarchs of Israel were very strong personalities and were formidable women. The life experiences of our mother Sarah are an excellent example of this assessment of character and behavior. From the Torah narrative we are informed early on that she is infertile, unable to conceive and give birth naturally. Nevertheless, we do not hear despair from her. She is willing to bring another woman into her house and to share her husband, so to speak, with that woman in the hope that this would somehow facilitate her own becoming pregnant.

Having Hagar in her home and watching her arrogant behavior forces her to chastise Avraham's attitude towards this complex relationship. She takes action to bring Hagar in line and thus preserve the primacy of her relationship to Avraham. Having escaped from the clutches of the Pharaoh and being aware of the dangers facing a beautiful woman in a cruel and violent society, she nonetheless continues her life's mission of advancing monotheism and morality in a surrounding society that condones evil and violent paganism.

She is wondrously shocked, almost to disbelief, when informed by a stranger who appears as a Bedouin Arab that she will conceive and bear a son to Avraham. At that moment she realizes that she will not only become an "ordinary" mother but rather the matriarchal figure that will preside over an eternal people that will influence all future societies.

To protect and safeguard that eternity, she is forced to expel Yishamael from her home. She does not flinch or flag at performing this distasteful task. In this respect, she is stronger than Avraham, and Heaven, so to speak, backs up her position. She is the woman of iron that acts to guarantee the future survival of the Jewish people.

Sarah serves as the paradigm for the matriarchs that follow her in the Torah narrative of the book of Bereshith. Rivka is certainly the strong force in the house of Yitzchak who recognizes the darkness of Eisav in comparison to the heavenly potential of Yaakov. She shows strength in having to do family triage, so to speak, and knowingly to accept the consequences of such a painful and agonizing decision. The ability and strength that she exhibits, in switching her husband's blessings from the older son to the younger one, is indicative of the certainty of commitment and clarity of vision that so characterized all of the matriarchs of the people of Israel.

Sarah lived on in Rivka and her life's decisions. The same thing is true regarding Rachel and Leah who are more aware of the nefarious and dangerous ways of their father Lavan than is their husband Yaakov. It is they who finally force Yaakov to heed the Heavenly

voice that directs him to leave Aram and return home to the Land of Israel.

Again it is the strength of character and will that decides the ultimate issue, and it is that decision that tips the scales of eternity in favor of Jewish survival. If Chava is recorded as being the mother of all living things, it is Sarah who is the mother of the loving, vibrant and eternal people of Israel. ©2016 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 AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he two portions preceding this week's reading have two distinct characteristics. The portion of Lekh Lekha is nationalistic and Vayera is universal. A cursory glimpse of the narratives in each of these portions supports this thesis.

In Lekh Lekha, G-d chooses Avraham (Chapter 12) and Sarah (Chapter 17) to be the father and mother of the Jewish covenantal community. The specifics of the brit (covenant) are spelled out in detail in the covenant of the pieces (Chapter 15). The other chapters in Lekh Lekha are similarly particularistic. They describe how Avraham separates from those members of his family who have no role in the covenant. He parts with both his nephew Lot (Chapter 13) and his maidservant, Hagar, mother of his child, Yishmael (Chapter 16). The portion also describes how Avraham refuses to take any of the spoils from the King of Sodom. (Chapter 14) Throughout the portion, Avraham insulates himself from the rest of the world, and identifies himself solely as a Jew.

Vayera is quite different. The narrative is universal. Avraham tries to save the non-Jewish city of Sodom. (Chapters 18, 19) He establishes peace with the King of Philistea, Avimelekh. (Chapters 20, 21) He also shows emotion for his child Yishmael, who is not part of the Jewish covenant. (Chapter 21)

It can be suggested that in Vayera, Avraham becomes so involved in the universal that he forgets his nationalistic roots. This is understandable for so often it is the case that in caring about the larger world, we forget our own community.

