

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

HAYYE SARAH

Haftarah: Melachim I 1:31

NOVEMBER 25-26, 2016 25 HESHVAN 5777

Rosh Hodesk Kislev will be celebrated on Thursday, December 1.

**DEDICATION: In memory of Raymond L. Dayan - Rahamim ben Mahal A"H**  
**Our condolences to his Children: Stephen, Morris, Jonny and his wife Merlene**  
**And in memory of our friend Andre Langer Z"L**

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## Editors Notes

### Serving Our Inclination or Our Inclination Serving Us

We read each day in the Shema, "You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart – Levavchem" . The word should read Levchem – your heart. The Talmud asks why the double language of Levavchem and explains to us that loving Hashem with one's whole heart means serving Him with both our yetzer hatov – our good inclination and with our yetzer hara – our evil inclination. The Gaon Rabbenu Eliyahu from Vilna explains that the righteous use even their physical desires only to serve Hashem. Throughout Bereshit we have been discussing overcoming one's evil inclination or the Satan and putting it to work for you.

We begin this perasha with the death of Sarah. We explained previously that Avraham was the tikkun or the repair of Adam and Sarah was the tikkun of Chava. At the moment of Sarah's death her soul went up to heaven and returned with Rivka (although this is why the midrashim say Rivka was three years old when Eliezer came calling. It's possible that instead of being born at that moment, Rebecca was so to say reborn as at that moment taking on the soul of Chava through Sarah.) Rivka's job was to further the refinement of Chava's soul. At the same time there

was a feminine aspect of the soul of Isaac which was perfected as he lay on the alter and went up as Abraham brought the knife to Isaac's neck. Isaac was then revived but with a new soul, with his own masculine soul as the Ohr HaChayim explains.

Now that three years have passed allowing Isaac own soul and Rebecca's new soul to take root, it is time for them to get married and continue the process.

Abraham calls his trusted servant. Who is this servant? We know him as Eliezer. He is the one Abraham referred to as his heir before being blessed with his own children. He is the son of Nimrod who accompanied Abraham after Abraham emerged unharmed from Nimrod's fire at Ur Kasdim also in a sense leaving his land, his father's palace and his birthplace to serve Abraham. Eliezer is the Head of Abraham's Yeshiva. He is the general who assists Abraham at war. He rules Abraham's house, has the combination to the safe, the keys to the lock box and power of attorney to act on behalf of Avraham. Yet as we begin the story he is nameless. Although a man of many possible titles, the Torah refers to him and he refers to himself simply as Abraham's servant.

Abraham makes his servant swear. One must ask, if this is Eliezer, chief of staff with the keys and power of attorney, doesn't Abraham already trust him? The Midrash tells us that Eliezer had hopes that his own daughter would wed Isaac, but Abraham explains that Eliezer as all those of Canaan who descend from Noah's son Ham, are cursed, while Isaac, a descendant of Shem is blessed.

So Eliezer gathers ten camels and again the Midrash jumps in telling us that this 17 day journey from south of Israel all the way up to Syria was shortened to three hours. While we fret over El Al's strike this week, Eliezer had something better than even Aladdin's magic carpet; he had flying camels led by an angel. And we are told the same about the return journey as they leave after breakfast and arrive at lunch time. The Midrash comments that Hashem made the miracle so that Rebecca would not be forced to spend the night in the company of Eliezer. But what are we worried about? He had ten servants

with him, she had her nursemaids and he was the Rosh yeshiva?

The story which repeats itself twice tells us how Eliezer prays and suddenly Rebecca appears offering to draw water for him as well as the camels. The Torah comments, "Now the maiden was of very comely appearance, a virgin, and no man had been intimate with her". Why do we need to know how pretty she was and that she was a virgin with the added note that no man had been intimate with her? Rashi explains that the daughters of the gentiles would preserve their virginity but were promiscuous in unnatural ways. Scripture attests that she was completely innocent.

