

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The language of the Torah is, in Erich Auerbach's famous phrase, "fraught with background." Behind the events that are openly told are shadowy stories left for us to decipher. Hidden beneath the surface of Parshat Chayei Sarah, for example, is another story, alluded to only in a series of hints. There are three clues in the text.

The first occurs when Abraham's servant is returning with the woman who is to become Isaac's wife. As Rebecca sees Isaac in the distance, we are told that he is "coming from the way of Be'er-lahai-ro'i" (Gen. 24:62) to meditate in the field. The placement is surprising. Thus far we have situated the patriarchal family at Be'ersheva, to which Abraham returns after the binding of Isaac, and Hebron, where Sarah dies and is buried. What is this third location, Be'er-lahai-ro'i, and what is its significance?

The second is the extraordinary final stage of Abraham's life. In chapter after chapter we read of the love and faithfulness Abraham and Sarah had for one another. Together they embarked on a long journey to an unknown destination. Together, they stood against the idolatry of their time. Twice, Sarah saved Abraham's life by pretending to be his sister. They hoped and prayed for a child and endured the long years of childlessness until Isaac was born. Then Sarah's life draws to a close. She dies. Abraham mourns and weeps for her and buys a cave in which she is buried, and he is to be buried beside her. We then expect to read that Abraham lived out the rest of his years alone before being placed beside "Sarah his wife" in the Cave of Machpelah (Gen. 25:9).

Unexpectedly, however, once Isaac is married, Abraham marries a woman named Keturah and has six children by her. We are told nothing else about this woman, and the significance of the episode is unclear. The Torah does not include mere incidental details. We

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in memory of our beloved mother
Chana Rosenberg A"H
on her seventh yartzeit
חנה בת יוסף ע"ה
נפטרה כ"ג מר חשון תשע"ב
by Itzy and Ruchie Weisberg

have no idea, for example, what Abraham looked like. We do not even know the name of the servant he sent to find a wife for Isaac. Tradition tells us that it was Eliezer, but the Torah itself does not. What then is the significance of Abraham's second marriage and how is it related to the rest of the narrative?

The third clue to the hidden story is revealed in the Torah's description of Abraham's death: And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the Cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased of the children of Het. There was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife. (Gen. 25:8-10)

Ishmael's presence at the funeral is surprising. After all, he had been sent away into the desert years before, when Isaac was young. Until now, we have assumed that the two half-brothers have lived in total isolation from one another. Yet the Torah places them together at the funeral without a word of explanation. The sages piece together these three puzzling details to form an enthralling story.

First, they point out that Be'er-lahai-ro'i, the place from which Isaac was coming when Rebecca saw him, is mentioned once before in Genesis (16:14): It is the spot where Hagar, pregnant and fleeing from Sarah, encountered an angel who told her to return. It is indeed she who gives the place its name, meaning "the well of the Living One who sees me" (Gen. 16:14). The Midrash thus says that Isaac went to Be'er-lahai-ro'i in search of Hagar. When Isaac heard that his father was seeking a wife for him, he said, "Shall I be married while my father lives alone? I will go and return Hagar to him."¹

Hence the sages' answer to the second question: who was Keturah? She was, they said, none other than Hagar herself. It is not unusual for people in



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¹ Bereishit Rabbah 60:14.

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
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the Torah to have more than one name: Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, had seven. Hagar was called Keturah because "her acts gave forth fragrance like incense (ketoret)."² This indeed integrates Abraham's second marriage as an essential component of the narrative.

Hagar did not end her days as an outcast. She returned, at Isaac's prompting and with Abraham's consent, to become the wife of her former master. This also changes the painful story of the banishment of Ishmael.

We know that Abraham did not want to send him away – Sarah's demand was "very grievous on Abraham's sight on account of his son" (Gen. 21:11). Nonetheless, God told Abraham to listen to his wife. There is, however, an extraordinary Midrash, in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, which tells of how Abraham twice visited his son. On the first occasion, Ishmael was not at home. His wife, not knowing Abraham's identity, refused the stranger bread and water. Ishmael, continues the Midrash, divorced her and married a woman named Fatimah. This time, when Abraham visited, again not disclosing his identity, the woman gave him food and drink. The Midrash then says "Abraham stood and prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He, and Ishmael's house became filled with all good things. When Ishmael returned, his wife told him about it, and Ishmael knew that his father still loved him."³ Father and son were reconciled.