In order to show Avraham the need to recapture his priorities, a corrective was needed. At the end of Vayera, we read the section of the binding of Isaac. The fundamental message of the episode is the message that if Yitzhak (Isaac) is killed, there is no future for the Jewish people. In other words, if you care about everyone, but, in the process, forget who you are—all is lost.

This trend of the corrective for Avraham reaches its crescendo in this week's portion, Hayei

Sarah. Hayei Sarah is the narrative that translates the covenantal promises of land and children, into reality. Avraham buys land to bury his wife, Sarah. (Chapter 23) He insures continuity by having a wife chosen for Yitzhak. (Chapter 24) Avraham moves inward, reinforcing his relationship with Sarah and Yitzhak thus guaranteeing the future of Am Yisrael.

This is the sweep of the Avraham story. When becoming too universal, Avraham is at risk of forfeiting his nationalistic base. Hayei Sarah comes to remind Avraham that, to be a strong universalist, one must first be a strong nationalist.

It is often the case that people view nationalistic and universalistic agendas as contradictory. The truth is—a strong sense of who we are is a prerequisite for forging a commitment to the whole world.

I've always been wary of those who say they love everyone. When you love everyone, you don't have to love anyone. The movement of the Avraham narrative teaches that the pathway to caring about everyone is to address and insure family, and in this case, national and religious continuity. The path to loving everyone is to love someone. ©2016 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

#### **ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

## **Aninut**

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit  
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**B**efore burial, the mourner is classified as an "Onen", in which he is exempt from performing any positive commandments ("Asseh") such as prayer, Tifillin, and "Kriat Shema". However with regard to any prohibition ("Lo Taaseh") one is still commanded to adhere to.

One may wonder whether this applies to a "Lo Taaseh" that is also associated with an "Asseh" ("Lav Shenitak Laaseh")?

For example, is a "Onen" exempt, from destroying his "Chametz" on Pesach eve (an active Mitzva, thus an "Asseh"), since it is also associated with the "Lo Taaseh" of not being permitted to have Chametz (Leaven) in one's possession on "Pesach" ("Baal Yeraeh Ubaal Yimatze")? In addition if an "Onen" wishes can he be stringent upon himself and fulfill the Mitzvot that he is exempt from performing?

The answers to these questions are dependent on the reason an "Onen" is relieved from performing these Mitzvot. If it is to give honor to the deceased then he cannot be stringent and perform these Mitzvot. However if the reason is that he should be available to performing the necessary preparations for the burial, in such a case if there is someone else that is available, he would be able to be stringent on himself and perform

these mitzvot as well. Finally, if this exemption is based on the fact that one who is involved in performing a Mitzva is exempt from performing another ("Haosek B'mitzva Patur Min Hamitzva"), then should the mourner feel that he has the ability to perform both Mitzvot, he should be permitted!

In our Parsha, Avraham is involved in the preparations to bury his wife Sarah. He not only purchases the cave for the burial, but also the field that this cave is situated on, and also bargains the price with Efron (the owner of the property) and as well becomes involved in the Mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisral ("Yishuv Eretz Yisrael"). Thus we might conclude that just as Avraham involved himself in extraneous mitzvot while he was an "Onen" so also if one feels he is able, he can also be stringent upon himself and perform the Mitzvot "Asseh" that he is ostensibly free from performing. © 2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

### RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**W**ith the American holiday of Thanksgiving coming up this week, I thought to share with you an email exchange with a synagogue president who was upset that a generous donor to the Kol Nidre appeal was miffed at not being thanked. Wrote the president, "charity is not done in anticipation of thanks and recognition." I thought I'd share with you my response and some thoughts on giving charity.

There are different levels of charity and different motivations. Both the giver and the recipient(s) have their obligations and opportunities. If we were all perfect we would give anonymously to the most important causes and not need anyone to know or to thank us. However, even if the donor has elevated himself to this high level of spirituality, it does not free the recipient(s) from their obligation to have gratitude and express gratitude for his benefaction.

The president: "If we give this man a thank you, what about the poorer congregant who gathered every penny he could to give a five dollar donation?"

