

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

On 11 August 2017, the world's oldest man passed away, just a month short of his 114th birthday – making him one of the ten longest-lived men since modern record-keeping began. If you knew nothing else about him than this, you would be justified in thinking that he had led a peaceful life, spared of fear, grief and danger.

The actual truth is the opposite. The man in question was Yisrael Kristal, Holocaust survivor. Born in Poland in 1903, he survived four years in the Lodz ghetto, and was then transported to Auschwitz. In the ghetto, his two children died. In Auschwitz, his wife was killed. When Auschwitz was liberated, he was a walking skeleton weighing a mere 37 kilos. He was the only member of his family to survive.

He was raised as a religious Jew and stayed so all his life. When the war was over and his entire world destroyed, he married again, this time to another Holocaust survivor. They had children. They made aliyah to Haifa. There he began again in the confectionery business, as he had done in Poland before the war. He made sweets and chocolate. He became an innovator. If you have ever had Israeli orange peel covered in chocolate, or liqueur chocolates shaped like little bottles and covered with silver foil, you are enjoying one of the products he originated. Those who knew him said he was a man with no bitterness in his soul. He wanted people to taste sweetness.

In 2016, at the age of 113, he finally celebrated his bar mitzvah. A hundred years earlier, this had proved impossible. By then, his mother was dead and his father was fighting in the First World War. With an almost poetic sense of fittingness, Yisrael died on erev Shabbat Ekev, the parsha that includes the second paragraph of the Shema with its commands to wear tefillin and teach Torah to your children, “so that you and your children may live long in the land that the Lord

swore to your ancestors.”

Yisrael Kristal faithfully did both. On his bar mitzvah he joked that he was the world's oldest tefillin-wearer. He gathered his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren under his tallit and said, “Here's one person, and look how many people he brought to life. As we're all standing here under my tallit, I'm thinking: six million people. Imagine the world they could have built.” This was an extraordinary man.

His life sheds light on one of the most tantalising verses in the Torah. Describing the death of Abraham, our parsha says that he “breathed his last and died in good old age, old and satisfied” (Gen. 25:8). His is the most serene death in the Torah. Yet consider his life, fraught as it was with trial after trial.

To pursue the call of God, he had to say goodbye to his land, his birthplace and his father's house and travel to an unknown destination. Twice, famine forced him into exile, where his life was in danger. Promised countless children – as many as the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky – he remained childless until old age. Then God told him to send away his son by Sarah's handmaid Hagar. And if that trial were not heartbreaking enough, God then told him to sacrifice his only son with Sarah, Isaac, the one whom God had told him would be his spiritual heir and bearer of the covenant into the future.

Seven times promised a land, when Sarah died, he owned not a single square inch of territory in which to bury her, and had to entreat the Hittites to let him buy a field and burial cave. This was a life of disappointed hopes and delayed fulfillments. What kind of man was this that the Torah can say that he died “in good old age, old and satisfied”?

I learned the answer to this question through a series of life-changing encounters with Holocaust survivors. They were among the strongest, most life-affirming people I have ever met. For years I wondered how they were able to survive at all, having seen what they saw and known what they knew. They had lived through the deepest darkness ever to have descended on a civilisation.

Eventually I realised what they had done.

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in memory of our beloved mother
Chana Rosenberg A”H
on her sixth yartzeit
חנה בת יוסף ע”ה
נפטרה כ”ג מר חשוון תשע”ב
bv Itzv and Ruchie Weisbera

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in honor of the bar mitzvah of our grandson
Yardein Yisrael Simcha Rieder
by
Rosalyn & Stephen Flatow

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Almost without exception, when the war was over, they focused with single-minded intensity on the future. Strangers in a strange land, they built homes and careers, married and had children and brought new life into the world.

Often they did not talk about their experiences during the Shoah, even to their spouses, their children and their closest friends. This silence lasted, in many cases, for as long as fifty years. Only then, when the future they had built was secure, did they allow themselves to look back and bear witness to what they had suffered and seen. Some of them wrote books. Many of them went around schools, telling their story so that the Holocaust could not be denied.¹ First they built a future. Only then did they allow themselves to remember the past.

