



Parshas Chayei Sarah

For the week ending 22 Cheshvan 5758
21 & 22 November 1997

Overview

The life of Sarah, mother of the Jewish People, comes to a close at the age of one hundred and twenty seven. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham buries her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham is prepared to pay its owner Ephron the Hittite the exorbitant sum which he demands for the cave. Avraham places the responsibility for finding a suitable wife for his son Yitzchak on his faithful servant Eliezer, who takes an oath to chose a wife from amongst Avraham's family and not from the Canaanites. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim, to the city of Nachor, and prays to Hashem to show him a sign so he will know whom to choose. At evening time, as he is about to water his camels, Rivka providentially appears and Eliezer asks her for a drink of water. Not only does she give him to drink, but she draws water for all ten of his thirsty camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme thoughtfulness and kindness is the sign that she is the right wife for Yitzchak, and a suitable mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan finally result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into the tent of his mother Sarah, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed *Ketura* to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of one hundred and seventy-five and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

Insights

CUPS OF KINDNESS

“Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say ‘Tilt your pitcher so I may drink,’ and who replies ‘Drink and I will even water your camels,’ her will You have designated for Your servant Yitzchak” (24:14)

A poor man once asked the Brisker Rav whether he could fulfill his obligation to drink four cups of wine on Pesach by drinking four cups of milk instead. The Brisker Rav told him to stick to wine, and instructed his wife to give the poor man a large sum of money from the communal *tzedaka* fund so that he could buy both wine and meat for the festival. After the poor man had gone, the *rebbetzin* asked her husband why he had given him money to buy meat as well as wine. After all, the question had only been about the wine. The Brisker Rav replied that if this man was intending to drink four cups of milk on the Seder Night, he certainly wasn't planning to eat meat either for lack of funds. What distinguished Rivka's kindness was that she was able to understand not just what Eliezer said to her, but what his real needs were. True kindness lies in understanding the needs of others even when they don't express them.

WHO'S SORRY NOW?

“And Avraham came to eulogize Sarah” (23:2)

Both parents were crying their eyes out.

“Rabbi — it's our son. He wants to marry a non-Jewish girl. We've never been that religious, but I always thought that he would at least marry someone Jewish.”

More tears. Finally the rabbi said. “In Russia, during the reign of the Czar, it was forbidden to have alcohol without a license. To avoid the duty, some clever rogues decided to smuggle whisky from over the border. They came up with a ruse to fool the border guards.

The border ran through the middle of a particular Jewish *shtetl* (village). The graveyard happened to be on the Russian side of the border. Thus it was not uncommon for funerals to cross the border. The smugglers borrowed a hearse and a coffin, and filled it with Scotch whisky. As they approached the border, they assumed long faces and the dark demeanor of those whose profession is escorting the dead to their rest. So convincing was their acting that the guards let them pass without a second look.

Emboldened by their easy success, they decided to try it again. Again, they succeeded without a hitch. But now, they started to get over-confident. On the next trip, the guards pounced and discovered their haul.

They were led away in chains. Facing a capital offense, they started to cry bitter tears. The chief smuggler asked the guard: ‘*But how did you know that we weren't real?*’ Said the guard ‘*As you came towards the border post, you were all smiling and laughing. No one laughs at a funeral. If you'd cried then, you wouldn't be crying now!*’

“That, unfortunately,” said the rabbi to the distraught parents, “is the present situation. *If you'd cried then, you wouldn't be crying now!* You're twenty years too late. What do you expect me to do now?”

When Avraham came to eulogize Sarah, he focused on *the Akeida* — the binding of Yitzchak — as exemplifying Sarah's qualities. For Sarah had educated a son who was prepared to give up his very life to serve Hashem, and there can be no greater testimony to the qualities of a parent than the qualities of the child.

This should serve as a powerful reminder to parents that our children's spiritual aspirations are inevitably a reflection of our own. We cannot blame our children if they continue in the path that we have shown them.

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THE EYES OF TRUTH

“And the servant (Eliezer) said to him (Avraham): ‘Perhaps the woman will not wish to follow me to this land; shall I take your son back to the land from which you departed?’” (24:5)

“Why can’t I see G-d? Why don’t I feel He’s there? I really envy you being religious, but I just don’t feel it!”

What makes a person feel close to G-d?

The eyes are the windows of the soul. If you want to “see” G-d in your life, you have to have clean windows. All the character flaws that a person has are like grime on those windows. Anger, jealousy, lust, status seeking, all smear the windows of the soul so that it cannot see.

The Midrash on this verse says “‘And the servant said to him...’ — this refers to the phrase ‘A trader with scales of deceit in his hand, who loves to cheat.’ The ‘trader’ is Eliezer, who sat and weighed — ‘with scales of deceit in his hand’ — whether his own daughter was fitting to be Yitzchak’s wife or not.” When Eliezer suggested the match, Avraham told him: “You are cursed, my son is blessed. The cursed cannot connect with the blessed.”