By struggling to give, the poorer person receives a great reward in the World to Come; his caring and effort deserves thanks, even if his gift is meager. It is incumbent upon us to express gratitude to all who benefit us either with intent or without intent. Ultimately, it is to the Almighty that we must give thanks and recognize His great kindnesses. If we do not recognize -- or feel that we must recognize -- the good that others do for us, likely we will lack in our appreciation of the Almighty's goodness as well.

The president: "The truest form of tzedakah is to give anonymously. Are we wrong in not thanking every member who responds to our Kol Nidre Appeal?"

They deserve thanks; they are helping others. Those who don't express their appreciation are missing

an opportunity, just as those who could give and do not give are missing an opportunity. Too often we get caught up with "What is the minimum the law requires of me?" when the real question should be "What does my Creator, the Master of Universe, want me to aspire to do and to be?"

Perhaps the rich person should not need to be thanked in an ideal world. However, on a real human interaction level, does the president think that people will give if their gifts are not appreciated? I am reminded of the story of Bart Starr, quarterback for the Greenbay Packers. He was noted for his passing game, not his running game. One time he opted to run the ball in from the 3 yard line for a touchdown. He ran back to the bench and excitedly asked the coach, "What did you think about that?" The coach replied, "You want me to thank you and praise you for running the ball?" Bart Starr responded, "Only if you ever want me to do it again."

Some additional thoughts about Tzedakah: The Hebrew word "tzedakah" is commonly translated as "charity" or "tithe." But this is misleading. "Charity" implies that your heart motivates you to go beyond the call of duty. "Tzedakah," however, literally means "righteousness" -- doing the right thing. A "tzaddik," likewise, is a righteous person, someone who fulfills all his obligations, whether in the mood or not.

The Torah says: "Tzedek, tzedek you shall pursue" -- justice, justice you shall pursue (Deut. 16:20). There's a basic human responsibility to reach out to others. Giving of your time and your money is a statement that "I will do whatever I can to help." That's the Jewish concept of Tikun Olam -- repairing the world.

The Torah recommends giving 10 percent. (Hence the popular expression "tithe," meaning one-tenth.) The legal source is Deut. 14:22, and the Bible is filled with examples: Abraham gave Malki-Tzedek one-tenth of all his possessions (Genesis 14:20); Jacob vowed to give one-tenth of all his future acquisitions to the Almighty (Genesis 29:22); there are mandated tithes to support the Levites (Numbers 18:21, 24) and the poor (Deut. 26:12). We should look for opportunities to help others with our actions and with our resources.

A humorous addendum: One person who loves Aish HaTorah half-jokingly told me, "When I give Tzedakah... I love to give alphabetically!" © 2016 Rabbi K. Packouz

### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## Soul Trustee

**W**hen Avraham seeks a wife for his son Yitzchak, he called no one other than his trusted loyal servant, Eliezer. Eliezer was one of the primary soldiers, aiding Avraham during his battle to rescue Lot. Eliezer was considered by Avraham to be his heir apparent until Hashem informed him of the forthcoming

birth of Yitzchak. Eliezer was nicknamed the one who drew and watered from his master's Torah. Simply put, the Torah constantly informs us that Eliezer was Avraham's right-hand-man.

Before sending Eliezer, the Torah tells us that "Avraham told his servant, the elder of his household, who was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions, to swear that he would not take a girl from Canaan for Yitzchak. Eliezer swore in the name of Hashem, the Master of the heaven and the earth" (cf. Genesis 24:3).