That is what Abraham did in this week's parsha. He had received three promises from God: children, a land, and the assurance that he would be the father, not of one nation but of many nations (Gen. 17:4-5). At the age of 137, he had one unmarried son, no land, and had fathered no nations. He uttered not a single word of complaint. It seems that he realized that God wanted him to act, not to wait for God to do the work for him.

So, when Sarah died, he bought the first plot in what would become the Holy Land, the field and cave of Machpelah. Then he instructed his servant to find a wife for Isaac, his son, so that he might live to see the first Jewish grandchildren. Lastly, in his old age, he married again and had six sons, who would eventually become progenitors of many nations. He did not, except briefly, sit and mourn the past. Instead he took the first steps toward building the future.

That, in his own way, is what Yisrael Kristal did – and that is how a survivor of Auschwitz lived to become the world's oldest man. He too died "in good old age, old and satisfied."

That is what the Jewish people did collectively when, a mere three years after standing eyeball-to-

¹ For two fascinating portraits of how encounters with the Holocaust and its survivors were transformative for young Americans, see the films *Paper Clips* (2004) and *Freedom Writers* (2007).

eyeball with the angel of death at Auschwitz, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the Jewish State in our people's ancient homeland, the land of Israel. Had world Jewry sat passively and wept from then till now for the murdered generations of European Jewry, it would have been an understandable reaction. But it did not. It was as if the Jewish people had said collectively, in the words of King David, "I will not die but live" (Ps. 118:17), thereby giving testimony to the God of life. That is why the West's oldest nation is still young, a world leader in life-saving medicine, disaster relief, and life-enhancing technology.

This is a transformative idea. To survive tragedy and trauma, first build the future. Only then, remember the past. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**W**hen Rebecca looked up and saw Isaac, she fell from the camel. And she asked the servant: 'What man is this walking in the field to meet us?' And the servant responded, 'It is my master.' And she took her veil and covered herself" [Gen. 24:62-65].

The fascinating marriage of Isaac and Rebecca—from the circumstances surrounding their arranged nuptials to the devastating family split over their twin sons' bitter rivalry—contains vitally important lessons for couples in every generations. On the one hand, the Torah's description of the tenderness of their marriage is extraordinary: "And Isaac brought [Rebecca] into the tent of his mother, Sarah...and [Rebecca] became his wife; and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted over the loss of his mother" [ibid., 24:67].

The Torah also mentions the impassioned prayers of Isaac on behalf of Rebecca, who was struggling with infertility [ibid., 25:21], as well as their lovemaking while in the land of Gerar [ibid., 26:8].

Nevertheless, and tragically, what seems to be missing from their relationship is open communication. Perhaps no better evidence for the distance between them is their un verbalized dispute surrounding the bekhora, the spiritual blessings bequeathed from father to son.

Differences of opinion between parents will always exist, but if the father prefers Esau and the mother prefers Jacob regarding an issue as momentous as who will don the mantle of spiritual heir to Abraham, ought there not be a discussion and an opportunity to examine the true nature of their sons' very different characters in order to arrive at a consensus?

Instead, Rebecca resorts to ruse, casting the

otherwise-guileless Jacob [A1] into a role of deception for which he is unnaturally suited. Not only does he perpetrate an act that will haunt him for the rest of his life, but what begins as a split between brothers comes to signify the far greater division between Jews and gentiles throughout history.

Why must Rebecca resort to deception? Why could she not simply have raised the issue with Isaac? The answer can be found in the initial encounter between Isaac and Rebecca, which reflects the gulf that separates them. Isaac had been meditating in the fields, and with the approach of Eliezer and the bride-to-be, he raises his eyes:

“When Rebecca looked up and saw Isaac, she fell from the camel. And she asked the servant: ‘What man is this walking in the field to meet us?’ And the servant responded, ‘It is my master.’ And she took her veil and covered herself” [ibid., 24:62-65].

The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Berlin (19th Century Poland), in his commentary Ha’Emek Davar, explains that Rebecca fell because she had never before seen a religious personality, a spiritual persona who communed with nature and actually spoke before God.

So awesome was the sight of Isaac transformed by prayer that she was literally knocked off her feet. Compared to the lying and cheating world of her father, Betuel, and her brother, Laban, Isaac projected a vision of purity with which Rebecca had no previous experience.