The name of Ishmael's second wife, Fatimah, is highly significant. In the Koran, Fatimah is the daughter of Mohammad. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer is an eighth-century work, and it is here making an explicit, and positive, reference to Islam.

The hidden story of Chayei Sarah has immense consequence for our time. Jews and Muslims both trace their descent from Abraham – Jews through Isaac, Muslims through Ishmael. The fact that both sons stood together at their father's funeral tells us that they too were reunited.

Beneath the surface of the narrative in Chayei

² Bereishit Rabbah 51:4.

³ Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer 30.

Sarah, the sages read the clues and pieced together a moving story of reconciliation between Abraham and Hagar on the one hand, Isaac and Ishmael on the other. Yes, there was conflict and separation; but that was the beginning, not the end. Between Judaism and Islam there can be friendship and mutual respect. Abraham loved both his sons, and was laid to rest by both. There is hope for the future in this story of the past. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**M**y lord hearken to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me." (Genesis 23:14)

A significant part of this Torah portion deals with Abraham's purchase of the Hebron grave-site from the Hittites in order to bury Sarah, his beloved wife. In painstaking detail, the text describes how the patriarch requests to buy the grave, how the Hittites wish him to take it for free, and – when Efron the Hittite finally agrees to make it a sale – he charges Abraham the inflated and outlandish sum of four hundred silver shekels. The Midrash seems perplexed: why expend so much ink and parchment – the entire chapter 23 of the book of Genesis – over a Middle-Eastern souk sale? Moreover, what is the significance in the fact that the very first parcel of land in Israel acquired by a Jew happens to be a grave-site? And finally, how can we explain the irony of the present day Israeli-Palestinian struggle over grave-sites – the Ma'arat HaMakhpela in Hebron where our matriarchs and patriarchs are buried and Joseph's grave-site in Shekhem – which were specifically paid for in the Bible by our patriarchs?

In order to understand our biblical portion, it is important to remember that throughout the ancient world – with the single exception of Athens – the only privilege accorded a citizen of any specific country was the 'right' of burial, as every individual wanted his body to ultimately merge with the soil of his familial birthplace. Abraham insists that he is a stranger as well as a resident (ger toshav) of Het; he lives among, but is not one of, the Hittites. Abraham is a proud Hebrew; he refuses the 'right' of burial and demands to pay – even if the price is exorbitant – for the establishment of a separate Hebrew cemetery. Sarah's separate grave-site symbolizes her separate and unique identity. Abraham wants to ensure that she dies as a Hebrew and not a Hittite. In effect, the Hittites are more than willing to give Sarah a free grave, because they want to claim her as a Hittite; Abraham will never allow that!

Interestingly, the Talmud uses the same verb (kikha) to describe Abraham's purchase of a grave-site and to derive the law that a legal engagement can only

take place when the groom gives the bride a ring (or a minimum amount of money) to effectuate the marriage. Perhaps our tradition is suggesting that marriage requires a husband to take ultimate responsibility for his wife – especially in terms of securing her separate and unique identity – even beyond her life and into her grave.

This parasha reminds me of two poignant stories. First, when I was a very young rabbi, one of the first “emergency” questions I received was from an older woman leaning on a young Roman Catholic priest for support. She tearfully explained that her husband – who had died just a few hours earlier – was in need of a Jewish burial place. He had converted to Catholicism prior to having married her, and agreed that their children would be raised as Catholics. The Roman Catholic priest was, in fact, their son and she had never met any member of her husband’s Jewish family. Even though they lived as Catholics during thirty-five years of their married life, his final deathbed wish had been to be buried in a Jewish cemetery....

Second, when my good and beloved friend Zalman Bernstein z'l was still living in America and beginning his return to Judaism, he asked me to find him a grave-site in the Mount of Olives cemetery. With the help of the Hevra Kadisha (Sacred Fellowship) of Jerusalem, we set aside a plot. When he inspected it, however, he was most disappointed: ‘You cannot see the Temple Mount,’ he shouted, in his typical fashion. I attempted to explain calmly that after 120 years, he either wouldn’t be able to see anything anyway, or he would be able to see everything no matter where his body lay. ‘You don’t understand,’ he countered. ‘I made a mess of my life so far and did not communicate to my children the glories of Judaism. The grave is my future and my eternity. Perhaps, when my children come to visit me there, if they would be able to see the holiest place in the world, the Temple Mount, they will be inspired by the Temple and come to appreciate what I could not adequately communicate to them while I was alive...’