Avraham instructed his most trusted aid to get the proper shidach (mate) for Yitzchak. He was to go back to Avraham's hometown. The girl had to come from the right family. She must have been raised in the proper environment. And Avraham warned Eliezer that Yitzchak was not to leave the Land of Canaan. His charge was forceful. He made his trusted servant swear. He used strong language. "Be careful – watch out! Lest you bring my son there!" (Genesis 24:6)

The Torah's reiteration of Eliezer's domestic position in this context is perplexing. Isn't the juxtaposition – the glorifying of Eliezer's position as "the elder of his household, who was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions" – contradictory with the severe scrutiny and pressure that Avraham placed on him in reference to Yitzchak's matrimonial requirements? If Avraham trusted Eliezer for his entire worldly possessions, why did he make him swear in this instance? And if he had to swear in regard to Yitzchak, then why define him here as "the elder of his household, who was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions"? Isn't the fact that he had to swear, obvious evidence that he, in fact, was not in charge?

Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant, the founder of the mussar movement, once stayed at an inn. The inn was quite crowded and the innkeeper realized that he was low on meat. Seeing a distinguished and pious-looking Jew with a beard, the innkeeper approached Reb Yisrael.

"Are you perhaps a shochet? You see, I am running low on meat and I must slaughter a cow." Reb Yisrael was taken aback. "I would love to help," he stammered, "but unfortunately I am not a ritual slaughterer."

The next morning Rabbi Lipkin approached the innkeeper. "I have a tremendous business opportunity. If you were to invest a few hundred rubles with me, I can guarantee a nice return."

The man looked quizzically at the rabbi. "Reb Yid," he stammered. "I hardly know you! How do you expect me to invest with you? Give me a few references, and as many days, and let me check out the deal in its entirety. Then we can meet and I'll make my decision."

"Aha!" Exclaimed the great mussar luminary.

"Just yesterday, you were about to trust me with the ritual slaughter of your cow. You were going to feed you guests with that meat based on the appearance of my frock and beard. Nevertheless, you would not invest a few rubles on those same grounds. Shouldn't one treat his spiritual skepticism on the same level as his financial uncertainties?"

The Be'er Mayim Chayim explains: the Torah specifically states, in the context of Avraham's admonitions, that Eliezer "was the elder of Avraham's household, who was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions."

When buying stocks and bonds, when investing in real estate, when purchasing appliances or furniture, Eliezer had free reign. Yet when it came to Yitzchak's future that esteem was not enough. Avraham made Eliezer swear in the name of Hashem that he would bring a suitable wife for Yitzchak. Avraham's concern for spirituality and his future were by no means on the same level as those he had for his mundane needs. True, Eliezer was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions. But when it came to Avraham's future, when it came to spiritual decisions, even Eliezer was suspect. For when it comes to your spiritual needs, your sole trustee can never become your soul trustee ©2002 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

#### **RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN**

## **The Gift That Keeps on Hinting**

**T**he man took a golden nose ring weighing a beka, and two gold bracelets on her arms, ten gold shekels was their weight.

Rashi: Beka, because it alluded to the mitzvah of *machtzis ha-shekel*, which is described by the Torah as "*beka lagulgoless*." (Shemos 38:26)

Rashi finds it necessary to explain away the beka as a symbol, rather than something significant in its own right, because it grates on what seems to be the plain intent of the verse. The Torah appears to depict Eliezer's gift as a large one. The bracelets, indeed, were formidable at ten shekels. A beka, however, is literally a small fraction of that, since it is identical to a half a shekel. Its value must have been in its symbolic representation.

Eliezer made his point subliminally. He wished to say something about the people that would ensue from the union he planned to bring about between Rivka and Yitzchok. Their progeny would merit involvement with true *avodah*. (The *machtzis ha-shekel* will appear later in two forms that are connected to *avodah*: as the *adanim*, the support bases for the *kerashim*, and as the annual contribution of every Jew to finance the offerings in the *mikdash* throughout the year.)

We need not assume that Rivka understood the meaning of the allusion. Paraphrasing the gemara (Megilah 3A) in a different context, "even though she did not understand, her representative angel understood. Thus, Eliezer's message impacted her on some unconscious level.