Eliezer places upon Rebecca a nose ring and bracelets formalizing a proxy marriage between Rivka and Isaac. The story continues with Eliezer meeting the family. Laban seeing the jewelry is hoping for more gold. "And he said, "Come, you who are blessed of the Lord. " Wait, I thought Eliezer was cursed. Then Eliezer explains that he is Abraham's servant – again, no name and no other title, just Abraham's servant. He recounts the events at the well and the proxy marriage and asks for permission to leave with Rebecca.

The verse states: "And Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The matter has emanated from the Lord. We cannot speak to you either Rah oh Tov - bad or good." Strange language! What's the meaning of bad or good?

Eliezer hands Rebecca more jewelry, clothing and then to the family he gives fruits from the Holy Land. Was their significance to the choice of gifts?

Eliezer is in a rush to leave. Rebecca says she will accompany him and along with her own servants mount the camels which take to the air and return in time to see Isaac going out to pray. Rebecca is startled by the visible holiness of Isaac and falls off the camel. Apparently she is injured in the fall. Eliezer explains all that has happened and Isaac brings Rivka to his mother's tent and is comforted from the loss three years earlier of his mother. Again the Midrash jumps in and fills in some blanks. Rashi writes: He brought her to the tent, and behold, she was Sarah his mother (the soul of Sarah his mother?) ; i.e., she became the likeness of Sarah his mother, for as long as Sarah was alive, a candle burned from one Sabbath eve to the next, a blessing was found in the dough, and a cloud was attached to the tent. When she died, these things ceased, and when Rebecca arrived, they resumed.

A stranger Midrash explains why it was necessary to test Rivka and see if she truly was virtuous like Sarah who found herself with a snake like person with Pharaoh in Egypt and again with Avimelech in Gaza. We are told in one midrash Abraham cautioned Isaac to suspect Eliezer. We are told in another, that Isaac suspected Eliezer of sleeping with Rebecca on the way, and Eliezer needed to justify himself to his master. She had somehow lost her betulim (the sign of her virginity).

So now the Rosh Yeshiva, the general, the keeper of the safe and securities, the ruler of Abraham's house is accused both by Abraham and Isaac of sleeping with the young Rebecca sometime during that three hour return trip while accompanied with maids and servants?

The Midrash continues with Rebecca coming to the aid of Eliezer. "Heaven Forbid! Eliezer did not sleep with me, but in falling from the camel I lost the sign of my virginity. Let us travel to that place where I fell, and perhaps Hashem will perform a miracle and we will find there the blood of virginity."

"And so did they do; they went and discovered the blood on the tree such that she was a mukat etz {one who had lost her virginity as a result of impact}. And this blood, {the angel} Gabriel guarded so that no bird or wild animal consumed it."

Finally the midrash closes, "And since he suspected Eliezer where he had done nothing wrong, and he had faithfully performed the task set by Avraham, he merited to enter Gan Eden alive." And we no longer hear of Eliezer.

Eliezer is cursed, the son of Nimrod, the son of Cush, the son of Cham, the spiritual child of Kayin. Within Eliezer is a part of the nachash – the snake of Eden. The snake should have served man and is depicted on a flying camel. The snake who attacked Chava pushing her into the tree and polluting her in the process sought to break up the marriage of Adam and Chava. Now he arranges the marriage. Rebecca is pure as Chava at creation before she sins. Eliezer and with him that part of the snake who was cursed is now, in being faithful to his mission blessed by none other of Laban, who through his words lifts the curse. The snake who found Chava naked in the garden now brings her reincarnated in Rivkah clothing. The snake that prevented us from eating of the other fruits of the garden now brings those fruits from the Holy land to her family. The snake who challenged man succumbs under Abraham and takes the title he should have borne, man or Abraham's (who

perfected man, Adam), servant. And in this case it is the tree which bears witness to his innocence.

