

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

HAYYE SARAH

Haftarah: Melachim I 1:1-31

NOVEMBER 14-15, 2014

22 HESHVAN 5775

DEDICATIONS: Lelluy Nishmat - Yosef Ben Esther

. Candle lighting Friday evening 4:20 p.m. Mincha at 4:20
4:20 will creep up very quickly and its cold out so please make the effort to join us on time
and help to make sure we have a minyan

SHABBAT: Perasha class with Rabbi David at 8:30 – Zohar on Chayeh Sarah
Whales, Cows, Caves and Dead Man Walking ...
Shaharit - Hashem Melech at 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:27 AM
Kiddush sponsored by the Colish Family

Looking Forward The Waldman Family will sponsor Kiddush on Shabbat Nov 22 Parshat Toledot
And we have a sponsor for November 29th Details to follow
Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one
We want to schedule the full season in advance if possible

Early Mincha after Kiddush - Amidah after 12:04

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30
Ages 0-5 - in the Playroom/ Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at the Bach 4:30 PM
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 4:30

Return for Arbit at 5:40 and then join us

7PM.... BODY AND SOUL – The State of the Jewish nation ... This film sets the record straight eloquently and
comprehensively. It not only shows the undeniable historical connection between the Jewish People and the Land of
Israel, but also succeeds in debunking all of the propoganda, myths and misinformation that have become accepted as
truth by so many. Desserts – Discussion follows... Please invite your friends

SUNDAY: Sisterhood meeting Sunday at 9:30 AM upstairs
Krav Maga starting Sunday 10am - 11am

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00AM, Mon and Thurs at 6:55, Tues, Weds and Fri at 7:00

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Thursday Nights 8:30-9:30 Virtual* Class facilitated by Rabbi Yosef Colish.
Practical Laws of Shabbat for Sephardim

GENERAL SYNAGOGUE MEETING For all congregants
At the Synagogue – New Date - Sunday December 14th at 9:30 AM
Looking forward to 2015 - Plans for the future and transitions

Saturday Night November 22nd is Family Movie Night @The Sephardic. Pizza Melaka Malka
We are looking for a sponsor 6:15 pm.

Saturday Night December 6th is Family Movie Night @The Sephardic. Pizza Melaka Malka
We are looking for a sponsor 6:15 pm.

Saturday Night December 13th at 6:15 pm Did you know there are over 700,000 amateur radio operators in the
United States and almost 3 million world-wide! Come learn the secrets of how to operate your own radio to
communicate with others by transmitting voice, Morse code, digital text and pictures, even live video signals by radio
from one ham "station" to another, on land and at sea, in the air, and in space. Children and adults of all ages are
invited. Light refreshments will be served. Presentation by Bob Kraus, facilitated by Rabbi Yosef.

SAVE THE DATE: Sisterhood Annual Dinner December 9 honoring Hinda and Robert Mizrahi.
Please sponsor an ad and make your reservations

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 Israel or something of interest

**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us!
 212-289-2100 – Mincha and Arbit – Give us 22
 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!**

Editors Notes

Prepare The Future

What will the Jewish world look like for our children and grandchildren, especially for those who remain in America and outside the land of Israel? What contribution are we making towards defining that world beyond our own four cubits? What responsibility do we have?

We read this week that, "Hashem blessed Abraham with everything". Rashi asks how we define the word everything, in Hebrew Bakol? He writes the word Bakol is numerically equal to the word Ben meaning son and continues, "Since he (Abraham) now had a son (Isaac), he had to find him a wife." From here we learn that one generation is responsible for the Jewish continuity of the next generation; of defining the world and ensuring there is a tomorrow. Abraham is always stepping forward and it's his example we must follow.

In last week's portion we read of our forefather at 99 years old. Three days earlier he was commanded and complied with Hashem's command to circumcise his entire household which must have quite daunting. He circumcised his son and himself and now is at the height of post-operative pain and discomfort. The sun as if removed from the sheath which protects the world from the heat and rays shines down makes venturing out nearly impossible. Abraham is sitting at the entrance of his tent in the midst of some prophetic experience where Hashem himself has come to him. And then what appear to be three Arabian travelers are seen in the distance. Abraham has every excuse to remain where he is. Yet he does not use any of them. Instead he runs to greet and serve them. We are often told that to succeed in life, one must step out of his comfort zone. The example set for us by Abraham is so much more.