When Eliezer revealed the man’s identity, she took the veil and covered herself, not only as a sign of modesty, but as an expression of her unworthiness. From that moment on, the veil between them was never removed. She felt she could never speak to her husband as an equal. She never felt that she had the right to offer a dissenting opinion.

Granted that the veil comes to symbolize the distance between their worlds, why was Isaac unable to bridge that gap?

The harrowing experience of the Akedah left Isaac in a permanent state of shock. In fact, a part of him always remained behind on Mount Moriah, as hinted at in the final verse of the Akedah: “Abraham returned to his young men, and together they went to Be’er Sheva, and Abraham resided in Be’er Sheva’ [ibid., 22:19].

Where is Isaac? Why is he not mentioned? Very likely, the verse alludes to the fact that only Abraham came down from the mountain, while Isaac, or part of him, remained behind on the altar. Thus it is not surprising that the traumatized Isaac became a silent, non-communicative survivor. Indeed, Elie Wiesel referred to Isaac as the first survivor.

And if neither wife nor husband could speak openly with each other, there could be no real communication between them.

In my many years of offering marital counseling, I am never put off when one partner screams at the other. As a wife once said to her husband who complained that she yelled at him too often: “With whom then should I let out my frustrations? The stranger next door?” Of course, I am not advocating shouting, but a far more serious danger sign is silence—non-communication—between the couple.

A crucial lesson, then, from the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca is that we must spend a lifetime working on ourselves and on our relationship with our spouse. Most importantly, we must be honest with ourselves and honest with our spouse: loving them as we love ourselves, and learning how to disagree lovingly and respectfully. ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Avraham and Sarah have a loyal and devoted trustworthy servant named Eliezer. His abilities and nobility of character enable him to be entrusted with the most personal and sensitive of assignments and missions. His name has been used by Jewish families for thousands of years as an honorable name for their sons.

In fact, our great teacher Moshe named his younger son Eliezer as a remembrance of God’s saving him from the vengeance of Pharaoh. Yet this original Eliezer who occupies such a significant role in this week’s Torah reading somehow disappears into the mist of history.

What was the future of this great disciple of Avraham? What of his family and progeny? Is he part of our continuing story or is he like Lot and Lavan, side characters who eventually depart the scene of Jewish eternity?

Neither Torah nor tradition informs us as to these matters. Eliezer’s end like his beginning remains a complete mystery to us. But his name is preserved in the Jewish world regularly and eternally and that is no small matter of importance.

It is interesting to note that this is the way of the Torah regarding many great personalities in Jewish history who are mentioned in Scripture but remain basically unknown. Their names are remembered and referenced throughout the generations but their lives and experiences remain hidden to us. To a certain extent they are like the “unknown soldier,” the one who sacrifices all for the cause but whose own story remains a mystery to later generations.

In a comment to a later narrative that appears in the Torah, Ramban points out that God, so speak, uses unknown or “ordinary” people to propel forward great historical and spiritual processes. Eliezer is no ordinary person but his personal story, whatever it truly was, is not essential to the message of continuity of the

generations that created the Jewish people.

He, like all humans, had a purpose and mission in life. He was to further and spread the faith and ideas of Abraham in a disinterested pagan world. He did his part by loyally fulfilling the instructions of Abraham in finding the proper mate for Isaac. He may not have realized how eternally important that mission and task really was, but the Torah devotes much space and detail to the matter, proving its importance.

He accomplished the goal set before him by history and circumstance. His name was and is preserved throughout all later Jewish generations though his personal biography itself remains shrouded in silence and secrecy. The Torah, like life itself, is often enigmatic, concentrating on the forest and not dwelling on the individual trees. Appreciating this basic fact will go a long way in allowing us to have a proper understanding of Torah and its message to us in all times and ages.

The Torah, which is very detailed at times, nevertheless presents us with the broad and timeless view of people and events. We should always remember this for we are all participants in the drama of the Jewish people and its wondrous story. ©2017 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Years ago I was privileged to be in Rav Ahron Soloveichik's shiur (Torah class). Although most know him for his extraordinary Talmudic knowledge, it was his Thursday classes of Hashkafah in which he taught the portion of the week that I especially loved.

