

Torah Weekly

ד"ב

PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH

16 - 22 Cheshvan 5785
17 - 23 November 2024

Torah: Genesis 23:1-25:18
Haftorah: Kings I 1:1-31

REMAINING FOCUSED

Isaac was forbidden to leave the Holy Land, because he was consecrated to G-d when Abraham offered him as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. Abraham, however, wasn't willing to consider a Canaanite girl for Isaac, so he sent his faithful servant Eliezer to his own hometown of Aram Naharaim (modern-day northern Syria) to find a suitable girl for Isaac. Eliezer successfully discharged this mission and returned to Canaan with Rebecca.

The Torah relates the entire account of Eliezer's mission in great detail, repeating entire segments of the story several times. Generally speaking, the Torah is "stingy" with words; many laws of the Torah are derived from a seemingly superfluous word, or even an extra letter. The Midrash therefore concludes that "beautiful are the words of the servants of the Patriarchs more than the Torah of their children."

What is so special about the "words of the servants of the Patriarchs"? What is the lesson the Torah wants us to derive from Eliezer's mission? One characteristic of Eliezer's mission which is quite blatant is his tremendous focus. When he arrived in Aram Naharaim, he didn't first go around town to see the local attractions. In fact, he didn't even check in to the local Hilton to rest from his journey. Instead, he went straight to work, immediately starting the search for Isaac's future wife. Even after he found Rebecca and deemed her worthy for his master's son, he still didn't allow himself to relax. When he was invited to Rebecca's home, and the entire family sat down to eat, he proclaimed, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words... I am Abraham's servant..."

Because he was so focused on his duty, constantly aware that he was merely an envoy of Abraham, he realized that he had all of Abraham's miraculous powers at his disposal. Therefore, instead of hiring a private investigator to find the best and most virtuous girl in town, he went to the well and beseeched G-d for a sign from heaven which would identify the right maiden. And he succeeded. When Rebecca's family

requested that she be given several months to prepare herself for marriage—a seemingly reasonable demand—Eliezer responded: "Do not delay me . . . Send me away, and I will go to my master." And he got his way. He didn't feel compelled to comply with societal norms or standards; he knew that his mission would succeed even if he were asking for the impossible.

We, too, are emissaries. We were sent to this world by the Almighty to create a marriage, to bring together two opposites - Creator and creation. We can and will accomplish this task, because we go not with our own powers, but with the G-dly powers which G-d invested within us in order to accomplish this feat. We can transform ourselves, our families and acquaintances, and indeed all of creation into spiritual entities, suitable to be G-d's bride. We must, however, always remain focused on the mission. We must always have proper priorities, always remembering what is really important in life.

This is the lesson we learn from Eliezer, a lesson the Torah deems worthy of repeating several times.

By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

SHROUDS DON'T HAVE POCKETS

There's an old Yiddish expression, "In Tachrichim Iz Nishto Kein Keshines", "Burial shrouds don't have pockets." In other words, you can't take your stuff with you.

So, what does come with us? The answer is found in the title of this week's Torah portion.

Chayei Sarah means "the life of Sarah." One would therefore assume that this portion is all about the life of Sarah. The second verse, however, talks about Sarah's passing, and the rest of the portion discusses events that took place after her death. How could this portion be about the life of Sarah when we have 105 verses that talk about what happened after the life of Sarah?

In answering this classic question, we learn a profound life lesson: the life of a righteous person continues even after their physical passing. Our sages tell us that wicked people, "even when they are alive, they are

considered dead." The wicked have no continuity, no eternity. Righteous people (Tzaddikim), on the other hand, "even when they pass away, they are considered living."

The classic example of this teaching is, "David Melech Yisrael Chai Vekayam" – "David, King of Israel, is alive and well." Yet we know, of course, that King David was buried thousands of years ago. Why, then, do we sing about him being alive and well? Because only his physical body was interred; his true essence, the "real" King David, remains alive and well, and we are waiting for Moshiach, a descendant of David, to lead us out of exile.

Another example of this teaching is our patriarch Jacob. The Talmud (quoted by Rashi) tells us, "Our patriarch Jacob did not die. Just as his children are living, he, too, is living."

Who Was Sarah?

