

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The sedra of Chayei Sarah focuses on two episodes, both narrated at length and in intricate detail. Abraham buys a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and he instructs his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Why these two events? The simple answer is because they happened. That, however, cannot be all. We misunderstand Torah if we think of it as a book that tells us what happened. That is a necessary but not sufficient explanation of biblical narrative. The Torah, by identifying itself as Torah, defines its own genre. It is not a history book. It is Torah, meaning "teaching." It tells us what happened only when events that occurred then have a bearing on what we need to know now. What is the "teaching" in these two episodes? It is an unexpected one.

Abraham, the first bearer of the covenant, receives two promises-both stated five times. The first is of a land. Time and again he is told, by G-d, that the land to which he has travelled-Canaan-will one day be his.

1. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. (12:7)

2. The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north, south, east and west. All the land that you see, I will give you and your offspring forever... Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." (13:14-17)

3. Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to take possession of it." (15:7)

4. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates-the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites." (15:18-21)

5. "I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your G-d and the god of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and

to your descendants after you; and I will be their G-d." (17:7-8)

The second was the promise of children, also stated five times:

1. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing." (12:2)

2. "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted." (13:16)

3. He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars- if indeed you can count them" Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (15:5)

4. "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations." (17:4-5)

5. "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky and as the sand on the seashore." (22:17)

These are remarkable promises. The land in its length and breadth will be Abraham's and his children's as "an everlasting possession." Abraham will have as many children as the dust of the earth, the stars of the sky, and the sand on the sea-shore. He will be the father, not of one nation, but of many. What, though, is the reality by the time Sarah dies? Abraham owns no land and has only one son (he had another, Ishmael, but was told that he would not be the bearer of the covenant).

The significance of the two episodes is now clear. First, Abraham undergoes a lengthy bargaining process with the Hittites to buy a field with a cave in which to bury Sarah. It is a tense, even humiliating, encounter. The Hittites say one thing and mean another. As a group they say, "Sir, listen to us. You are a prince of G-d in our midst. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs." Ephron, the owner of the field Abraham wishes to buy, says: "Listen to me, I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." As the narrative makes clear, this elaborate generosity is a faade for some extremely hard bargaining. Abraham knows he is "an alien and a stranger among you," meaning, among other things, that he has no right to own land. That is the force of their reply which, stripped of its overlay of courtesy, means: "Use one of our burial sites. You may not acquire your own." Abraham is not

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deterred. He insists that he wants to buy his own. Ephron's reply-"It is yours. I give it to you"-is in fact the prelude to a demand for an inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. At last, however, Abraham owns the land. The final transfer of ownership is recorded in precise legal prose (23:17-20) to signal that, at last, Abraham owns part of the land. It is a small part: one field and a cave. A burial place, bought at great expense. That is all of the Divine promise of the land that Abraham will see in his lifetime.

The next chapter, one of the longest in the Mosaic books, tells of Abraham's concern that Isaac should have a wife. He is-we must assume-at least 37 years old (his age at Sarah's death) and still unmarried. Abraham has a child but no grandchild-no posterity. As with the purchase of the cave, so here: acquiring a daughter-in-law will take much money and hard negotiation. The servant, on arriving in the vicinity of Abraham's family, immediately finds the girl, Rebecca, before he has even finished praying for G-d's help to find her. Securing her release from her family is another matter. He brings out gold, silver, and clothing for the girl. He gives her brother and mother costly gifts. The family have a celebratory meal. But when the servant wants to leave, brother and mother say, "Let the girl stay with us for another year or ten [months]." Laban, Rebecca's brother, plays a role not unlike that of Ephron: the show of generosity conceals a tough, even exploitative, determination to make a profitable deal. Eventually patience pays off. Rebecca leaves. Isaac marries her. The covenant will continue.

These are, then, no minor episodes. They tell a difficult story. Yes, Abraham will have a land. He will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, or suddenly, or easily. Nor will they occur without human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower will bring them about. The divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that G-d will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation, from G-d to Abraham and his children that they should act. G-d will help them. The outcome will be what G-d said it would. But not without total commitment from Abraham's family against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable obstacles.