What was so wrong with Eliezer considering his daughter as a marriage partner for Yitzchak, that the Midrash calls him “a trader with scales of deceit in his hand?” Eliezer didn’t lie to, or cheat Avraham. He was merely wondering whether his daughter might be suitable. Which father would not at least consider if his daughter would be a worthy spouse for the world’s most eligible bachelor, the father-to-be of the Jewish people?

Also, when Avraham rejected Eliezer’s proposal, Eliezer accepted Avraham’s decision with total equanimity.

It must be then that the mere fact that Eliezer had room to consider this possibility showed a minute trace of deceit. For if it were not

so, he would have known without a second thought the truth — that the blessed and the cursed cannot combine.

This is the nature of deceit: A deceitful person deceives not only others, but himself as well.

The doubting heart, its inability to recognize the truth, comes from our own defects. They deceive us and lie about the truth of existence.

If we will only clear the windows of our soul, our eyes will see the truth shining like a beacon.

A GOOD HEART

“Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say ‘Tilt your pitcher so I may drink,’ and who replies ‘Drink and I will even water your camels,’ her will You have designated for Your servant Yitzchak.” (24:14)

In his prayer that he should select the correct wife for Yitzchak, Eliezer chose to rely on the prospective spouse showing only one character trait — kindness.

How could Eliezer rely on kindness alone? Surely a wife to be fit for Yitzchak would also need to be outstanding in other areas of character perfection. For example, purity of heart, faith and fear of Hashem. In the Ethics of the Fathers, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai says to his disciples, “Go out and see which is the good way to which a man should cling.”

Rabbi Eliezer says “A good eye.” Rabbi Yehoshua says “A good friend.” Rabbi Yossi says “A good neighbor.” Rabbi Shimon says “One who foresees the results of an action.” Rabbi Elazar says “A good heart.” Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai then says to them, “I prefer the words of Elazar ben Arach to your words, because your words are included in his words.” A good heart includes all other good characteristics.

Avraham Avinu was the first of the Avos. As he was the father of Yitzchak and the grandfather of Yaakov, he “contained” the other two patriarchs. Avraham’s most outstanding quality was *chesed*, kindness. Kindness contains the other qualities.

Haftorah Melachim I Chapter 1

The need to secure the succession of the Jewish People, which is the subject of this week’s *Parsha*, is reflected in the Haftorah. King David is coming to the end of his days (like Avraham in the *Parsha*) and his senior son, the handsome and indulgent Adonijah, tries to wrest the succession from Shlomo, King David’s appointed heir. But King David is alerted to Adonijah’s scheme by his wife Bas-sheva and Nassan the prophet, and the plot is foiled.

THE WILL TO DIVIDE

The Chafetz Chaim once wrote to a rich man that he was obliged to make a clear will dividing his property between his sons as we find in this week’s Haftorah. If the prophet Nassan admonished King David to leave clear instructions regarding his succession, certainly this rich man was

obliged to do so. We do not find that David was annoyed at Nassan for reminding him of his mortality; rather he took steps to rectify a difficult situation. As the Chafetz Chaim wrote: “Children are known to disobey their parents and quarrel amongst themselves even during their parents’ lifetime, how much more so after their death!”

Sources:

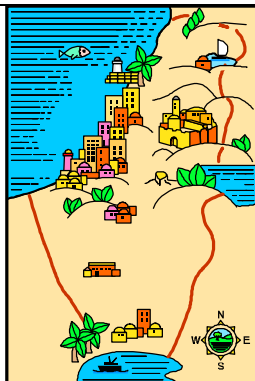
The Eyes Of Truth - Chidushei Halev;

Who’s Sorry Now? - HaDrash V’Halyun, Rabbi Shalom Schwadron, Rabbi Pesach Krohn;

A Good Heart - Avos 2:9, Rabbi M. Robman in *Zichron Meir, Lekach Tov*
The Will to Divide - Adapted from *The Midrash Says*

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



OTHER WORLDLY EXPERIENCES

“Whoever resides in *Eretz Yisrael*, recites the *Shma* in the morning and evening and speaks *lashon hakodesh* (the sacred Hebrew tongue) is considered a member of the World to Come.”

This statement by Rabbi Meir (*Sifri Parshas Ha’azinu* 32:43) does not relate to inheriting the World to Come, because we have already been taught (*Sanhedrin* 90a) that “All of Israel have a share in the World to Come;” not only those who perform these particular acts. It refers to how one can live a “World to Come” existence in this world. The Jew who lives in the holy land blessed by Hashem, pledges his allegiance to Him morning and evening, and speaks in the language with which Hashem created His world and wrote His Torah, is experiencing something of the intimacy with Hashem which the World to Come is all about. He is like a citizen of that infinite world who is on a temporary visit in this finite one.

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