Adam and Chava were cursed in separating themselves from G-d, in bringing bread through the sweat of the brow and in distancing themselves from the supernal light of creation which was hidden away. Rivka as the reincarnation of Sarah continues the tikkun of Chavah. She enters the tent where "a candle burned from one Sabbath eve to the next" and hidden within that flame is the supernal light of creation. Instead of bread being cursed, we are told, "a blessing was found in the dough". And finally where Adam and Chava disconnected from the shechina, she represents the opposite where "a cloud – representing the shechina or Divine presence - was attached to the tent".

And Eliezer allows even that part of the snake to return to Gan Eden alive.

Lots of stories in this story, but within it we find one huge lesson. Each of us has within us a piece of that snake as Noah's wife Naamah was a descendant of Kayin and we all descend from her. The Talmud says, all of us exaggerate, most of us lie, many of us steal and some of us commit sexual indiscretions. This is the snake in each of us. Our test each and every day is to resist and to eventually subjugate that snake. Abraham did it. Sarah and Rebecca did it. And we will see this again and again as we continue through the book of Bereshit. We need to remember that we also have the DNA of the avot and imahot and where they succeeded, so can we!

May we each be successful and may each of our homes be blessed with the supernal light of creation, with a blessing on our dough, our parnassa, our health and our happiness. And finally with the shechina – the cloud of Shalom and G-d's presence, resting over us.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi David Bibi

**We added an article on Thanksgiving that we put out about 7 years ago (for those with a perfect memory) and given the extra time off this week, we added an article called Lively Torah by Rabbi Avi Geller of Aish. Let us know what you think ....**

### THANKSGIVING

Ever hear of Gershom Mendes Seixas? Well, he might just be the forgotten hero of Thanksgiving.

Our national Thanksgiving narrative is rich with stories about proclamations, gatherings, meals, traditions, football, and of course, the obligatory pardoning of a turkey by the president of the United States. Schoolchildren rehearse that day long ago when the Plymouth pilgrims broke bread. We note things Lincoln said.

And doubtless you have heard about what our first president, George Washington, declared while proclaiming the first official national day of Thanksgiving in 1789:

I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

We hear much these days about our "Judeo-Christian" heritage and its early and enduring influence on our culture. A look back at the founding era of our nation reminds us, however, that only about 2,500 Jews actually lived in the colonies in 1776. Usually those of us who speak of that early dual influence are referring to the Christian Bible with its Jewish roots.

But pointing this out is not to say that Jews were not active and represented during the colonial and founding periods. Quite the contrary - there are some fascinating and often overlooked stories.

Gershom Mendes Seixas is a case in point. Described as "American Judaism's first public figure," he was appointed, in 1768, chazzan of New York's Congregation Shearith Israel - the only synagogue serving the city's approximately 300 Jewish residents.

He was just 23 years old at the time. Largely self-taught in the Talmud with much help from his devout

father, he never actually became an "official" rabbi. In fact, it would be several decades before a rabbi was ordained in America.

Seixas was the first Jewish preacher to use the English language in his homilies. He was a gifted teacher and tireless worker. And when it came to the American Revolution, he was a patriot - as demonstrated by his actions while the colonies were struggling to actually realize the independence that had been recently proclaimed.

His synagogue, like much of the greater public, was somewhat divided on the issue of independence. But Seixas used all of his persuasive skills to convince his congregation that they should cease operations in advance of the approaching British occupation of the city, during the early days of the conflict.

He fled to his wife's family home in Connecticut, carrying various books and scrolls precious to the synagogue for safekeeping. In 1780, he accepted the leadership role at a synagogue in Philadelphia, where he became an outspoken cultural voice regularly calling on God to watch over General Washington and the great cause.

When the war ended, he was invited back to resume his work with Congregation Shearith Israel in New York. He returned with the books and scrolls to serve from 1784 until his death 32 years later.

When George Washington was inaugurated as the first president of the United States on April 30, 1789, Seixas was asked to participate as one of the presiding clergyman. This was certainly an act of gratitude by Washington for the preacher's stalwart support during the war. It was also, though, an expression of Washington's thinking about the importance of religious freedom and diversity in the new nation.