A land: Israel. And children: Jewish continuity. The astonishing fact is that today, four thousand years later, they remain the dominant concerns of Jews

throughout the world-the safety and security of Israel as the Jewish home, and the future of the Jewish people. Abraham's hopes and fears are ours. (Is there any other people, I wonder, whose concerns today are what they were four millennia ago? The identity through time is awe inspiring.) Now as then, the divine promise does not mean that we can leave the future to G-d. That idea has no place in the imaginative world of the first book of the Torah. To the contrary: the covenant is G-d's challenge to us, not ours to G-d. The meaning of the events of Chayei Sarah is that Abraham realized that G-d was depending on him. Faith does not mean passivity. It means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we-inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise-who must bring it about. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

One major personality of the first Hebrew family, Mother Sarah, seems strangely absent in the awesome and awe-ful traumatic story of the akedah about which we read last week. After all, Isaac was not really the "only son" of Abraham - the patriarch himself had responded to G-d's guarantee that he would sire an heir with Sarah with the almost dismissive rejoinder, "Would that Ishmael live before thee" - but Isaac was certainly the only son of Sarah!

And Sarah had been very aggressive in protecting Isaac, even to the point of pushing Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael when she caught Ishmael "mocking" Isaac. Could it be that father, son and two servants made the requisite preparations for their fateful desert journey from Be'er Sheva to Mount Moriah and left the tent "early in the morning" without awakening Sarah or rousing her suspicions?! Is it logical that Abraham would set out for the akedah without first explaining to his wife and mission partner what G-d had demanded that he do to Isaac, especially after G-d had told him - in the context of protecting Isaac from Ishmael - "Whatever Sarah says to you, hearken to her voice.."?!

Are we really to assume that Sarah's only connection to the akedah took place after the fact? Rashi reports in this week's reading, that "the death of Sarah is linked to the binding of Isaac since (Satan) informed the (Matriarch) that her son was being prepared for slaughter: her soul then flew away from her and she died." (Rashi citing Tanhuma at end of Vayera - Gen 23:2) Was Sarah truly absent from the akedah story?

Let us begin to answer our query with another difficult textual problem. Our portion opens, "And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep over her". (Gen 23:2). According to the

chronology of Rashi and the Midrash which we have just cited, Sarah's death took place at the precise time that the akedah was happening: Abraham and Isaac left the familial tent in Be'er Sheva to go to the akedah - and Abraham returned to Be'er Sheva after the akedah (Gen 22:19). What was Sarah doing in Kiryat Arba, where she apparently died?! The Ramban asks this question in his commentary (ad loc), and concludes that "Sarah must not have died at the time (of the akedah) since Abraham would not have been living in Be'er Sheva while Sarah was living in Hebron." But how do we explain the story according to the Midrash? Even according to the simple reading of the text, it would seem that Abraham returns from the akedah to the familial tent in Be'er Sheva, and then - without the Bible informing us of a familial "move" - we are told that "Sarah died in Hebron, and Abraham "'came' to eulogize her and weep over her". Even if we do not posit Sarah's death immediately following the akedah, Abraham seems to be living in Be'er Sheva and Sarah seems to have died in Hebron?!

We have previously attempted to demonstrate that according to a not insignificant chorus of sages, Abraham did not properly understand the original command of G-d. A powerful passage in the Talmud (B.T. Taanit 4a) cites a verse from the Prophet Jeremiah (19:5) to suggest that "it had never even crossed G-d's mind" to order Abraham to sacrifice his son, and this view is confirmed by Rashi, "G-d never said that (Abraham) should slaughter (Isaac), since the Holy One Blessed be He only asked that he bring him up to the mountain, dedicate him and bring him down" (Rashi on Gen 22:2).

I would add to this the fascinating fact that Abraham survived Sarah by 38 years, during which he remained vigorous enough to re-marry and have more children, but throughout this period there were no real conversations between G-d and Abraham and no significant incident involving the Patriarch about which our sages could comment, "the deeds of the forefathers are a foreshadowing of what will occur to the descendants". The Sefat Emet (1847-1905) goes so far as to say that when the verse describing Abraham's journey to the akedah says, "Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place from afar" (22:4), "the place" refers to G-d, since Abraham had misunderstood G-d's true intent.