To this day I remember the class he gave on this week's portion. He asked a very simple question: Why did Avraham have to acquire land - the cave of Mahpelah in Hevron - to bury Sarah? Over and over God had promised the land to Avraham. The acquisition process seems unnecessary.

Here, Rav Ahron distinguished between legal ownership and psychological ownership. The former means that one has the legal contractual right to a particular object or piece of land. The latter means however, that the property which is mine was acquired through personal effort, extraordinary input and a serious expense of energy.

From this perspective, an inherited business is legally owned. It's the heir's even if the inheritor has not toiled in the business. But it is only psychologically mine if I have worked through my own efforts to create the business.

In this spirit, the Talmud declares that if one is

given a bushel of apples to watch and the apples begin to rot, it is best not to sell them for good apples. The Talmud explains that the owner would prefer to have returned the original apples that he produced rather than those that were the work of someone else. (Baba Metzia 38a)

I can still hear Rav Ahron as he illustrated this point with a delightful tale. In Europe, Yeshivot were often engaged in good-natured competition. The Telshe Yeshiva was known for its sharp students who were geniuses in pilpul (sharp analysis) and whose logic sometimes turned on the splitting of a hair.

As the story goes, a student in a competing Yeshiva declared that in Telshe they'd even ask how tea became sweet. Is it the pouring of sugar into the water or is it the actual stirring. The conclusion reached in laughter was that at Telshe it would be said that it is the stirring that makes the tea sweet but with one pre-requisite - that the sugar was first placed in the tea.

With a smile Rav Ahron declared that for him it is the stirring that is paramount. When you stir the tea you are using energy and thus you feel you have invested part of yourself in the making of the tea.

This difference between legal and psychological ownership especially resonates for me. I appreciate having had the opportunity to grow along with the congregation at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale – the Bayit, and with the students at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and Yeshivat Maharat. The Torah I treasure most is that which I have the privilege to work through -- realizing what Rav Ahron would call psychological ownership.

And so it is with life. And so it is with that that is most precious. The more we toil, the more we struggle, the more it becomes ours. ©2017 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

Before 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 DAVID S. LEVIN

Why is Eliezer Almost Anonymous?

It may seem unusual that one of the central figures in our parasha is a person whose name is not even mentioned. And yet, everyone knows his name and his position in life. This is even more amazing since his name is mentioned only once prior to this parasha. We find that his name is related in many midrashim about events that happened in prior parshiot even though it does not appear in the Torah directly in these contexts. According to midrash he is the person who goes out with Avraham to fight the four kings since the gematria (numerical value) of his name is equal to the number stated of Avraham’s students who went with him into battle. According to midrash again, he is one of the two lads that accompanied Avraham when he went to sacrifice his son on Har haMoriah. He is first introduced in the Torah by the title “ben meshek beiti, the steward of my house,” referring to the house of Avraham. He is then called “hu damesek Eliezer, the Damascene, Eliezer”. This is the first that we learn of his real name. The Aznayim L’Torah explains that this

title means that he was from Damascus, or that he fought the kings up to Damascus, and in Gemara Yoma it is seen as a contraction of the words “doleh umashkeh, he would draw water and give drink.” Although his titles are numerous, little is known directly about him, and yet he plays the central role in finding a wife for Avraham’s son, Yitzchak.

Eliezer is first introduced in this parasha by the title “avdo, his servant” followed immediately by “z’kan beito, the elder of his house” and “hamosheil b’chol asher lo, who controlled all that was his.” Throughout the story of his quest to find a bride for Yitzchak, he is called ha’eved, the slave, ha’ish, the man, and most importantly eved Avraham, the slave of Avraham. It is only through our Rabbis that we know him as Eliezer because his actions warrant us knowing his correct name. But let us examine his various names and we might begin to understand why his name is not mentioned directly except that one time in parashat Lech-L’cha.