For each individual, their personal grave-site represents the past and the future. Where and how individuals choose to be buried speaks volumes about how they lived their past lives and the values they aspired to. Similarly, for a nation, the grave-sites of its founders and leaders represent the past and reveal the signposts of the highs and lows in the course of the nation’s history. The way a nation regards its grave-sites and respects its history will determine the quality of its future.

Indeed, the nation that chooses to forget its past has abdicated its future, because it has erased the tradition of continuity which it ought have transmitted to the future; the nation that does not properly respect the grave-sites of its founding patriarchs will not have the privilege of hosting the lives of their children and

grandchildren. Perhaps this is why the Hebrew word, *kever*, literally a grave, is likewise used in rabbinical literature for womb. And the Hebrew name *Rvkh* (Rebecca), the wife of Isaac who took Sarah’s place as the guiding matriarch, is comprised of the same letters as *hkvr*, the grave and/or the womb, the future which emerges from the past. Is it then any wonder that the first parcel of land in Israel purchased by the first Hebrew was a grave-site, and that the fiercest battles over ownership of the land of Israel surround the graves of our founding fathers and mothers? And perhaps this is why our Sages deduce the proper means for engagement from Abraham’s purchase of a grave-site for Sarah – Jewish familial future must be built upon the life style and values of our departed matriarchs and patriarchs. The grave is also the womb; the past is mother to the future. ©2018 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The loss of one's beloved spouse, especially after many years and decades of marriage and shared life, is always a traumatic and shattering blow. Those of us, who unfortunately have also experienced this occurrence of Avraham's life in our own lives can testify as to the emotional damage and even physical harm that this sad experience can occasion.

We see from the life of our father Jacob that even decades later he reminds his children and himself of the pain and suffering caused by the death of his beloved wife, Rachel. In essence, it seems that Jacob never again was the same person after the death of Rachel. However, Avraham apparently dealt with the death of Sarah in a more stoic fashion. The Torah itself indicates this by inference, when it wrote concerning Avraham's reaction to the tragedy by using a small letter *kaf* in its description of the grief and weeping of Avraham over the death of Sarah.

It is not that Avraham is less grieved at the loss of Sarah than Jacob was at the death of Rachel, It is rather that after all of the challenges and trials that Avraham had already endured, his attitude towards life and its vicissitudes was now always one of looking forward and never dwelling on the past.

Those who live exclusively in the past are doomed to self-pity and great emotional angst. This only causes a sense of victimhood and hopelessness. It reflects itself in every aspect of later life and stunts any further spiritual, social, personal or societal growth. The greatness of Avraham, as taught us by the Mishnah, was his resilience and continued spiritual and personal growth. Avraham constantly looked forward -- ahead -- and never dwelled on past misfortune.

I heard an outstanding speech delivered by George Deek, a Christian Arab who is a member of the Israeli Foreign Office. In telling the story of his life he

describes how his family lived in Jaffa for many generations and how they fled to Lebanon during the 1948 War of Independence. Sensing the squalor and political manipulation of the refugees by the Arab powers, whose sole goal was the destruction of Israel and not in saving and resettling the refugees, his grandfather escaped Lebanon and somehow brought the family back to Jaffa and Israel, regained his job with the Israel Electric Company. He raised generations of successful professionals, all citizens of Israel.

He said that the Jewish refugees from Europe and the Moslem world attempted to forget their past and build a new future for themselves and their descendants when they arrived in Israel. The Palestinian Arab refugees, under the misguided leadership of their spiritual and temporal heads, reveled instead in their past defeats, in their legend of nakba and, in the main, devoted themselves to attempting to destroy Israel rather than rehabilitating themselves.