Given all of the above, even if Abraham had attempted to conceal G-d's command from Sarah, she could not possibly have been unaware of the preparations for the journey and the anxiety-filled exit from the tent on the morning in which they set out. I would posit that a confrontation between Sarah and Abraham took place, in which Sarah vigorously disagreed with Abraham's interpretation of G-d's words and did everything in her power to prevent a sacrifice. In desperation, she told Abraham that if he set forth with the slaughtering knife, she would not be there upon his

return. He left for the akedah, and she left for Kiryat Arba. Had she not died of grief at this point in time and had she lived to see her position vindicated by the angel who stayed Abraham's hand from slaughtering Isaac, she certainly would have returned to the family tent in Be'er Sheva. Unfortunately, the angel was too late for Sarah and as a result, Abraham had to travel to Kiryat Arba to eulogize his beloved wife and life partner who understood G-d's will better than he did © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Was Eliezer correct in establishing a pre-ordained sign of behavior to determine which woman would be the proper mate for Yitzchak? This is a long running debate among the commentators and scholars until our very day. Maimonides criticizes him for so doing while Rabbi Avraham ben David (Raavad) severely criticizes Maimonides for criticizing Eliezer.

The Talmud in the Tosefta to the eighth chapter of tractate Shabat discusses all sorts of superstitions, signs, indications of good fortune or danger, etc. that are forbidden to Jews to indulge in. The clear indication of the Tosefta is that anything that has been empirically proven to be of practical value is permitted, whereas good luck charms and other empirically unproven signs and omens are forbidden, as being akin to pagan belief and practices.

Due to many historical and social pressures over the centuries, many such omens and signs have seeped into Jewish society eventually acquiring the status of accepted custom. And we are all very aware of the power and hold that customs have upon individuals.

I am always reminded of the rueful comment of Rabbi Yaakov Emden who famously said that "it is regrettable that 'not to steal' was a commandment and not a custom for had it been a custom more people would attempt to observe it." Part of the problem in today's society is the prioritization of omens and signs and questionable customs over the values and observances of Judaism itself as proscribed by the Torah and rabbinic writings. The spooks apparently always win out.

Of interest, at least to me, is the fact that Eliezer disappears completely from the narrative of the Torah after the mission of bringing Rivkah to Yitzchak is accomplished. If one adopts the opinion of Maimonides regarding Eliezer's use of signs and omens as being incorrect and unjustified, perhaps that would inform his later disappearance from the Torah's text. However, those who laud his behavior and view him as a greatly righteous person, must confront the issue of his absence in the narrative of the Torah after fulfilling the mission that Avraham placed upon him.

A parable is related in the name of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (Chafetz Chaim): A person who

never saw a railroad train before stands at a crossing and sees the train whiz by his eyes. He notices that all of the cars of the train are moving at the speed as is the locomotive. He does not therefore realize that the cars have no power of their own independent of the locomotive. When the locomotive can pull no longer then all of the cars will come to a halt.

Our father Avraham was the locomotive that pulled Eliezer and many others along in their search for G-d. When he passes from the world, as recorded in this week's parsha, then Eliezer remains frozen and unable to grow spiritually. Thus the Torah has really nothing more to say to us about him. Jews are supposed to be locomotives, not just train cars being pulled along. © 2012 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

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Rashi offers two interpretations of Avraham's words to the children of Chet, "I am a stranger and resident (ger ve-toshav) with you" (Bereishit 23:4). According to the literal meaning of the text, Avraham is saying that in the past he was a stranger "from a different land, and I settled (nityashavti) among you." The other interpretation, based on the midrash, is: "If you are agreeable [to my request for a burial plot], then I am a stranger; if not, I will be a 'toshav' (resident), and I will take it by right, for G-d has told me, 'to your descendants I shall give this land' (Bereishit 12:7)."

According to both interpretations, the expression "ger ve-toshav" includes two contrasting terms that seem to contradict one another. However, the simple meaning of the text seems to indicate that there is some connection between them, and they can co-exist.

In order to understand the relationship between these two concepts, we must examine them on two different levels: one concerns the relationship between Avraham, the Hebrew, and the other people of the world; the other concerns the relationship between Am Yisrael and the other nations of the world.

When Am Yisrael was in exile, at times it wished to integrate into the surrounding society. However, even when this was indeed achieved, it was accompanied by a sense of "foreignness;" despite the integration there remained a barrier separating Jews from their neighbors. In Israel, however, Jews feel like "residents;" the sense of foreignness, of being strangers, is less tangible. The inhabitants of the land of Israel possess a sense of belonging which the surrounding nations do not succeed in shaking.