Later that year, as the nation set aside Thursday, the 26th of November, the date so designated by the president for Thanksgiving, Seixas preached a sermon to his New York congregation.

His Thanksgiving Day message was based on a text from the Psalms where it talks about how King David had "made a joyful noise unto the Lord." Seixas told his listeners that they had much to rejoice about - "the new nation, its president, and above all, the new constitution."

Warming to his theme, he reminded them that they were "equal partakers of every benefit that results

from this good government," and therefore should be good citizens in full support of the government.

Beyond that, they were encouraged to conduct themselves as "living evidences of his divine power and unity." He further admonished them "to live as Jews ought to do in brotherhood and amity, to seek peace and pursue it."

As the nation prepares to celebrate Thanksgiving this week, Gershom Mendes Seixas's sermon is every bit as relevant to all of us 220 years later.

News Source: The Jewish Press By David R. Stokes

### Summary of the Perasha Chayah Sara- Eliezer finds a wife for Yitshak

- 1- Sara dies. Abraham buys a burial plot for her in Ma'arat Ha'machpela.
- 2- Abraham sends Eliezer to find Yitshak a wife
- 3- Eliezer sees Rivka by the well
- 4- Eliezer meets Betuel and Laban
- 5- Rivka meets Yitshak and marries her
- 6- Abraham marries Ketura and has 6 children. Abraham dies
- 7- The children of Yishmael. Yishmael dies.

### FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

**"[Eliezer asked] Shall I take your son back to the land from which you departed?" (Beresheet 24:5)**

Eliezer is given the mission to find a wife for Yitzhak from Abraham's native land. So Eliezer asks what would be done in a case where he finds a great match but she doesn't consent to come to the Land of Canaan where Abraham and Yitzhak live? Rabbi Avigdor Miller zt"l says: this seems to be a remarkable query. How could it enter Eliezer's mind that Abraham could consent to allow his beloved only son from Sarah to forsake him and to settle in another land?

But, Eliezer understood that the choice of a proper wife for the prophet Yitzhak was a matter of the highest concern. Certainly, it was unthinkable to take Yitzhak to a foreign land to mingle with his wife's kin. But Eliezer was in doubt which of the considerations was paramount for Yitzhak's future. A wife of excellence to bear the future Holy Nation or the career of aloofness and non-mixing with others, which has been a very great principle in Abraham's history.

Abraham insisted on having his son under his own supervision. His son should not return to the influence of the environment from which Abraham became free, when Hashem commanded him to leave his father's home. Abraham was very loyal to

his mission, "To keep the way of Hashem" (Beresheet 18:19). The aloofness from outside influence is an essential part of the function of "Keeping the way of Hashem." Rabbi Reuven Semah

**"And Abraham was old; he came with his days." (Beresheet 24:1)**

What does it mean to "come with your days?" Can a person not come with his days?

There was a person who traveled to a town and visited the cemetery there. He was shocked to see all the adult graves with headstones that had the age of the deceased at three years, four years, five years, etc., and no one had any normal life span of sixty, seventy or eighty. When he questioned the townspeople, he was told that the custom of that place was not to write the actual amount of years lived on this world, but rather how much a person accomplished. Every person would be asked before he passed on to estimate how much time he spent in the service of Hashem. That is why people would only have a few years on their headstones.

This is what is meant that Abraham came with his years. Every moment of his life was used to serve Hashem. Indeed the Midrash says that Abraham had a coin minted with a picture of a young man and woman on one side, and an old man and woman on the other. Perhaps this lesson was hinted on that coin. A person must use his life and years to such an extent that he can be considered old as far as how many years were used to serve Hashem.