Last week we saw Abraham running to do. We saw him argue with G-d over Sodom. And we saw him at the very end of the portion willing to go against his very nature in binding Isaac. The week prior we saw HaShem tell Abraham to go (Lech Lecha) and he does. We saw Abraham risk life and limb to rescue

his nephew. Abraham is our example of stepping out of our comfort zone into the world and making a difference. He stands in sharp contrast to his ancestor Noah who locks himself into the ark saving no human other than his family.

As observant Jews from tight knit communities, we often find ourselves mimicking Noah and locking out the turbulent waters of the outside world. We build our own arks for our families and friends. We create a comfort zone. We ought to remember that it is Abraham whom we should mimic.

Last week I attended a continuing education program in media training. What would have been an expensive course was, thanks to our friends at UJA given free to members of the local rabbinate. And I am deeply grateful to UJA and to the course presenters and teachers for an incredibly informative day.

When I walked into the room, I was one of 14 rabbis attending. Strange enough many of these rabbis wore no yalmakahs although most of the lady rabbis did have a Kippah on their heads. And when our OU certified sandwich was served, only my neighbor from Lido Beach, Rabbi Shaul Rappaport and I got up to wash. At the sink we presumed we wouldn't get a third for zeman and we were right. Now the other twelve attendees were brilliant people with masters degrees and PHDs that attest to the fact. They were also kind and socially conscious. But when it came to what I'll label as Torat Moshe, Halacha and Rabbinic Judaism, they were clueless. And just as sad was that these were the types of rabbis who we read about in the papers over the holidays who were scared to speak about supporting Israel because so many of their left leaning liberal and intermarried congregants were spewing anti Israel propaganda in line with their bible, The New York Times. You may be thinking that we have nothing to do with these people so why am I even telling this story. Four years ago Haham Ovadia Yosef z"sl, and the council of Torah Sages directed us to join the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and help direct and influence the future of the Jewish people. Haham Ovadia personally commissioned former member of Knesset and mayor of Tiberias **Yigal Bibi** to direct these efforts.

A little history. The WZO was originally founded at the initiative of Theodore Herzl at the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1897.

It was based on the principles of creating a Jewish homeland in Eretz Israel, and ultimately ending anti-Semitism. The WZO includes several national institutions that are active in Israel and world

Jewry. These institutes include the Jewish Agency, Zionist Federation, Keren Kayemet, L'Yisrael and Keren Hayesod. In the past the Diaspora supported these efforts. Now at the backing of Natan Sharansky, the Israeli government participates actively in funding projects run by these national institutions, with the *emphasis this year* on support for the absorption of immigrants and expansion of *Jewish education and identity in the Diaspora*.

Who dictates how the money is spent and who dictates the direction of the education and creating identities both in Israel and abroad? It is the delegates of the WZO. And if we do not heed the words of the Rishon LeSion Haham Ovadia and take a stand, then the ones who dictate will all resemble those twelve rabbis and their liberal congregants. And our children and our children's children will feel the effect. It is time to step out of our comfort zone.

Haham Ovadia understood that we the Torah observant community must have a strong and paramount influence in the education of the Jewish people throughout the world; to provide rabbis and educators in the Diaspora, absorb and encourage Aliyah and ensure that these issues are not left to outside influences. To that end the World Sephardic Zionist Organization - Ohavei Zion was formed with a list of delegates from our many communities all under the banner championed by Haham Ovadia and supported by our Sephardic Sages today. And each and every lover of Torah and Mitzvot must join in this endeavor. And it takes so little to do so. There are hundreds and hundreds of thousands of us. We can really make a difference. We simply need to register and vote.

Elections for the 37th World Zionist Congress will take place during the coming year for the delegates for these national institutions. Our aspirations are to strengthen the presence of the World Sephardic Zionist legacy of Maran. For the first time, the delegates will also be representing the issue of the rights of the Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries, which was recognized by the Israeli government and the International community through legislation initiated by a Member of Knesset.

Our Sages are appealing to our brothers and sisters throughout the world to support the Ohavei Zion Movement within the World Zionist Organization (WZO) for the upcoming elections, which will be crucial for the future identity and unity of the Jewish people.

The first step in creating our new party is to register a minimum of 600 people so that we can become a recognized party and this must be done within the next thirty days. To register in support of the party, please visit <https://admin.election-america.com/Candidates/?petition=10>

There you will be asked to fill in your personal information and check-off boxes approving our party. There is a nominal registration fee of \$5 for those under 30 or \$10 depending for the rest of us. Please make sure all your family members register.