That attitude and mindset has served them badly and cost them dearly. The past needs to be remembered and recalled, treasured and instructive to us. However, it is the future and what we make of it that ultimately determines our worth and our fate. That is one of the great lessons to be derived from the story of the life of our father Avraham. ©2018 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 LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

"Now Yitzchok was on his way, coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i, and he dwelt in the land of the south. And Yitzchok went forth to pray in the field towards evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were approaching. And Rivka lifted her eyes, and saw Isaac, and she let herself down from the camel." (Breishis 24: 62-64)

"Coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i: where he had gone to bring Hagar to Abraham his father, that he should marry her." (Gen. Rabbah 60:14)

It's no mistake that Yitzchok met his bride on his way back from delivering a wife to his father and at the very time when he was praying in the fields for a wife. That's what catalyzed "everything"!

I have a theory. Here's my thesis. Everybody makes their own Shidduch -- marriage match. Sure there are many angels and agents involved but the people themselves must have done something special to distinguish themselves. That's how it worked for Rivka, Moshe, and for Yaakov as well, at the well.

I recently heard a about a young lady in Jerusalem who was feeling desperate for a Shidduch. She wanted to get married but nothing was happening.

She went to visit Reb Chaim Kanievsky in Bnei Brak. He gave her a blessing and advised her to buy a Tallis. (A bride traditionally purchases a Tallis for her groom). She acted on his advice and went into a Seforim Store in Jerusalem to purchase a Tallis.

The saleswomen who attended to her asked her what size Tallis she was looking for. The young lady shrugged her shoulders and foolishly admitted that she did not know. "How tall is your Chosson?" She was asked. "I don't know!"-was the response." The saleswomen was confused. "You don't know how tall your Chosson is?" Again the answer was shockingly "No!" But now she explained that she was following the advice of Reb Chaim. The saleswomen was amazed and so impressed that she took the words of the Reb Chaim to heart that she started thinking and wondering aloud.

I know a great family in Bnei Brak. They have a wonderful son. For some reason he has not found his Bashert yet. I am going to call them now and make a suggestion." I don't have to tell you how this story ends. They met and got married and she bought her Chosson a Tallis.

This story I know very well. A famous Morah teaching for more than 50 years in Queens, traveling daily from Monsey, had a marvelous and dedicated assistant. Once a week she would travel in with a Maggid Shiur, a big Talmud scholar. This Rabbi had been very impressed with and spent extra hours learning with a young man whose high school was in the same place as his evening Kollel. The father of that boy had asked him to keep his eyes open for a special girl. On one of those rides to Queens in the morning the elder Morah could not stop talking about the virtues of this girl who was her assistant. Not only was she good with the children and helpful in every way but she distinguished herself in one extraordinary episode.

The Morah came to work one day ready to go later to a wedding. She brought with her to school her bag with all of her jewelry. By the end of the day the Morah was distressed by the realization that she could not find her bag of jewelry.

The loyal assistant looked everywhere. She spent hours after school turning over everything. They concluded that it must have been accidentally swept away with the garbage. By that time the garbage had been collected and taken away by the sanitation workers and it was "too late".

This dedicated assistant would not be deterred. She called the Sanitation Department of New York and found out exactly where the garbage from this school was deposited in the Staten Island dump. She searched and searched until she found it-the jewelry bag. The Morah was amazed by her unstoppable determination. She found more than the Morah's jewelry bag that day. The story didn't end there! That's how it begins! ©2018 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Words have the power to express ideas. But as expressive as words can be, they can sometimes be limiting. Often music can give soul and meaning to ideas that words cannot.

This concept is also true with respect to the melody (trop) used to read the Torah. The tune actually acts as a commentary on the text itself.

The highest and most prolonged trop is called the shalsholet. The word shalsholet is from the word shalosh - three. The sound of this note curves upward and then down three successive times. Commentators suggest that when a shalsholet appears, it indicates a feeling of hesitation by a character in the text.

For example, when Mrs. Potiphar attempts to seduce Yosef (Joseph), Yosef refuses, va-yemaen. (Genesis 39:8) Although saying no, Yosef, at first, may have thought about giving into temptation. The word va-yemaen has, as its trop, the shalsholet.

In last week's portion, the angels instruct Lot and his family to leave Sedom. The Torah then tells us that Lot lingered (va-yitmamah). (Genesis 19:16) Lot and his family were leaving their home. This could not have been easy. Even as they left, they hesitated. In the end, Lot's wife looks back and is overtaken by the brimstone and fire, turning into a pillar of salt. Atop va-yitmamah is the shalsholet.