Just what was the message? Chazal tell us (Avos 1:2) that the world stands on three things: Torah, avodah, and chesed. Eliezer was witness to her outstanding accomplishment in chesed. He meant to inform her that her chesed made it appropriate for her to achieve the other two pillars, which are related to chesed and flow from it. Because of her chesed, she would be a suitable match for Yitzchok and his superlative avodah. Between the two of them, they could produce a Yaakov, the one who would "dwell in tents" (Bereishis 25:27) and study Torah. (The beka symbolized avodah, as we said before; the two bracelets represented the two tablets of the Aseres Hadibros.)

Moreover, avodah and Torah would follow along from chesed not only because of their organic connection. Klal Yisrael would, of necessity, need to possess all three. The avos serve as a foundation for all of the world. If the world rests on three pillars, then those pillars needed to have been in the firm possession of the avos. In the course of time, the children would carry on the work of the avos; they too, would need to possess all three. Eliezer hinted to Rivka that by becoming one of the matriarchs, she would play a role in creating a people that would, of necessity, lay claim to Torah, avodah, and chesed.

The allusion to the half-shekel of the yearly korbanos conveys an additional message. Hashem authored a complex system of offerings to cover a gamut of Jewish misdeeds. Why? The apparent explanation is that He values the purity and elevation of each Jewish soul, and created an elaborate system of offerings to safeguard and preserve the integrity of each soul by providing ample opportunities for atonement. The beka, therefore, alludes to the perfection of the soul—just as the reference to Torah (by way of the two bracelets) alludes to the perfection of the intellect. (Based on Gur Aryeh, Bereishis 24:22) © 2012 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

**SHLOMO KATZ**

## Hama'ayan

"Va'yihyu chayei Sarah" / "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years..." (23:1) R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; early 14th century) observes: Sarah lived for 37 years after Yitzchak was born, and these were no doubt the happiest years of her life. This is alluded to in the verse: "Va'yihyu chayei Sarah," which could be translated: "Sarah's lifetime was 'va'yihyu'." The gematria of the word "Va'yihyu" (vav-yud-heh-yud-vav)

is 37, alluding to the prime years of Sarah's life. (Derashot R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv)



"Grant me an estate for a burial site with you, that I may bury my dead from before me." (23:4)

If, at first, Avraham asked that a burial site be granted to him, why did he later insist on paying for it? R' Yochanan Luria z"l (15th century) explains:

Just as Avraham was pleased to perform kindness for others, he believed that it would please others if he received kindness from them. Of course, Avraham's request from them was minimal; he asked only a burial place for Sarah—"that I may bury my dead (singular) from before me."

They answered, "In the choicest of our burial places (plural) bury your dead." They offered him a family plot for his descendants. But, they immediately followed this by saying, "Any one (singular) of us will not withhold his burial place (singular) from you." Seeing the size of their offer decline, Avraham realized that their kindness was not sincere, so he offered to pay for Sarah's burial place.

In contrast, R' Luria continues, one who is sincerely kind always delivers more than he offered. In last week's parashah, Avraham offered the angels bread, but he brought them also cheese and meat. Similarly, in this week's parashah, Eliezer asks Rivka for a drink of water and she promptly offers to water his camels as well.

R' Luria adds: This is why Avraham made very clear (in verse 13) that he was buying the entire field from Efron, not just the burial cave. Halachah states that a seller is presumed to be generous, i.e., if a person sells a plot of land which is surrounded on all sides by the seller's field, we presume that the seller intends to give the buyer a right-of-way to his plot. But, that is only a presumption. Where, as here, the seller has demonstrated his stinginess, the presumption might not apply. (Meshivat Nafesh) © 2014 S. Katz & torah.org

### JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

## The Gift of Gratitude

by Rabbi Yonason Goldson

If I were to say, 'G-d, why me?' about the bad things, then I should have said, 'G-d, why me?' about the good things that happened in my life. - Arthur Ashe

There's no arguing that tennis legend Arthur Ashe had good reason to complain. His mother died when he was four years old. His brilliant tennis career was cut short at age 36 by a heart attack, followed by two open-heart bypass operations and one brain surgery, only to discover that he had contracted AIDS via blood transfusion. He died at age 49.