We can ask ourselves this question, "How much of our life is used in the service of Hashem?" Is it only one or two hours on Shabbat when we come to shul? Do we study morning and night and make sure to pray three times a day? Indeed, if we do even our physical mundane acts for the sake of Heaven, such as eating and sleeping to have strength to do misvot, or going to work to support our families - to support Torah, then most of our day can be considered fulfilling and positive. Our lives will be full with days and years, and we will be considered "coming with our days"! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

**Testing**

"And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years – the years of Sarah's life." (Beresheet 23:1)

Rashi explains that Sarah's death is written in the Torah immediately after the episode of Abraham's trial of sacrificing Yitzhak because after hearing what was about to transpire, she became so distressed that "her soul flew from her and she died."

Rashi tells us that Sarah was on a greater level of prophecy than Abraham. Yet we see that Abraham passed every stage of this great test, from

rising early in the morning to carry out the word of Hashem, to the very last moment of lifting the knife to perform the sacrifice. On the other hand, at the very first moment when Sarah heard what was taking place, she could not cope with the distress and died on the spot! How could Sarah, who was a greater Prophet, not be able to cope with this test at the first hurdle, whereas Abraham was able to complete everything to perfection?

One of the answers that Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz offers is that sacrificing Yitzhak was not actually Sarah's test, and as such, she was not given the Heavenly assistance to pass it. For it is only when Hashem Himself provides the test are we able to withstand it, because with every test comes the means to pass it. Even though Sarah was a greater Prophet, this test was not hers to pass, and she therefore did not have the means and Heavenly assistance to succeed.

This message is echoed by Rav Eliezer Zusha Portugal, the first Skulener Rebbe, in his answer to a perplexing question on the words, "Baruch gozer umkayem – Blessed is He Who decrees and makes it stand," said in the Baruch She'amar prayer at the beginning of Pesukei Dezimrah: "Is it not strange," asked the Rebbe, "that we are praising Hashem not only for making a decree against us, but we go further and praise Him for fulfilling it?" The answer, says the Rebbe, is that we are supposed to read the words like this: "Blessed is He, that when He decrees, He gives the person who He has decreed against, the ability to withstand it." (Short Vort)

**Get the Ball Rolling - (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)**

Michael is always frustrated. He has many good ideas that remain just that – good ideas. At his staff meetings, key personnel regularly put forth suggestions that ought to spur growth and profits for the company – yet more often than not, nothing materializes. Or someone precisely diagnoses a problem and its root causes – and even comes up with a creative solution that should be very easy to put in place – yet, months later, the problem is still there, creating trouble.

Mordy, on the other hand, is one who always seems to succeed. Yesterday's problems are only a memory, and his mind is clear, ready to confront today's new issues. When he looks back over a year he finds that the big issues that disrupted his plans are non-issues now, because systems were developed and put in place to prevent their recurrence.

Michael could see no difference between his own creativity and effort and that of his friends, or between the quality of their products or staff. The

only difference he could see was in the results. "How is it that you are able to make things happen?" he asked Mordy.

"When I hear a good solution, I always do something – anything – right away to get the ball rolling. Just this morning, one of my executives suggested that we contact an analyst who could help us solve a distribution problem that was costing us not only money, but customers, too. When I asked for the phone number and email address, my manager said that the expert would be away until next week. I got the information anyway, sent a message, and called his secretary to arrange an appointment. Even though she told me that he makes all of his own appointments, I left word that he should contact me on his return. This way, I initiated the contact, he will call me back, and we'll be able to move on the project. If I had waited for his return, I guarantee you he would never have been called. You've got to start the ball rolling to make something happen."

We all face challenges every day in a quest for self-improvement. Some people can develop a plan to lose weight, stop smoking, control temper, or be more prompt. Yet they don't get the mission accomplished because of procrastination. Logic or circumstances suggest waiting for a better time, and then something else develops and nothing ever materializes.

When you have a good idea, do something immediately to get the ball rolling. Once you are moving, no matter how little or how slowly, you will build momentum until you reach your goal.

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR**  
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**Finding The Silver Lining**

Parashat Hayeh-Sara begins with the story of Sara Imenu's death, and Abraham's purchase of the Machpela cave in Hebron as a burial site. This story follows the story of Akedat Yitzhak, which is perhaps the most remarkable event in the entire Tanach, when Abraham was prepared to obey God's command to sacrifice his beloved son, Yitzhak.