Sarah was many things: a righteous woman, a prophetess, the wife of Abraham. But above all, Sarah was our matriarch. And not only that, she was our first matriarch. It was Sarah who brought about the fulfillment of G-d's promise that her son, Isaac, would carry forth Abraham's legacy.

"For I have known him," says G-d about Abraham, "because he commands his sons and his household after him, that they should keep the way of the L-rd to perform righteousness and justice." As Rashi explains, "For I have known him" implies love. To know him is to love him. Why does G-d love him? Because Abraham and Sarah established continuity for G-d. And to this day we are called the children of Abraham and Sarah.

Life is not the pleasures we encounter; those are transient, passing. What is permanent in life are those things that live forever.

That's why this portion is called Chayei Sarah, because it teaches us about what is real in life.

Transient vs. Eternal

There are two contrasting perspectives regarding reality:

One approach suggests that if something cannot be perceived with any of the five senses, then it does not exist. Only if you can see it, hear

Psalms Daily

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

HaYom Yom

Thought is a garment and servant of the intellect and emotions.1 Even when it is not serving the intellect or emotions, it continues to function, thinking and meditating. However, this activity is then not only devoid of content, but also open to depravement... It is explained that alien or evil thoughts are caused by "emptiness of the head." For when the mind is occupied, the thought has something to serve, and there is no room for stupid and vain thoughts devoid of substance.

Aleph Institute

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center

5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412-421-0111

Fax:412-521-5948

www.AlephNE.org
info@AlephNE.org



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it, smell it, taste it, or touch it, then it is real. The other perspective is that anything that can be perceived with the senses is temporary. Here today, gone tomorrow. Only intangible experiences, it is argued, can represent eternity. Seven-layer cake is delicious, but it's not forever. An idea, a belief, a mathematical axiom - one plus one equals two - those are forever. This explains why even the mightiest of governments have failed to eradicate certain ideals, values, and aspirations. Chayei Sarah teaches us that the true "life of Sarah" lies in the good and the G-dly aspects of life, or as we know it, in studying Torah, performing Mitzvot, and living as a Jew. These are eternal realities.

Place of Life

According to Jewish law, a person must be buried when they pass. In Hebrew, there are three different expressions for the word "cemetery":

Beit Hakevarot, meaning "place of graves." Life is life, and death is death. When you die, it's over.

Beit Olam, or "place of eternity." Humankind was created from earth and returns to it. "For dust you are, and to dust you will return." Although the body is interred in the ground, the soul, the true consciousness of the person, the essence of the person, especially a righteous person, lives on forever. That is why it is referred to as a "place of eternity."

Beit Hachaim, the "place of life." Now, that sounds strange! Why call a cemetery a place of life? One might think it's facetious, but it's not. The soul is eternal. The blessings that emanate from souls are eternal. A person spends 70, 80, 120 years - or in the case of Sarah, 127 years - and then the body is returned to the earth. But the soul remains alive; the real person continues to live.

How? Firstly, by their accomplishments, their Mitzvot, and their Torah study. And secondly, through their children, their grandchildren, and all their descendants until the end of time.

The Only True Friend

A poignant parable often comes to mind whenever I study this Mishnah. It is about a

man who was summoned by the king. Back then, if the king wanted to see you, it was never a good sign. Overwhelmed with fear, he sought solace from his three closest friends.

"Listen," he said to his first friend, "I received a summons from the king. I'm terrified. Can you accompany me?" His friend immediately reassured him, "Of course I'll come with you! I'm your friend. I will walk with you all the way to the capital city," he said, "but that's as far as I can go. I hope you understand."

He made a similar request of the next friend. "Of course I'll come with you," the friend responded, "but I can only go until the palace gates. I hope you understand."

Finally, he turned to his only remaining friend and implored, "You are my dearest friend. Will you come with me? I am so scared." In a resolute voice, the devoted friend declared, "I will accompany you to the capital city, through the palace gates, and even into the king's court. I will stand by your side even when the king is interrogating you. I am with you; I will never leave your side."

Who are these three best friends that a person has?

The first friend is the wealth and possessions we've amassed in this world—our stocks, bonds, securities, real estate. When the time comes for us to depart to the next world, we ask our money to come with us. The money, however, says, "I'll accompany you, but only until the cemetery. Hearse's don't have luggage racks. Shrouds don't have pockets. You can't take it with you."