However, there is another level on which the relationship between the sense of "sojourning" and the sense of "foreignness" must be expressed, and that is on the personal level, as expressed in the connection between an individual and the reality that surrounds him.

On the one hand, a person naturally feels part of the world around him. Halakha addresses this connection, instructing a Jew as to the path that he should follow and the actions that he should undertake vis-a-vis the various manifestations of reality. This includes everything from his relationships with peers, to his relationship with his spouse, to his attitude towards every tiny detail of Creation.

On the other hand, a person has to know that he is a "stranger" in the world. It can be difficult to live with this knowledge, especially if one is successfully integrated in the world and one's material pursuits are flourishing. A person who experiences setbacks and defeats in all his endeavors will not find it difficult to feel himself a "stranger." But if everything goes smoothly for a person, and his path in life takes him from one success to the next, it is difficult for him to sever his bond with the reality of this world, which gets stronger by the day. This bond arises not only from the person's subjective consciousness, but also from reality itself: the works of Creation, bursting with life, invite man to eat of their fruit and to satisfy himself with their goodness.

Despite this-and specifically for this reason-a person must consciously adopt a sense of foreignness. He must know that even his integration into the most practical aspects of life is necessary in order to be able to achieve a higher spiritual level. The reality is nothing but a means. The end, the aim, is to attain "that day" when "G-d will be One, and His Name will be One" (Zekharia 14:9). When a person feels, with his entire being, that this is his goal and purpose in life, then he is able to sense his "foreignness" in this world-not out of scorn for the world, nor in an attempt to remove himself from it, but rather out of his integration into it as a means to attain a higher goal-"that day." (*This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat parashat Chayei Sara 5732 [1971].*)

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

The Gift than Keeps On Hinting

The 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 machziz 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 mikdosh 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 and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The 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 forming 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. © 2012 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Efrone was sitting amongst the Hittites” (B'raishis 23:10). Rashi explains that Efrone had been one of the Hittite commoners, but after Avraham expressed interest in acquiring property from him to bury his wife, due to Avraham's status they immediately appointed Efrone to be a government official. It is curious that the Hittites felt they had to elevate Efrone's status before he could do business with Avraham. Was Avraham so popular that his wanting Efrone's property made the latter a celebrity, leading to his being given an important position? Was Avraham considered such nobility (“G-d's prince,” see 23:6) that it was inappropriate for him to do business with a commoner, so they elevated Efrone to the status of nobility (see B'raishis Rabbah 58:7)? More specifically, the position they appointed Efrone to was “sho-ter,” a policeman, one who enforces the law set by the judges. Why, if they felt they should (or had to) elevate Efrone's status, did they choose this particular position?

Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom (<http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/5772/chayeisarah.html>), based on archeological evidence, discusses some of the laws that governed the ancient Near East, including Canaan and the Hittites. Quoting Rabbi Etshalom, “in many near eastern societies, foreigners (anyone outside of the tribal family) were not allowed to purchase land.” In other words, Avraham's request was against the law. The Hittites were willing to let him bury Sara on their land, because of the respect they had for him, but it would remain their land. “You can bury your dead in the choicest of our graves” (23:6), but it would remain our graves. Avraham expressed his appreciation for this hospitality (23:7), but politely asked that he be able to negotiate with Efrone regarding purchasing his property (23:8-9). How could Avraham insist that he be able to purchase the property if the local laws didn't allow it? Rabbi Etshalom suggests that Avraham knew of a

loophole to a similar law that existed in Mesopotamia, where he came from (Ur Kasdim), that allowed for (what Rabbi Etshalom calls) a “sale-adoption,” a means of buying into a family whereby that family officially adopts the outsider, making him part of the family. Once considered part of the family, the “ex-outsider” now has the legal right to purchase property. Avraham gathered the Hittites together rather than going straight to Efrone because he knew that they would have to approve of this loophole before it could be implemented in Canaan as well. The purchase of Efrone's land would really be a “buy-in” to Efrone's family, thereby allowing Avraham to actually own the land, and use it as the family burial plot rather than just burying his wife on someone else's property.