Surprisingly, there are some Rabbis who point to the story of Abraham's purchase of Me'arat Ha'machpela as the tenth of Abraham's tests. The Mishna in Pirkeh Abot mentions that Abraham was subjected to ten tests, and the commentators disagree in identifying precisely what these ten tests were. Most assume that Akedat Yitzhak was the final and most challenging of the ten tests. According to one view, however, the test of Akedat Yitzhak was followed by

the tenth test – the test of Sara's death and purchasing a burial site.

In order to understand why this incident constituted a test for Abraham, we must understand the nature of Abraham's tests. What made these tests difficult was the fact that they entailed contradictions. For example, God commanded Abraham to move to Eretz Yisrael and promised that he would enjoy wealth and prosperity. But soon after his arrival in the land, the area was struck by a severe drought, forcing him to go to Egypt, where his wife was abducted. Abraham's test was enduring the hardship without questioning God, accepting whatever happens and firmly believing that everything that God does is just and for his benefit. Akedat Yitzhak, too, involved a contradiction. After promising Abraham that a great nation would emerge from Yitzhak, God commanded him to slaughter him as a sacrifice before Yitzhak was married. Once again, Abraham asked no questions and proceeded with resolute faith to comply with the divine command.

This happened again with the test of Sara's death. After the Akedah, God promised Abraham eternal rewards for his unbridled devotion, and proclaimed that he would be blessed for obeying the command to sacrifice his son. And yet, when he returned home, he learned that his wife had died. In fact, she died as a result of the Akedah; our Sages teach that she perished upon hearing that her son was nearly offered as a sacrifice. And, even after having been promised Eretz Yisrael, he ended up having to pay an exorbitant price for the burial site.

Abraham could have been tempted to ask, "Is this fair? After agreeing to offer my son as a sacrifice, is this what I deserve? And didn't you promise to bless me in reward for my obedience?" But Abraham did not question God; he accepted what came without any questions or complaints.

In truth, in this episode Abraham rose to even greater heights than he had in the previous tests. The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Nahmanides, 1194-1270) comments that the story of Sara's death and burial demonstrates God's benevolence toward Abraham, showing the respect that he commanded among the people of Canaan. Abraham purchased the plot of land from the Hittim, who treated him with reverence and even offered him the land for free. The greatness of Abraham was that despite everything he was going through, he still recognized God's kindness. The Torah says that when the Hittim offered Abraham a parcel of land for Sara's burial, he bowed –and the Ramban explains that he bowed to God, to thank Him for allowing him to properly bury

his wife. Although he had just lost his wife, despite God's promise of reward, Abraham had the faith and composure to give praise and thanks to Hashem for the kindness he received. He was grateful for the way he was treated by the people around him, and for having the opportunity to give his wife a respectful burial. As hard as things were, Abraham saw the silver lining and expressed his appreciation to Hashem.

This is even a greater level of piety and faith. Not only did Abraham accept God's decisions without asking questions, he went even further – actually thanking God and feeling grateful for everything that was good.

This is an important example for us to follow. Yes, life can be difficult and trying; we all go through "tests" of one sort or another throughout our lives. As the descendants of heirs of Abraham Abinu, we must look for the silver lining in every dark cloud, and find Hashem's kindness and benevolence even during life's more difficult periods. We all have what to be grateful for, no matter the situation. Our patriarch showed us how to be grateful and appreciative even in hard times. Through unwavering faith in God's justice, we are able to withstand even life's most difficult tests, and remain content and joyous over the many wonderful blessings we have been given.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein**

**LOOKING AT GENERATIONS**

On my recent visit to America I availed myself of the opportunity to visit with many of my grandchildren and great grandchildren. The great grandchildren are still mainly too young to recognize me and appreciate my connection to them. As one of them so succinctly put it when he was informed that I was his zaydie: "But I already have two zaidies!" So the experience and its meaning currently is one-sided, weighted very heavily in my favor.