The second friend is our family. We turn to our spouse, children, grandchildren, and siblings, and plead, "Please come with me!" Our loved ones assure us, "Of course we'll accompany you. We love you. We'll come to the cemetery and even attend the funeral. We will escort you all the way to your grave."

"But then," our relatives continue, "we'll need to go home and eat bagels and eggs, and other round things, representing the cycle of life. We're going to have a party at the shiva house. And maybe we'll fight over the inheritance." With a sense of despair, the person exclaims, "Hey! I can't take

my money with me, and my relatives can't come with me either?!"

So, we turn to our only remaining friend—the Torah we studied, the mitzvot we performed, and the good deeds we amassed. The person asks, "Will you come with me?" The Torah and the mitzvot reply, "Not only will we go with you, but we'll be with you all the way. We will accompany you wherever you go."

Experiencing Eternity

Let us always be mindful of what is transient, and what is eternal. May our acts of kindness and goodness, our Torah study, and our performance of mitzvot be our guiding light, illuminating the path of eternity. May we all be blessed to lead lives that are engaged in the pursuit of the eternal.

By Rabbi Yehoshua B. Gordon

CHAYEI SARAH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Chayei Sarah," means "The life of Sarah" and it is found in Genesis 23:1. Sarah dies at age 127 and is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron, which Abraham purchases from Ephron the Hittite for four hundred shekels of silver.

Abraham's servant Eliezer is sent, laden with gifts, to Charan, to find a wife for Isaac. At the village well, Eliezer asks G-d for a sign: when the maidens come to the well, he will ask for some water to drink; the woman who will offer to give his camels to drink as well shall be the one destined for his master's son.

Rebecca, the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel, appears at the well and passes the "test." Eliezer is invited to their home, where he repeats the story of the day's events. Rebecca returns with Eliezer to the land of Canaan, where they encounter Isaac praying in the field. Isaac marries Rebecca, loves her, and is comforted over the loss of his mother.

Abraham takes a new wife, Keturah (Hagar), and fathers six additional sons, but Isaac is designated as his only heir. Abraham dies at age 175 and is buried beside Sarah by his two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, 17 Cheshvan 5785 - 18 November 2024 Great Flood Begins (2105 BCE)

The rains began to fall on the 17th of Cheshvan of the year 1656 (2105 BCE), flooding the earth and rising above the highest mountains. Only Noah and his family survived, in the ark built to that end by Divine command, and a pair of each animal species, who entered with him into the ark.

Monday, 18 Cheshvan 5785-19 November 2024 Pittsburgh Tree of Life Massacre (2018)

On Shabbat morning, Cheshvan 18, 5779 (Oct. 27, 2018), Pittsburgh's peaceful Jewish enclave of Squirrel Hill was shattered by gunshots as a crazed anti-Semite attacked Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life congregation, killing 11. It was the deadliest-ever attack on Jews on American soil.

Wednesday, 20 Cheshvan 5785-21 November 2024

Birth of Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch (1860)

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn (known by the acronym "Rashab"), was born on the 20th of Cheshvan of the year 5621 (1860).

Passing of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (2020)

An international religious leader, philosopher, and respected moral voice, he was the author of over 30 books, served as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013 and took his seat in the House of Lords in October 2009.

Born in London in 5708 (1948), he was planning to become a lawyer until the Rebbe - Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory - directed him to the rabbinate. He was a towering figure, who counseled social and political leaders

and others. His voluminous writings brought relevance and eloquence to thousands of Torah topics. Even after his retirement, he continued to write, teach, lead, and inspire until his passing at the age of 72.

Friday, 21 Cheshvan 5785-22 November 2024 Passing of R. David Ibn Zimra (1574)

R. David ibn Zimra, known by the acronym Radvaz, was a great rabbi and scholar who led the Jewish communities of Egypt and Safed for sixty years. Radvaz was held in high esteem by his contemporaries, and is the author of 3000 responsa, covering a vast array of topics. Among his more famous students are R. Isaac Luria (the Ari) and R. Betzalel Ashkenazi (author of Shitah Mekubetzet). It is said that Elijah the Prophet revealed himself to him. He passed away on 21 Cheshvan of 5334 (1574).