I would suggest it this was why Efrone was appointed to be an enforcer of the law. This way, he could set the precedent (locally) whether or not it was acceptable to allow a foreigner to be adopted by a native family and thereby permitted to purchase land. Rashi (23:10) is very clear that the Hittites respected Avraham and wanted to help him out. Everyone took off from work to pay their respects to Sara (according to our editions of B'raishis Rabbah, it was out of respect for Avraham that they closed everything down). If so, they very likely wanted to fulfill his wishes and sell him land, and were eager to find a way around the law that prevented it. By appointing Efrone to be the one responsible for enforcing the law, his agreeing to sell his property to Avraham would automatically mean that the sale was within the parameters of the law, with the Mesopotamian loophole becoming a Hittite loophole as well. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“**A**vraham expired and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people.” (Breishis 25:8)

Here we discover a fascinating set of facts that are not nearly as morbid as one might think at first glance. There three ways or better yet three stages to what we call dying. Imagine a car driving on the highway. The car breaks down. Then the driver gets out of the car. Then he gets a hitch a ride home.

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

The big question that the Chovos HaLevavos struggles with is, “Why does the Torah not tell us more about Olam Haba?” Wouldn't that be a fascinating

topic! Amongst the many answers offered in the Gate of Trust is that Olam Haba is not an absolute guarantee based upon the specific performance of a certain number of Mitzvos! It's not a business deal-a quid pro quo! No, it's a relationship! How is the relationship measured?

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

Then the Rabbi uncorked the first new big idea. "Make sure to get your wife fresh flowers every Erev Shabbos!" "That's it!" queried the newly wed. "No!" the Rabbi insisted. "You must write personal note and or tell her something nice and flattering!" The poor young man looked at the Rabbi with bewilderment. "I have no idea what to say or recite!" The Rabbi then offered some nice not entirely cliché phrases that just might reach the desired mark. "Why am I the luckiest man on the face of the earth!?" "You are wonderful!"

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

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

The Chovos HaLevavos explains that Olam Haba is based on heart. The intoxicating flavor of this world is gifted for the external aspects of the Mitzvos but Olam Haba is hinging very much on the longing of a heart homeward bound! © 2012 Rabbi L. Lam and torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Chayai Sarah: "And the life of Sarah was one hundred and twenty seven years.[23:1]" The parsha begins with Sarah's death and Avrohom's subsequent acquisition of Ma'aras Hamachpelah {the Tomb of the Patriarchs} for her burial.

Immediately afterwards, the Torah tells of Avrohom sending his servant, Eliezer, to find the proper

wife for his son, Yitzchok. Avrohom wanted to ensure an appropriate partner with whom Yitzchok could continue the world-shaping path that he had begun. He therefore had his servant, Eliezer, swear not to take a Canaanite girl as a wife for Yitzchok. "Rather, to my land and birthplace you shall go.[24:4]" Juxtaposed between these two episodes is the following passuk {verse}: "And Avrohom was old, 'ba ba'yamim' {having come in days}, and Hashem had blessed Avrohom with 'kol' {all}." [24:1]"

The Ramban explains that this passuk supplies the reason why Avrohom felt compelled to have Eliezer swear. He saw himself advancing in years and he was concerned that he might leave this world before Eliezer would return. He therefore had Eliezer swear in order to 'lock in' his choice of Yitzchok's future wife's nationality.

However, this term of 'ba ba'yamim', meaning, having come or advanced in days seems a bit strange. The passuk had already said that Avrohom was old. Isn't every old person 'ba ba'yamim'? Furthermore, we only find this expression by Avrohom. Although it says that Yitzchok became old, it doesn't say that he was 'ba ba'yamim'.

What is the meaning and significance of this term as it relates specifically to Avrohom?

We know that the attribute which Avrohom exemplified and perfected was that of chessed {acts of kindness}. The Shla"h writes that a Jew must perform at least one act of chessed each day in order for it to be considered a day. Without at least one chessed, it's as if that day didn't exist.

With that, the Nesivos Sholom explains, we can understand why specifically Avrohom was 'ba ba'yamim', advanced in days. He, with his incredible devotion to chessed, had every day standing proudly behind him as he approached his old age. He literally came with his days. Not a single one was absent.

However, we need to understand why only chessed, as opposed to any other commandment, is the deciding factor if a day is to be considered existent and worthwhile.

The Nesivos Sholom explains that it was Hashem's chessed which brought Him to create the world. Hashem needed nothing but wanted to share His goodness with others. Furthermore, the world, having been created 'yesh ma'ayin' {something from nothing} is in the constant, perilous state of being unable to continue to exist on its own. It is only through a constant re-creation, every single second of time, through which Hashem's chessed enables this world to continue to exist.