To paraphrase a famous cliché – it is too bad that perspective is often wasted on the old. Over the past holiday of Succot when I visited with a beloved cousin of mine spending the holiday with his children and grandchildren in Jerusalem, I realized and

remarked that I now have seen seven generations in our family in my lifetime!

Growing up in the Chicago of my childhood, when most of my peers never knew their grandparents, I never imagined I would ever be able to achieve such a feat. To a certain extent, due to the grace of God and the unbelievable advances in health care in our times, there is a tendency to accept and expect to see generations in one's lifetime as a matter of course. And of course to think that way is not only a measure of ingratitude but it is a deprivation of the joy that otherwise is such a rare commodity in our lives. For we rarely are able to feel happiness, satisfaction and joy when we receive something that we feel entitled to and fully expect.

The rabbis of the Talmud have taught us that students, disciples, people that we have somehow influenced positively are considered to be our descendants. Many of us are fortunate to have biological descendants who share portions of our DNA and our physical and even mental characteristics. Both types of the above mentioned descendants are certainly influenced by us but are definitely not controlled by us or are bound by the mores of our older generation.

The later generations always live in a completely different world than did their predecessors. I am not merely speaking of a different world of technology – I was raised when there was no television, iPhones, personal computers, jet engine airplanes, Internet, fax machines, microwave ovens, etc. – but a different world of human thought and a radically dissimilar social society.

The role of government and our expectations of its abilities to ease and support our personal and financial lives have taken on the greatest dimension in our body politic. Human nature, the good and the better parts of it have never really changed over the millennia of human existence but everything else in our world certainly has changed. Understanding and appreciating this simple bald fact and dealing with the coming generations accordingly, is key to being a successful grandparent and providing meaningful guidance. No matter what, children and grandchildren may resemble or even imitate their ancestors, but they will never actually be their elders. Our constantly changing world and society simply precludes this from happening.

King Solomon wrote in Kohelet that generations depart and generations arrive yet the world remains standing and eternal. He does not mean that the world remains static and unchanging. There are

certain facets of human existence on this earth – physical laws and the vagaries of human nature for example – that are constant throughout human existence. But human society and its civilizations do in fact change.

There is a concept in traditional Jewish thought that since the time of the revelation at Sinai there has been a steady decline in the potential for Torah greatness and spiritual holiness. Thus every generation is judged by its own unique spiritual and Torah potential. My grandson's generations and its achievements are therefore to be judged differently than those of the generation of my grandfather. They already surpass me in technological matters and on the operation of all of the gadgets, necessary or otherwise, of the current generation. But I would hope that their aspirations for spiritual and Torah greatness would equal that of previous generations. But because of the vastly different worlds that generations inhabit, comparative results and achievements of differing generations are really not comparable. Nevertheless, I wish them all of the blessings that only the old can bestow upon the young, that they too are privileged to see, know and love many generations in their families.

### **Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks A Journey of a Thousand Miles**

Our parsha contains the most serene description of old age and dying anywhere in the Torah: "Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:8). There is an earlier verse, no less moving: "Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything" (Gen. 24:1).

Nor was this serenity the gift of Abraham alone. Rashi was puzzled by the description of Sarah – "Sarah lived to be 127 years old: [These were] the years of Sarah's life" (23:1). The last phrase seems completely superfluous. Why not just tell us that Sarah lived to the age of 127? What is added by saying that "these were the years of Sarah's life"? Rashi is led to the conclusion that the first half of the verse talks about the quantity of her life, how long she lived, while the second tells us about the quality of her life. "They – the years she lived – were all equal in goodness."

Yet how is any of this conceivable? Abraham and Sarah were commanded by God to leave everything that was familiar: their land, their home, their family, and travel to an unknown land. No sooner had they arrived than they were forced to leave because of

famine. Twice, Abraham's life was at risk when, driven into exile, he worried that he would be killed so that the local ruler could take Sarah into his harem. Sarah herself had to say that she was Abraham's sister, and had to suffer the indignity of being taken into a stranger's household.