Additionally we will need volunteers and point people to assist us from every synagogue and school in every community in the country. This is your opportunity to truly make a difference. If you can help, please contact Lana Eliyahu at lana.eliyahu@gmail.com or via phone at [917-213-4600](tel:917-213-4600).

We are not known as Benai Noah. We are called Benai Yisrael. We are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We are the children of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Each of them was tested to step out of their comfort zone. Each was required to venture beyond the ark. Each changed the world.

We saw last week that Abraham had lots of excuses available to him. He had old age. He had pain. He even had G-d's presence as an excuse not to get up. Yet he used none of them. And not only did he step out, he ran. And this week we see his dedication towards the future. One may be blessed with everything, but without a future, everything is worthless.

The work to register our communities is great. The time is short. The potential benefits are enormous. And our sages are begging us to step out and to run. Join us in this marathon to benefit the Jewish people. Prepare the future.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Amazing Story of Rav Mordechai Eliyahu Really Something to strive for !

Once, a Jew who wasn't stringent about keeping Torah or Mitzvot heard the Talmudic story about Hillel the Elder. (Gemara Shabbat 30b - 31a). As the Talmud relates, two friends were talking, and one bet the other 400 zuz (a considerable sum) that he couldn't get Hillel the Elder angry. To win the bet, the

second man went to Hillel on Friday afternoon, not long before Shabbat, while Hillel was in the midst of bathing in preparation for Shabbat.

"Who here is Hillel? Who here is Hillel?" cried out the man by Hillel's door (a rather disrespectful way to go to the home of the Gadol Hador).

Hillel, who was bathing, wrapped himself in a robe and came outside. "My son, what is it that you need?" said Hillel.

"I have a question."

"Please ask my son, ask."

"Why is it that the heads of the Babylonians are round?"

"My son, you have asked a significant question. It is because they do not have skilled midwives," said Hillel.

The man left and waited a bit of time so that Hillel would get back involved with his bath. And then he returned.

"Who here is Hillel? Who here is Hillel?" cried out the man a second time by Hillel's door.

Hillel stopped bathing, wrapped himself in a robe again, and came outside. "My son, what is it that you need?" said Hillel.

"I have a question."

"Please ask my son, ask."

"Why is it that the eyes of the Tarmudin are oval?"

"My son, you have asked a significant question. It is because they live in a sandy environment," said Hillel.

The man left and waited some more, to give time for Hillel to get back involved with his bath. He then returned yet again.

"Who here is Hillel? Who here is Hillel?" cried out the man by Hillel's door.

Hillel stopped bathing, wrapped himself in a robe again, and came outside a third time.

"My son, what is it that you need?" said Hillel.

"I have a question."

"Please ask my son, ask."

"Why is it that the feet of the Africans are broad?"

"My son, you have asked a significant question. It is because they live in watery marshes," said Hillel.

"I have many more questions to ask," said the man, "But I am afraid you may get angry."

Hillel wrapped his robe around himself, and sat down. He said, "All questions you have, please ask."

"Are you the one they call the Nasi (prince, president) of Israel?"

"Yes," Hillel said.

"Well then, may there not be many more like you in Israel."

"My son, why do you say that?"

"Because on account of you, I just lost 400 zuz."

"Be careful not to be so impetuous," said Hillel.

"Better you should lose 400 zuz, and then 400 more, than Hillel should get angry."

The modern Jew who heard this story wanted to know if the Rabbis of today have that same kind of patience. He thought to himself, "They must definitely know this story, and maybe even use it in their sermons. I want to check out whether they really "Practice what they preach.""

So, he made a list of telephone numbers of a series of known Rabbis. At 2AM, he called one of the Rabbis on his list, and 'innocently' asked a question. "What blessing do you make on a candy covered apple?" The reaction of the Rabbi was immediate, "For a question like this, you can't call me at a more normal hour?!" and he hung up the phone. The Jew proceeded to call Rabbi after Rabbi. They all reacted the same way, with anger at being woken up in the middle of the night for such a thing.

Around 3AM the Jew reached Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu. When the Rabbi picked up the phone, the Jew said, "Can I ask you a question?"

"Please," answered the Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu.

"But first, is it a question that could wait a moment until I make Netilat Yadim or is it an emergency?"

The Jew said it could wait a moment. Shortly afterwards, the Rabbi's voice was heard on the telephone. "Yes, I'm ready now."

When the Jew asked his question about the candy-covered apple, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu responded kindly with a detailed answer. Then, at the end of the conversation, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu parted warmly, saying, "Please feel free to call and to ask me any question you'd like, and any time you want."