Dovid HaMelech {King David} refers to Hashem as our shadow [T'hilim 121:5]. The Baal Shem Tov explains that a person's actions can be discerned by watching his shadow. So too, Hashem's actions and dealings mirror our own. When we treat each other with chessed, Hashem in turn showers chessed down upon us.

Being that the entire world is based on chessed and only continues to exist through Hashem's constant chessed, we can only 'earn' our day if our actions of chessed prompt and stimulate Hashem to give forth His chessed. If we do our part, we have earned that day. It exists and is worthwhile as something which we had a hand in. Otherwise, in the absence of any chessed-provoking chessed on our part, the day was a 'free-bee'. A gift which we played no part in. Not something that can be considered ours and not something which will stand behind us as we reach our old age.

All of our actions result from many different motives-some lofty and some a bit less lofty. Most of our mitzvos {fulfillment of commandments} are tainted by some of the less than lofty motives. Where the mitzvah is focused onto ourselves, inconsistencies within ourselves will tarnish the mitzvah. Chessed, however, is very different. Since the focus is outward and the other person has in fact received the act of kindness intended for him, it will therefore not be sullied by less than altruistic motives.

Avrohom was 'ba ba'yamim'. He had earned every one of his days. As a result of that, as the passuk continues, "Hashem had blessed Avrohom with 'kol' {all}."

We know that what we work hard at and earn has a special place in our hearts.

When my wife and I first moved to Israel we were shocked to find that the apartment had no closets whatsoever. For weeks we were living out of suitcases until our lift finally arrived. At that point we began to live out of suitcases and boxes until I was able to build some sort of an 'aron' {closet} from the lift wood. Proving to my wife that I now could and would be painfully 'punny' in two languages, I proudly told her that we now have something that we can call 'aron' (closet in Hebrew, pronounced 'our own'-sorry). The morning after I built it, I woke up early and ran to the kitchen to make sure that it was still standing. It was an incredibly amateur job but it was functional and being the first thing that I had ever built, I was fiercely proud of it.

Everything that Hashem blessed Avrohom with came as a result of Hashem mirroring Avrohom's actions. They were his actions. His days. His chessed. His. He had everything. "Hashem had blessed Avrohom with 'kol' {all}."

May we, the descendants of Avrohom, continue in his way. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

We read in our parashah that Yitzchak brought his new wife, Rivka, into the tent of his mother Sarah. Rashi z"l writes, "He brought her into the tent and she became exactly like his mother Sarah." He explains that several miracles that used to occur while Sarah was living began to occur again, one of them

being that the Shabbat candles burned from one Shabbat eve to the next. [Until here from Rashi]

Regarding Shabbat candles, the Gemara (Shabbat 25b) states: We read (Eichah 3:17), "My soul despaired of having peace"-this refers to [the absence of] Shabbat candles [Until here from the Gemara]. R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; died 1609) explains: Light is associated with peace, because light allows man to differentiate between things. Peace exists when proper boundaries exist, which is possible only when there is light. In the dark, everything is jumbled, and there is no differentiation and therefore no peace. This is why morning is called "boker"-because the morning light permits "bikkur" / inspection, which leads to differentiation. On Shabbat there is peace because man refrains from work and rests. [Maharal does not explain this last thought. Perhaps he means that man thus differentiates between the workweek and the day of rest.] (Chiddushei Aggadot)

In light of Maharal's words, perhaps the significance of Sarah and Rivka's Shabbat candles burning all week is that these Matriarchs distinguished themselves by their ability to differentiate where their husbands did not-in Sarah's case, recognizing that Yishmael was a bad influence on Yitzchak; in Rivka's case, recognizing that Yaakov, not Esav, deserved to receive Yitzchak's blessing.

"Yitzchak came from having gone to Beer-lachai-ro'ee, for he dwelt in the south country. Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field towards evening..." (24:62-63)

Why does the Torah tell us that Yitzchak came from the be'er / well? R' Yekutiel Yehuda Teitelbaum z"l (1808-1883; rabbi of Sighet, Hungary) explains:

Our Sages say that the second verse quoted above alludes to the fact that Yitzchak instituted the prayer of minchah. By telling us that he came from the well, the Torah is alluding to the chassidic custom of immersing in a mikvah before prayer. (Quoted in Heichal Ha'Besht, Vol. 14, p.61) © 2012 S. Katz and torah.org