As the “ben meshek beiti”, Eliezer was more likely to come in direct contact with the family than if he were a field slave or a servant whose responsibilities laid elsewhere. As the “doleh umashkeh”, he was a servant directly involved in serving food and drink to his master. In this capacity, he probably assisted Avraham to influence others to believe in one G-d, as Avraham often performed this task in conjunction with the mitzvah of hachnasat orchim, the greeting of guests with food and drink. Eliezer would stand nearby as Avraham explained Hashem to these travelers. Eliezer also became a monotheist and a Tzaddik as he emulated Avraham in everything he did, not just because he was his slave, but because Eliezer recognized the pure character of Avraham. This change propelled him now from ha’eved, the most important slave, to the title of ish, a man in his own right. This growth in Eliezer is also reflected in his responsibilities. Eliezer is a student of Avraham in the war with the four kings. He becomes the director of Avraham’s household. He is grouped with Yishmael as one of Avraham’s two lads who accompany him to the Akeidah, the Binding of Yitzchak. In our parasha, he is given the daunting responsibility of choosing a wife for Yitzchak.

The last of the titles given to Eliezer is given to him by himself. He refers to himself as eved Avraham, Avraham’s servant, when speaking to Rivka’s family. What is the significance of this final identification of Eliezer? When Eliezer refers to himself as eved Avraham he is not speaking of himself as simply the servant of Avraham. As a slave he is forced to follow the command of his master but he may not be doing this willingly. Eliezer has observed Avraham for many years and has seen the way that Avraham serves Hashem. Avraham serves Hashem with the fullness of his being. He does not serve Hashem reluctantly but

seeks only to serve with all of his heart. Just as Avraham is a true eved Hashem, so Eliezer chooses to be a true eved Avraham. And perhaps through serving Avraham completely he can serve Hashem completely in the same way. Eliezer has given himself completely to the Will of his Master and through his master to the Will of Hashem.

There is one final question that must be asked. When Eliezer leaves with Rivka and approaches Yitzchak's land, Rivka once again refers to him as eved, without tying that title to Avraham's name. Does this reference now negate the rise in stature which Eliezer has accomplished? This is truly the irony of Eliezer's situation but which proves the true elevation of Eliezer's character. We have seen that Eliezer gave himself completely to the Will of Avraham and through Avraham to the Will of Hashem. We must remember that Eliezer is a Canaanite slave. We might think that at the level he has now reached he should be freed and allowed to become a full Jew. But we also know that it is forbidden to free a Canaanite slave. By acknowledging this restriction, Eliezer has demonstrated that he understands and accepts Hashem's Will that he remain a slave even though he has risen so high spiritually. By acknowledging the title eved once again, Eliezer demonstrates that his own wishes are subordinate to Hashem's wishes. This then is the final spiritual growth of Eliezer.

Eliezer realized that his personal aspirations must coordinate with Hashem's Torah. He understood his position in life and was willing to accept the limitations that were placed on him by the Torah. We each face similar tests in our own lives. Our desires and aspirations lead us to accomplish much in our lives, yet they can also lead us away from what the Torah demands from us. It is that conflict which defines our choices and sets our future. May we all be zocheh to understand what Hashem asks from us, and may we be capable of making the right decisions with every challenge we face. ©2017 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

“I will adjure you by God, the God of the heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites...” (Bereishis 23:3)

We know how Adam HaRishon found his wife. Process of elimination. She was the only human female in the world at the time, so his choice was limited. No shadchan needed. Fortunately for the first man, she was custom made just for him.

We DON'T know how Noach met his wife, or even how Avraham and Sarah decided they were soul mates and married. It is only in this week's parsha with the selection of Yitzchak's wife, that we are privy to the process that brought these two righteous soul mates

together, the future parents of Ya'akov AND Eisav.

That's right, AND Eisav.

Avraham was very specific about who Eliezer brought back home to marry Yitzchak. He made Eliezer vow not to deviate from his instructions, as they later did with the Kohen Gadol in the Second Temple period. It wasn't just about finding a future daughter-in-law with whom Avraham could be comfortable. It was about finding someone who could give birth to the foundation of the future Jewish people.

And Eisav too?

The truth is, yes. Apparently, Eisav the "Rasha" was supposed to have been Eisav the "Tzaddik," the fourth of four Forefathers. It was true, the older one, Leah, was meant for the older one, Eisav, and the younger one, Rachel, was destined for the younger one, Ya'akov. It's just that something went horribly wrong, and though Leah remained worthy, Eisav did not.