President Obama seeks to form an alliance with this guy

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei took to Twitter to call for the destruction of Israel over the weekend. He first started with a string of vitriolic anti-Israel tweets that called for the destruction of the "barbaric, wolflike & infanticidal regime of Israel."

He then culminated by posting a "neat table," as Haaretz puts it, that lays out nine key questions on why—and how—his plan to destroy Israel should be implemented. The post begins with the basic: Why? Because throughout its existence "the fake Zionist regime has tried to realize its goals by means of infanticide, homicide, violence & iron fist." But rest

easy, Iran definitely does not want “the massacre of the Jewish people” but rather Iran has proposed “a practical & logical mechanism” to eliminate Israel through a referendum involving “all the original people of Palestine, including Muslims, Christians and Jews” anywhere in the world.

The referendum would then give rise to a new government that would then have to decide whether Jews who have relocated to Israel can stay there or “should return to their home countries.” Khamenei is confident that the plan “can enjoy the supports of the independent nations and governments.”

Until the day when Khamenei’s plan can be realized, “powerful confrontation and resolute and armed resistance” is the only way to deal with “this ruinous regime.” And what should be the first step? Arming the West Bank. Isn’t a compromise possible? “The fact that Yasser Arafat was poisoned and killed by Israel while he had the most cooperation with the Zionists proves that in the viewpoint of Israel, ‘peace’ is simply a trick for more crimes and occupation,” Khamenei writes.

The post comes days after the Wall Street Journal revealed that President Obama wrote a secret letter to Khamenei that suggested the two nations could cooperate in fighting against ISIS. In the letter, Obama said that any cooperation would be dependent on Iran reaching a nuclear deal with global powers by Nov. 24. Mitt Romney harshly criticized the letter on Friday. “That the president would write a letter of this nature, in effect legitimizing a nation and a leadership that is violating international norms and is threatening the world, is so far beyond the pale, I was stunned. I was speechless,” Romney said, according to the Washington Post.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Avraham negotiates with Ephron the Hitite to purchase the Cave of Machpelah as a burial place for Sarah. Tradition says that this is also the burial place of Adam and Chava.

2nd Aliya: Avraham sends Eliezar, his trusted servant, to Aram Naharayim, (between the Tigris and the Euphrates) to find Yitzchak a shiduch - a bride.

3rd Aliya: Leading a caravan of supplies and riches, Eliezar arrives in Nachor. While resting by "the well", he devises a test to ascertain the worthiness of a potential mate for Yitzchak. Rivkah (Yitzchak’s 1st cousin once removed) meets all the criteria and Eliezar presents her with the appropriate gifts.

4th Aliya: Eliezar is invited into Bisuel's home (Rivkah's father) and he relates the entire story of his mission and his encounter with Rivkah. Eliezar asks for her hand in marriage to Yitzchak. Bisuel and Lavan (Rivka’s brother) agree.

5th Aliya: Rivkah express her desire to depart immediately. Her family blesses her, and Eliezar brings her to Canaan. Yitzchak marries Rivka in the year 2108.

6th & 7th Aliyot: Avraham marries Keturah (some say she was Hagar) and has 6 more sons. Avraham dies in 2123 - 1638 b.c.e. at the age of 175. His two sons Yitzchak and Yishmael bury him in the Cave of Machpelah. Yishmael's 12 sons are listed and Yishmael dies at 137.

This week's Haftorah is from the first chapter of Kings 1. Dovid Hamelech (the King) is old and must confront the inevitable succession of the throne. His 40 year reign as King of Israel had been blessed with great success, and he had secured the security and sovereignty of the nation. Yet, in his personal life he had suffered great tragedies and hardships. Having already survived the rebellion of his son Avshalom, he must now confront the rebellion of his son Adoniyahu, and his trusted General, Yoav.

The Haftorah relates the foresight and courage of Batsheva, the mother of Shlomo, and the help of Nasan the Navi, in guaranteeing the succession of Shlomo to become the next King.

The relationship of this story to our Parsha is the planned succession of the throne. Just as Dovid must plan for the next stage of Israel's leadership; so too must Avraham accept the inevitable end and look to Yitzchak's future. Just as Dovid oversees the succession while still living, and steps aside to guarantee a proper and secure change; so too does Avraham take the necessary steps of securing Jewish national development while he is still alive and in a position to continue teaching and directing.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of Canaan.” (Beresheet 24:3)

The choice of a wife for Yitzhak was a matter of great concern to Abraham. The entire future of the holy nation depended on the character of this woman. Abraham was aware of his function as the founder of the nation of Israel. The women of

Canaan had bad character traits that would work to the detriment of the marriage and the entire nation of Israel.