In this week's Torah portion there is a less obvious shalsholet. Eliezer, Avraham's (Abraham) steward, is at the well, seeking a wife for his master's son, Yitzchak (Isaac). The Torah states "And he said" (va-yomar) (Genesis 24:12) the woman who will give camels to drink is kind and hence suitable for Yitzchak. Atop the word va-yomar is the shalsholet. One wonders why? What type of hesitation takes place in this moment?

Perhaps, deep down Eliezer, did hesitate. In his heart of hearts, he may not have wanted to succeed. Failure would mean Yitzchak would not marry, and Eliezer, being the closest aide to Avraham, would be the next in line to carry on the covenant. Alternatively, as the midrash suggests, perhaps, if he did not find a wife on this journey, Yitzchak would end up marrying Eliezer's daughter. Either way, lack of success on this mission, may have ended up personally benefiting Eliezer.

No wonder Eliezer's name never appears in the entire chapter. When he identifies himself to Yitzchak's future father-in-law Lavan, Eliezer declares, "eved Avraham anochi, I am Avraham's servant." (Genesis 24:34) It is extraordinary that Eliezer does not identify himself by name. But this omission makes sense as Eliezer works selflessly for Avraham, even at the risk of his own personal gain.

The Rambam notes that, in many areas, one

who hesitates but in the end does the principled thing is on a higher level than one who acts without hesitation. Therefore, Yosef's hesitation doesn't mean he's less righteous, but rather, very human. And certainly, the act of Eliezer falls into this same category.

Most often, when people become involved in an endeavor they ask "what's in it for me?" Eliezer may have asked this most human question, but the message of the shalsholet is clear. There are times when we are called upon to complete tasks that may not be in our best self interest, but we must do them nonetheless. In a world of selfishness this musical note teaches each one of us the importance of selflessness.

Interestingly, the shalsholet looks like a crooked line that begins on the ground and reaches upward. It is telling us that personal feelings are real and human. But it is also teaching us that sometimes we should abandon those natural human inclinations and reach beyond ourselves. Then we will be able to reach the heavens. ©2018 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 DAVID LEVIN

Quality Match

In the beginning of our parasha we are told of the death and burial of Sarah. Afterwards, Avraham realized that it was incumbent on him alone to find a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham knew that this task would not be easy. Avraham did not want Yitzchak to leave this holy land, so he sent his servant, Eliezer instead. When Avraham explained this mission to Eliezer, his instructions were not about the girl who should be chosen, but about her surroundings. His only statement about whom not to take was, "Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell." Avraham continued by saying, "but to my land and to my birthplace you shall go." It is difficult to comprehend Avraham's thinking on this matter. Did he feel that the Daughters of Canaan were so much worse than the daughters of his family? It is clear that the Canaanites were not worthy of his son, but were the members of his own family any better? Both groups worshipped idols, both were sinners, and both seemed inappropriate for Yitzchak. In addition, Avraham had been instructed by Hashem to leave his birthplace and his land because of their potential influence on him and his family. Why, then, go back to this same group of people to find a wife for his son?

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin gives us insight into Avraham's decision. No matter which girl Eliezer would choose for Yitzchak, she would have to be trained and converted in Avraham's house. This could still be a dangerous proposition. Avraham had trained many followers in the belief in Hashem, yet none of them continued to follow this belief when they spread around

the world and were influenced by their neighbors. Yet Avraham would at least have some control over this girl if she came to live in his house. This would automatically exclude the daughters of Canaan because they would frequently be in touch with their family and friends nearby. But there was also another factor. Sarah and Milkah came from that land. Perhaps it was only the men of the family who were corrupt, but the women were of a higher quality.

Eliezer traveled to Avraham's land but was still at a loss as to how he should proceed. When Eliezer asked Hashem for His guidance, it is not Hashem who set the test for the girls that he would see, it was Eliezer himself. "And it will be that the young girl that I will speak to saying please let down your pitcher that I may drink from it, she will say drink and also your camels I will water." What was Eliezer's test? Did he ask about her parental background and lineage or which schools she had attended? His test instead would determine her ability to view a situation, to determine the need, and to offer assistance. The Malbim suggests that Eliezer specifically sought out a young girl who was not wealthy and would go herself to draw water for her family. He wanted to know her character and her midot.