It's extraordinary that a person could suffer so

much and not cry out against his fate with anger and bitterness. But the explanation used to be obvious, before it became increasingly rare: Gratitude.

In our age of entitlement, indulgence, and instant gratification, the very concept of appreciation has all but disappeared. The primary victories of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump evidence our unwillingness to appreciate that the choices we make have real consequences. The assorted outbreaks of irrational exuberance, impotent rage, and crippling melancholy ignited by the election results evidences our inability to appreciate that we have to deal with reality when it arrives.

Perhaps the Founding Fathers anticipated some of this when they fixed our national elections in the first week of November. With the holiday of Thanksgiving already an established tradition throughout New England, the Framers might have recognized the holiday as an ideal curative for restoring perspective in the aftermath of toxic political battles.

Of course, that's only works if we remind ourselves that, once upon a time, Thanksgiving Day was about more than turkey and football.

Who were the Pilgrims? The Puritan settlers who landed on the American continent in 1620 were not adventurers or opportunists. They were devout Protestants seeking a pure, uncorrupted expression of the Christian values they had found wanting in their native England.

They paid a high price for their idealism: After enduring a miserable two-month crossing packed into the belly of the Mayflower, half their number died during that first, brutal, Massachusetts winter. But summer brought hope, and out of hope they declared a festival to thank the Almighty for their survival and for their hard-won religious freedom.

Nor did the Puritans consider their journey finished, but rather just having begun. In their view, it had been the complacency of Christian Europe that led to a dilution and a depreciation of authentic religious values. They recognized that ideals for which we are unwilling to sacrifice will disappear – if not in our lifetime, then certainly in the lifetime of our children.

"As one small candle may light a thousand," Plymouth Governor William Bradford wrote, "so the light here kindled hath shone to many, yea in some sort to our whole nation."

The problem with success is that prosperity itself breeds complacency. Children forget the currency of hard work and self-sacrifice paid by their fathers, and privileges earned become rights to be inherited.

Throughout history, the lesson has been frequently taught but never learned. The Roman nobility used bread and circuses to keep their citizenry pacified, until the empire collapsed under the weight of its own excesses. Communism promised Russian peasants a workers' paradise, until the Soviet Union disintegrated

almost overnight. And Western civilization is locked in a fierce culture war between traditional values and moral anarchy.

Thomas Jefferson wrote that we will not attain freedom from a feather bed. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote that most Americans would prefer a feather bed to freedom. Indeed, the true heroes in any society are those prepared to fight for their ideals, those ready to devote themselves to a higher purpose, those who understand that nothing of value ever comes cheap or easy. When we take freedom for granted, we will not remain free for long.

And the shortest road to taking anything for granted is failure to express appreciation.

In biblical Hebrew, the term for gratitude is *hakoras hatov* --- literally, recognizing the good. One who sees himself as the beneficiary of blessing cannot help but feel a sense of indebtedness and accountability. But one who believes himself entitled to whatever he wants feels no responsibility to anyone other than himself.

And so, with all due respect to Arthur Ashe, he might have phrased it just a little better by saying it this way: It's okay to say, "G-d, why me?" about the bad things, as long as we also say, "G-d, why me?" about the good things.

Thanksgiving offers a perfect opportunity to remind ourselves that it is the struggle that makes life worth living. Comfort and complacency lead to apathy, and a life of apathy is scarcely better than no life at all. If we let it, Thanksgiving reminds us to be grateful not just for the success, but even for the struggle.

Especially for the struggle. ©2016 Rabbi Y. Goldson and [jewishworldreview.com](http://jewishworldreview.com) Rabbi Yonason Goldson is a professional speaker and trainer. Drawing upon his experiences as a hitchhiker, circumnavigator, newspaper columnist, high school teacher, and talmudic scholar, he teaches practical strategies for enhancing communication, ethical conduct, and personal achievement. He is the author of *Proverbial Beauty: Secrets for Success and Happiness from the Wisdom of the Ages* is available on Amazon.