Rabbi Ephraim Nissenbaum tells a story of a young man with an elderly widowed mother. He set a precondition for marriage: the woman he married must be willing to have his mother live with them, as she had no one else to care for her. Unfortunately, he could not find any woman who would agree to this.

His friends spoke to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach to convince him to put his mother in a nursing home, where she would be cared for. Rav Shlomo Zalman refused.

"I agree with the young man," he explained. "Good character traits are necessary in a wife. A wife who doesn't want to assist her mother-in-law lacks character."

Eventually the young man met a wonderful woman and they got engaged. Shortly after the engagement, Rav Shlomo Zalman spoke to the fellow and recommended he put his mother in a facility.

"Now that your kallah has proven her good character, you should know that having your mother live with you at the beginning of your marriage may cause unnecessary stress. That is not advisable."

Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba" (Beresheet 23:2)

The Rabbis tell us that Sarah passed away when she heard that Yitzhak was almost killed. The shock of such drastic news was enough to make Sarah lose her life. However, we also know that Sarah was greater than Abraham in prophecy, so if Abraham was able to perform the act itself without being overwhelmed by his emotions, why could Sarah not bear this trauma, since she is the greater of the two?

The answer is that fulfilling a *niehu*, a test, often seems beyond one's capabilities. However, Hashem, Who commands one to be tested, also gives him the strength to bear the challenge. The *niehu* itself reinforces the person doing it. Abraham was commanded to do the *Akedah*, the binding of Yitzhak, so he was given the strength to bear the test. Sarah was not herself commanded in this *niehu*, and so relying only on her natural strength, she passed away merely upon hearing the news of Yitzhak's near death.

We are constantly faced with challenges, and some of them seem so overwhelming to us, even to the point where we feel it's impossible to pass this test. We have to know that if Hashem gives a test, He also gives the wherewithal to pass the challenge. We just have to look deep inside of ourselves and

pray for His guidance. There, we will find it! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

KEEP IT COMING

Most people pray. Some devote a great deal of time to prayer and to the reciting of Tehillim.

It is unfortunate, however, that many individuals who spend their time involved in this activity don't expend the effort to do it right. When you are praying, you are talking to Hashem – yes – really talking to Him! Make sure you take advantage of this opportunity.

The trick is to anticipate. David Hamelech said, "Al zot yitpallel kol Hasid elecha le'et metzo – For this every pious person should pray to You for the time of finding" (Tehillim 32:6). His suggestion is to ask Hashem for anything and everything we might need. Many people really feel their prayers in times of trouble and dire need. But we should not limit our prayers to what we believe we are missing; we should train ourselves to ask for continuance of all the good that we already have. We should pray to the One Above that our lives should not diminish, but instead, improve.

Remember that while prayer – any prayer – is valuable, there is no comparison between one who prays under duress and one who prays out of sincere appreciation. Today, thank Hashem for all past gifts and then ask Him for greater happiness in the future. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Abraham's Bows

Parashat Hayeh Sara begins with the death of Sara Imenu, which occurred immediately after *Akedat Yishak*. Abraham now needed a burial plot, and so he negotiated with members of the local Hitti tribe and ended up paying an exorbitant sum of money for the Machpela Cave, where he buried Sara and where he, too, would eventually be buried.

Rabbenu Yona (Spain, 1210-1263) maintained that this episode constituted the final of Abraham's ten tests. Whereas most commentators were of the opinion that the final and most difficult test was that of *Akedat Yishak*, in Rabbenu Yona's view, the need to negotiate with the Hittim for a piece of land for burial was the final test. The question naturally arises as to what made this incident such a difficult test for Abraham that it can be counted along with *Akedat Yishak* in the list of tests that Abraham passed. Rav Matisyahu Salomon (contemporary) explained that Abraham's test was the need to start negotiating for a burial site after all he had gone just gone through. Abraham had just undergone an emotional

roller-coaster, having nearly slaughtered his own son, and then being told to desist and that he would earn eternal rewards for passing this test. Upon returning home after this emotional experience, he learned that his beloved wife had passed on. Abraham could have understandably thought to himself, "Can't I at least obtain a burial site without trouble? After all I've gone through, does this, too, have to be so complicated?" But Abraham did not approach the situation this way. He never complained or questioned G-d, and instead simply did what he had to do so he could give his wife a proper burial.