But there was still another part of the test that was left unspoken and unclarified. Eliezer wanted to see what would happen after he would ask his question of the girl. How would she proceed to fulfill his wish? Eliezer understood that the spoken offer is not always matched by the performance of the deed. Rivka overwhelmed him with her performance. The Torah is abundant with her actions: "She filled her pitcher, she said 'drink', she let down her pitcher, she hurried, she emptied her pitcher for the camels, she ran, she drew water again, she drew for the camels." Nechama Leibovitz estimated that all of these services took several hours to perform because Rivka went beyond the request of Eliezer and made sure that both Eliezer and his camels had their fill of water. She was not satisfied just to quench their thirst but to give each one all that he needed. We see this same over-extension in a second test for which Eliezer had not requested Hashem's assistance.

Eliezer understood from her actions that she was the one whom Hashem had chosen. Yet he examined her one more time. He asked Rivka for her family lineage and if her father had room for him overnight. Again, Rivka assessed the situation and offered food and lodging for the camels before she offered a place for Eliezer and his assistants. She understood that animals cannot fend for themselves especially when they are muzzled. She understood immediately that they were muzzled to prevent their eating from someone else's property. Once again, Rivka went beyond the request in her hospitality. When Eliezer heard her words, he immediately bowed and

offered his thanks to Hashem for a successful mission. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Eliezer sought a girl who embodied the same special trait of character that he understood to be the most characteristic of Avraham's family, gemilut chasadim, bestowing kindness on others.

What does Eliezer's quest and Rivka's fulfillment of that quest indicate to us about our own searches for matches for our children? Eliezer knew his master and his master's family well. He understood the great loss that Avraham and Yitzchak suffered with the passing of Sarah. Eliezer also was familiar with the qualities that Sarah added to the family. He sought out a young girl who might exhibit those same qualities. That was the purpose of the test that he devised. But how can we proceed in that same task for our own children? The most important thing for us to look for in any match is the midot, qualities, of the person. We all know of young men and women who have all of the correct qualifications on paper but are still lacking midot. And which midot should we seek? The answer is not simple because it is different for each child. We must understand our child and ourselves. We must seek the midot which will complement our child's midot while at the same time continue the ideals which we wish for our own children. Most importantly, we must do as Eliezer did and ask for Hashem's assistance and guidance. May our children and their spouses be able to follow in the path of our forefathers and build a family which is dedicated to Hashem and His Torah. ©2018 Rabbi D. Levin

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 ("Hosek 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

Avraham asked his trustworthy servant Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac. Eliezer journeys to Aram Naharayim, taking ten camels with him. Upon approaching the town, he neared a well and prayed to God: "Let it come to pass that the maiden to whom I shall say: 'Incline your pitcher that I may drink,' and she shall say, 'Drink and I will give your camels to drink also,' she will be the one whom You have designated for Your servant, for Isaac; and thereby shall I know that You have shown kindness to my master" (Gen. 24:14).

Eliezer, the devoted servant of Avraham, had learned from his great master to appreciate the profound significance of helping others. Chesed is not merely a kind act, but a manifestation of one's belief in God. Doing chesed is an act of emulating Him whose kindness is without bounds.

Eliezer realized that the woman who would be deemed worthy of becoming a mother of the Jewish people must be the paragon of chesed. He therefore fashioned an appropriate test for determining the bride of Isaac to find someone who loved to do chesed, to help others and try to save them from bother under all circumstances.

And what happened? Rivka ran of her own volition to water the ten thirsty camels -- an act which she was not even asked to perform. This act of chesed indicated that she was worthy of being Avraham's daughter-in-law. Remember to look for kindness in choosing a spouse! *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2018 Rabbi K. Packouz*

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RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Let the girl to whom I say, 'Please tip your pitcher for me to drink'..." (Bereishis 24:14) THE TALMUD SAYS that 40 days before a child is born, it is decided in Heaven who they are to marry. It's even proclaimed (Sotah 2a), though no one down here can really hear it. But that doesn't matter, because it will become known once the two people finally meet each other and decide they are for one another.