It is amazing to think about how the Jewish people have always been their own WORST enemy, and this case, quite inadvertently. Two of our biggest enemies have historically been Yishmael, now the Arabs, and Eisav, eventually all the Christians. Ironically, their origins are the same as ours.

Was it something Yitzchak and Rivkah did, or didn't do? What about Yishmael? How did he become so dangerous? True, his mother was Hagar, an Egyptian princess. His father was Avraham, and he grew up in a house of righteousness and prophecy. Why did it not rub off more than it did?

And what happened to Menashe? His father, Chizkiah HaMelech, was almost Moshiah. Chizkiah turned the entire country back to Torah, cleaning up the spiritual mess left behind by his father. Menashe's mother was the daughter of Yeshayahu the prophet. You don't get a much more of an Aishes Chayil than that!

Yet, Menashe became a rasha. He undid all the good his father had accomplished, and returned the nation BACK to the evil ways of his grandfather. What had been missing from his chinuch? After all, Chizkiah even knew through prophecy what his son COULD become, and he must have tried with all his might to avoid it.

As if to make matters even more confusing, what works with some children does not always work with others. Some children can grow up in a house where everything seems to be on track, and still go against the spiritual grain. Others grow up in the most unfitting spiritual environments, and yet find their ways in Torah. There are a lot of surprises in both directions.

Of course this is not only true with respect to raising children. It also has to do with making money as well. Some people seem to make money even without trying, while others who try so hard to get ahead do not succeed.

We have no questions regarding those who work hard and succeed, or those who do not and fail. We expect that. Nevertheless, it was part of Moshe Rabbeinu's question to God. He didn't only ask God why some righteous people experience bad, and some evil people receive good. Once that was a question, he also wanted to know why some righteous people DO receive good and some evil people DO experience bad, since it was no longer an absolute. By what criteria are such outcomes decided?

It's not clear from the Talmud if Moshe Rabbeinu was answered. If he was, he did not pass on the information to us, at least not on a Pshat level. There IS no Pshat level for this answer. It is ONLY on the level of Sod, Kabbalah, that a person can even begin to approach an understanding of how God runs this world. On the level of Sod, there is at least a hint to the philosophical undercurrent of history.

Think about it for a moment. God is infinite. Do we even know what that means? His thoughts and plans incorporate much more than we'll ever know or relate to. His Essence is so beyond us that we can't even talk about it without becoming guilty of idol worship on some level. His perfection is beyond any concept of perfection that even the greatest human kind can comprehend. And we think we have the wherewithal to understand history?

Kabbalah has names for the intellectual abyss that separates our perception from God's, but they all mean the same thing. As much as we DO understand life and history, Divine mysteries abound and always will. There are things going on, that impact our lives that are rooted in levels so sublime that we can't even sense them. We're not even aware of them, for the most part, until they leave their mark through some event that just does not make sense to us.

This is why Torah is so essential. There is so much we cannot control in history. Such things are too far beyond us. So, God gave us the Torah and said, "Here, follow this. If you stick to the plan, at least you will stay out of My way and not interfere with the good I am arranging for you. I may even make it look as if you are a partner in the process."

So, yeah, Eisav was born from Yitzchak and Rivkah. Sure, he became one of the most evil people in history. But, at least Avraham went to his grave knowing that he had done all he HAD to do, to assure a positive outcome when choosing a wife for Yitzchak. The rest, he knew, was up to God and part of a Master Plan that was FAR beyond his ability to know. ©2017 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah portion begins: "And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years. These were the years of the life of Sarah."

Why does the Torah, which does not waste words, add the seemingly repetitive verse, "These were the years of the life of Sarah"?

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

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

The quality of one's life is not dependent on external situations. There are people whose lives seem to run quite smoothly. Nevertheless, they tend to evaluate minor frustrations as tragedies and therefore view their lives in negative terms. The Torah ideal is to be aware that the purpose of your life is to perfect your character. Every life situation is an opportunity for growth. Sarah mastered this level of consciousness. Therefore, at the end of her life, which was constantly devoted to growth, it could be said about her that all her years were good.

This lesson is most important for us to internalize. See the growth possible in every life event. In each difficult situation ask yourself, "How can I become a better person because of what happened?" *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And 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, renamed 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