Rav Salomon finds proof to this explanation in the Torah's description of Abraham's bows as he spoke to the Hittim. In the first instance, Abraham bowed "Li'bneh Het" – "to the people of Het." In the second instance, however, he bowed "Lifneh Am Ha'aretz" – "before the people of the land." It appears that the first time Abraham bowed to the Hittim, whereas the second time he bowed in their presence, but not to them. Rav Salomon explained that in the first instance, Abraham bowed to the Hittim to show respect as a necessary formality as part of his negotiations. But the second time, he bowed not to the Hittim, but in front of them – because he bowed to G-d to thank Him. Abraham thanked G-d for enabling him to purchase the property he wanted. He did not express any frustration or angst, asking why he was subjected to this ordeal. He simply bowed and thanked Hashem.

This is a quality of Abraham Abinu which we can all emulate each and every day of our lives, several times a day. Every day presents its unique struggles and challenges. Even our successes and good fortune generally follow a period of struggle. We learn from Abraham to be grateful without complaining, to acknowledge that everything G-d does is for the best, whether or not we understand how. And this might be the greatest test of all – accepting life's challenges as G-d's will, and recognizing that they are all, ultimately, to our benefit.

Rabbi Wein

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 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.

Avraham apparently dealt with the death of Sarah in a more stoic fashion. The Torah itself indicates this by inference. In reference to Avraham's reaction to the tragedy, a small letter kaf is used to describe 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 endured his attitude towards life and its vicissitudes was affected – he now always looked forward and never dwelt 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 – never dwelling on past misfortune. I heard an outstanding speech delivered by George Deek, who is a Christian Arab and 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 saving and resettling the refugees, his grandfather escaped Lebanon and somehow brought the family back to Jaffa and Israel. He regained his job with the Israel Electric Company and 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 and in their legend of nakba.

In the main, they have devoted themselves to attempting to destroy Israel instead of rehabilitating themselves. This 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.

The Amended Conversion Law: Problems and Pitfalls

One of the current hot button topics here in Israel is pending legislation to make changes in the current process of converting non-Jews to Judaism here in the Jewish state. The bill itself has undergone many compromises and changes until it was approved by the coalition cabinet for presentation to the Knesset for a deciding vote.

The bill, in its original form was backed by Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid party, abetted by the Russian immigrant Yisrael Beyteinu party, and other smaller secular, left of center parties in the ruling coalition. It seemingly opened a loophole to allow for non-Orthodox conversions to take place and be recognized. That original bill has been modified now numerous times and that loophole has been closed and eliminated.

The thrust of the bill today is to allow municipal and neighborhood rabbis throughout the country to initiate and execute conversion processes. The bill in all of its forms, no matter how much it has been moderated and watered-down, is still bitterly opposed by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, which until now has been the sole arbiter of the conversion process. It is also being opposed and criticized by the haredi political parties and by many rabbinic leaders here in Israel. On the other hand, some of the rabbinic organizations such as Tzohar have praised the bill as being the first step in a necessary reorganization of the bureaucracy that controls the conversion process here in Israel. As of this writing, the fate of his bill is still unknown. (The amended version, where it is a government administrative decision and not a Knesset Law has since been passed, ed.) However, the fact that it has come this far indicates that there is strong public support for such a measure. The bill still insists that all final conversion documents must be signed and approved by the Chief Rabbinate but that has in no way weakened the opposition to the passage of this legislation.

I saw a very different and insightful reason for opposing the passage of this bill in one of the Israeli newspapers last week. The journalist pointed out that synagogue and community rabbis, by the very nature of their personal involvement with the people of their area and congregation, are more prone to succumb to outside and personal influences in such sensitive matters as conversion than are the ivory tower, disconnected and scholarly rabbinic courts of the Chief Rabbinate who are currently invested with the execution of the conversion process.

I can testify from my own rabbinic experience that the synagogue rabbi is in a very difficult position when one of his leading congregants or personal friends

asks him to convert a non-Jew who somehow nevertheless is attempting to become a member of that person's family. The very impersonal nature – the cold, bureaucratic, objective atmosphere of the current rabbinical courts of conversion – is itself in a paradoxical fashion a good guarantee that the conversion process will be legitimate and that the convert will be accepted by all groups as a true member of the Jewish people.

There is no perfect system that can deal with human affairs and achieve complete efficiency, fairness and alacrity. The conversion bill comes to attempt to overcome human nature and societal frictions. Its goals are lofty but in our practical world they may be unattainable. And the efforts expended in attempting to reach those goals may very well be wasted effort if not even counterproductive.