This means that it was already announced before Yitzchak was born that he would one day marry Rivkah, and that 40 days before Rivkah was born, it was proclaimed that she would later marry Yitzchak. As Rashi mentions about her birth at the end of last week's parsha, she was born as Yitzchak's soul mate.

Avraham, being a prophet, as God told Avimelech in last week's parsha, probably knew. Or, at least he suspected this, another reason to send Eliezer eastward in search of Yitzchak's wife.

But when Avraham instructs Eliezer, he makes it sound as if it was not yet determined who Yitzchak would marry, as if Eliezer would have to find out for himself. Thus, Eliezer also seemed to act on this when when he contrived his whole scheme to flush out Yitzchak's "zivug." While it is true that the Talmud would not be written down for thousands of years, it is more than likely that they were already aware of such concepts. So why did they act contrary to what the Talmud would later say?

They didn't. They just understood that even though God decides all outcomes of events (Brochos 34b), He likes to allow us to act as if we can play a role in them. This way God can reward us for our contribution in whatever happens, and we can feel as if our decisions made a difference. Or, if a person made it possible for something bad to happen, they can be held responsible for it.

This is because, what counts in life is not what we accomplish, because we can "fail" for reasons that go beyond our own personal attributes or lacks. We're part of some hugely bigger picture than our own personal lives seem to indicate, and this takes precedence over our idea of what is "fair." Sometimes the moment needs us to fail, because a larger history requires it.

But that's okay. What counts the most in life is our "ratzon," or will. It's what we decide to care about that gets Heaven's attention. It's about what makes us feel good or what makes us feel sad that reveals our true self, and what we'd like to do to make a situation better. This is true regardless of whether or not we have the means to make good on our will.

That's the initial merit a person needs to be

plugged into God's plan for good, or the demerit to be plugged into a plan for bad. Then, if history allows it, a person might find themselves one day actually in a position to make such a difference, for good OR for bad, depending upon who they have become.

Aharon HaKohen's grandson, Pinchas, stands out as one of the perfect examples of this for good. Until he acted zealously on behalf of God, he was a virtual nobody, not even a kohen. But his lack of position and fame did not stop him from looking at himself as a partner of God, and when the right moment came, God plugged him in and he got both, kehunah and fame.

Zimri, whom Pinchas killed on behalf of God, did the same thing, but for bad. The Talmud speaks about whom he really was and what kind of spiritual life he lived. Therefore, when the time came for him to be plugged in, he became the person through whom Pinchas would sanctify the Name of God.

History is pre-determined, as the Midrash says. Certainly God has known everything that would happen since Creation, and set it up so that it would. What about free will? That's for people to decide who they want to be, and what they want to accomplish, so God can plug them appropriately.

One way or another, Yitzchak was destined to marry Rivkah, even before they were born. They were soul mates, and they deserved each other. Eliezer was just fortunate enough to be the one through whom God worked to make it happen, earning reward for doing so as if it depended upon him. ©2018 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In the week's Parsha, Chaye Sarah, there lies a hidden story behind the story, with three clues in our Parsha. The first clue is when Rivka first sees Yitzchak, we are told that he is coming from Be'er Lachai Ro-i (24:62), a fact not relevant to the story, and seemingly insignificant. The second clue is that after Sarah's death and Avraham's mourning of her passing, while we would expect Avraham to walk into the sunset of his life, we are told that Avraham then married a woman named Keturah and has six children, with no further mention of her or their children. The third clue is that when Avraham did pass away, he was buried next to Sarah by Yitzchak and Yishmael (25:8-10). Where did Yishmael come from, and where has he been until now?

The Midrash pieces together the underlying story, and its meaning. The sages point out that Be'er Lachai Ro-i is the spot where Hagar prayed for her son Yishmael to be saved, and where Yitzchak went to search for Hagar after his mother died, hoping to find his father a wife. They also explain that Avraham did end up marrying Hagar, now named Keturah because

"her acts produced fragrance". Yishmael was present at Avraham's burial, suggesting that this resulted in Avraham and Yishmael getting along. These facts provide context to their complex relationships, and more importantly, their ability to resolve their differences. May the story of our past provide hope for our future. *Adapted from the work of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ©2018 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky and TorahWeb.org*

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"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) ©2018 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky and TorahWeb.org