There is a great debate here in Israel as to how many non-halakhic yet Jewishly identifying people live in the country. There is no question that there are hundreds of thousands of loyal Israelis who are of Jewish descent or identify themselves with the Jewish people but who are nevertheless not halakhically Jewish. There is also no question that the overwhelming majority of them are not really interested in an halakhic conversion or in living a lifestyle of Torah observance.

Therefore the populist demands to somehow solve this "conversion crisis" by Knesset legislative action are largely motivated by politics and a basic misunderstanding of the concepts of halakhic conversions. Handing over the power to convert non-Jews to Judaism to local and communal rabbis in the long run will cause more problems than it solves. Not all rabbis are equal and neither are all rabbinic courts.

The conversion courts of the Chief Rabbinate have proven themselves to be effective and acceptable throughout the Jewish world. The new bill will force the Chief Rabbis to investigate and approve every rabbi who conducts a conversion, something which they do not have to do today since they rely on the rabbinical courts that they themselves have appointed and with whom they are acquainted. Every piece of legislation brings about unforeseen consequences. Rarely are those consequences positive and beneficial. Tinkering with the conversion process, as inefficient and impersonal as it may be at present, will open a vista of new and unimaginable problems that will have to be dealt with in the future.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Kindness of Strangers

In 1966 an eleven-year-old black boy moved with his parents and family to a white neighbourhood in Washington. [1] Sitting with his two brothers and two sisters on the front step of the house, he waited to see how they would be greeted. They were not. Passers-by turned to look at them but no one gave them a smile or even a glance of recognition. All the fearful stories he had heard about how whites treated blacks seemed to be coming true. Years later, writing about those first days in their new home, he says, "I knew we were not welcome here. I knew we would not be liked here. I knew we would have no friends here. I knew we should not have moved here . . ." As he was thinking those thoughts, a white woman coming home from work passed by on the other side of the road. She turned to the children and with a broad smile said, "Welcome!" Disappearing into the house, she emerged minutes later with a tray laden with drinks and cream-cheese and jelly sandwiches which she brought over to the children, making them feel at home. That moment – the young man later wrote – changed his life. It gave him a sense of belonging where there was none before. It made him realise, at a time when race relations in the United States were still fraught, that a black family could feel at home in a white area and that there could be relationships that were colour-blind. Over the years, he learned to admire much about the woman across the street, but it was that first spontaneous act of greeting that became, for him, a definitive memory. It broke down a wall of separation and turned strangers into friends.

The young man, Stephen Carter, eventually became a law professor at Yale and wrote a book about what he learned that day. He called it *Civility*. The name of the woman, he tells us, was Sara Kestenbaum, and she died all too young. He adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew. "In the Jewish tradition," he notes, such civility is called "chesed – the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of God." Civility, he adds, "itself may be seen as part of chesed : it does indeed require kindnesses toward our fellow citizens, including the ones who are strangers, and even when it is hard." To this day, he adds, "I can close my eyes and feel on my tongue the smooth, slick sweetness of the cream cheese and jelly sandwiches that I gobbled on that summer afternoon when I discovered how a single act of genuine and unassuming civility can change a life forever."

I never knew Sara Kestenbaum, but years after I had read Carter's book I gave a lecture to the Jewish community in the part of Washington where she had

lived. I told them Carter's story, which they had not heard before. But they nodded in recognition. "Yes," one said, "that's the kind of thing Sara would do." Something like this thought was surely in the mind of Abraham's servant, unnamed in the text but traditionally identified as Eliezer, when he arrived at Nahor in Aram Naharaim, northwest Mesopotamia, to find a wife for his master's son. Abraham had not told him to look for any specific traits of character. He had simply told him to find someone from his own extended family. Eliezer, however, formulated a test: Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness [chesed] to my master." (Gen. 24: 12-14?)

His use of the word chesed here is no accident, for it is the very characteristic he is looking for in the future wife of the first Jewish child, Isaac, and he found it in Rivka.

It is the theme, also, of the book of Ruth. It is Ruth's kindness to Naomi, and Boaz's to Ruth that Tenakh seeks to emphasize in sketching the background to David, their great-grandson, who would become Israel's greatest king. Indeed the sages said that the three characteristics most important to Jewish character are modesty, compassion and kindness. [2] chesed, what I have defined elsewhere as "love as deed," [3] is central to the Jewish value system. The sages based it on the acts of God himself. Rav Simlai taught: "The Torah begins with an act of kindness and ends with an act of kindness. It begins with God clothing the naked: "The Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them," and it ends with Him caring for the dead: "And He [God] buried [Moses] in the Valley." [4] Chesed – providing shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry, assistance to the poor, visiting the sick, comforting mourners and providing a dignified burial for all – became constitutive of Jewish life. During the many centuries of exile and dispersion Jewish communities were built around these needs. There were hevrot, "friendly societies," for each of them. In seventeenth century Rome, for example, there were seven societies dedicated to the provision of clothes, shoes, linen, beds and warm winter bed coverings for children, the poor, widows and prisoners. There were two societies providing trousseaus, dowries and the loan of jewellery to poor brides. There was one for visiting the sick, another bringing help to families who had suffered

bereavement, and others to perform the last rites for those who had died – purification before burial, and the burial service itself. Eleven fellowships existed for educational and religious aims, study and prayer, another raised alms for Jews living in the Holy Land, and others were involved in the various activities associated with the circumcision of newborn boys. Yet others provided the poor with the means to fulfil commands such as mezuzot for their doors, oil for the Hanukkah lights, and candles for the Sabbath. [5] Chesed, said the sages, is in some respects higher even than tzedakah:

Our masters taught: loving-kindness [chesed] is greater than charity [tzedakah] in three ways. Charity is done with one's money, while loving-kindness may be done with one's money or with one's person. Charity is done only to the poor, while loving-kindness may be given both to the poor and to the rich. Charity is given only to the living, while loving-kindness may be shown to the living and the dead. [6]

Chesed in its many forms became synonymous with Jewish life and one of the pillars on which it stood. Jews performed kindnesses to one another because it was "the way of God" and also because they or their families had had intimate experience of suffering and knew they had nowhere else to turn. It provided an access of grace in dark times. It softened the blow of the loss of the Temple and its rites:

Once, as R. Yohanan was walking out of Jerusalem, R. Joshua followed him. Seeing the Temple in ruins, he cried, "Woe to us that this place is in ruins, the place where atonement was made for Israel's iniquities." R. Yohanan said to him: "My son, do not grieve, for we have another means of atonement which is no less effective. What is it? It is deeds of loving-kindness, about which Scripture says, 'I desire loving-kindness and not sacrifice'" (Hosea 6:6). [7] Through chesed, Jews humanised fate as, they believed, God's chesed humanises the world. It also added a word to the English language. In 1535 Myles Coverdale published the first-ever translation of the Hebrew Bible into English (the work had been begun by William Tyndale who paid for it with his life, burnt at the stake in 1536). It was when he came to the word chesed that he realised that there was no English word which captured its meaning. It was then that, to translate it, he coined the word "loving-kindness."

The late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel used to say, "When I was young I admired cleverness. Now that I am old I find I admire kindness more." There is deep wisdom in those words. It is what led Eliezer to choose Rivka to become Isaac's wife and thus the first Jewish bride. Kindness brings redemption to the world and, as in the case of Stephen Carter, it can change lives. Wordsworth was right when he wrote

that the "best portion of a good man's [and woman's] life" is their "little, nameless, unremembered, acts / Of kindness and of love." [8]

[1] Stephen Carter, *Civility*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, 61-75.

[2] Bamidbar Rabbah 8: 4.

[3] Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 44-56.

[4] B. T. Sotah 14a

[5] Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, London, Edward Goldston, 1932, 348-363.

[6] B. T. Sukkah 49b.

[7] Avot de-Rabbi Natan, 4.

[8] From his poem, 'Tintern Abbey.'

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

Eliezer the servant of Abraham occupies a great space in the Torah and his words are quoted at great length, more than the words of many great personalities that are mentioned before or after. The reason for this distinction is because Eliezer gained enormous excellence by his loyalty to his holy master Abraham.

Eliezer had his own daughter that he desired to give to Yitzchak in marriage. Yet when his great master commanded him to go to Padan Aram to seek a wife for Yitzchak, Eliezer repressed his own wishes and he loyally set out to do his teacher's bidding.

During the journey, Eliezer could have found numerous excuses to turn back and to fail his mission. Yet he persisted with the utmost resolve and he finally succeeded. He thereby gained the distinction of being named "the blessed of Hashem" (Beresheet 24:31) and Hashem inscribed his words and deeds in the eternal record.

This is the very great importance of the loyalty to our Torah-teachers. And for this we become "Blessed of Hashem".

Quoted from a Bar Mitzvah speech written by R' Miller

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