Then there was the long wait for a child, made even more painful by the repeated Divine promise that they would have as many children as the stars of the sky or the dust of the earth. Then came the drama of the birth of Ishmael to Sarah's servant Hagar. This aggravated the relationship between the two women, and eventually Abraham had to send Hagar and Ishmael away. One way or another, this was a source of pain to all four people involved.

Then there was the agony of the binding of Isaac. Abraham was faced with the prospect of losing the person most precious to him, the child he had waited for so long.

For a variety of reasons, neither Abraham nor Sarah had an easy life. Theirs were lives of trial, in which their faith was tested at many points. How can Rashi say that all of Sarah's years were equal in goodness? How can the Torah say that Abraham had been blessed with everything?

The answer is given by the parsha itself, and it is very unexpected. Seven times Abraham had been promised the land. Here is just one of those occasions:

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

Yet by the time Sarah dies, Abraham has no land at all, and he is forced to prostrate himself before the local Hittites and beg for permission to acquire even a single field with a cave in which to bury his wife. Even then he has to pay what is clearly a massively inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. This does not sound like the fulfillment of the promise of "all the land, north, south, east and west."

Then, in relation to children, Abraham is promised four times: "I will make you into a great nation" (12:2). "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth" (13:16). God "took [Abram] outside and said, 'Look at the sky and count the stars. See if you can count them.' [God] then said to him, 'That is how

[numerous] your descendants will be.” (15:5). “No longer shall you be called Abram. Your name shall become Abraham, for I have set you up as the father of many nations” (17:5).

Yet he had to wait so long for even a single son by Sarah that when God insisted that she would indeed have a son, both Abraham (17:17) and Sarah (18:12) laughed. (The sages differentiated between these two episodes, saying that Abraham laughed with joy, Sarah with disbelief. In general, in Genesis, the verb tz-ch-k, to laugh, is fraught with ambiguity).

One way or another, whether we think of children or the land – the two key Divine promises to Abraham and Sarah – the reality fell far short of what they might have felt entitled to expect.

That, however, is precisely the meaning and message of Chayei Sarah. In it Abraham does two things: he buys the first plot in the land of Canaan, and he arranges for the marriage of Isaac. One field and a cave was, for Abraham, enough for the text to say that “God had blessed Abraham with everything.” One child, Isaac, by then married and with children (Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born; Isaac was sixty when the twins, Jacob and Esau, were born; and Abraham was 175 when he died) was enough for Abraham to die in peace.

Lao-Tzu, the Chinese sage, said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. To that Judaism adds, “It is not for you to complete the work but neither are you free to desist from it” (Avot 2:16). God Himself said of Abraham, “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him” (Gen. 18:19).

The meaning of this is clear. If you ensure that your children will continue to live for what you have lived for, then you can have faith that they will continue your journey until eventually they reach the destination. Abraham did not need to see all the land in Jewish hands, nor did he need to see the Jewish people become numerous. He had taken the first step. He had begun the task, and he knew that his descendants would continue it. He was able to die serenely because he had faith in God and faith that others would complete what he had begun. The same was surely true of Sarah.

To place your life in God’s hands, to have faith that whatever happens to you happens for a reason, to know that you are part of a larger narrative, and to

believe that others will continue what you began, is to achieve a satisfaction in life that cannot be destroyed by circumstance. Abraham and Sarah had that faith, and they were able to die with a sense of fulfillment.

To be happy does not mean that you have everything you want or everything you were promised. It means, simply, to have done what you were called on to do, to have made a beginning, and then to have passed on the baton to the next generation. “The righteous, even in death, are regarded as though they were still alive” (Berakhot 18a) because the righteous leave a living trace in those who come after them.

That was enough for Abraham and Sarah, and it must be enough for us.

### **Rabbi Avi Geller Abraham Buries Sarah, and Arranges a Wife for Isaac**

A True Story:

Rachel, the beautiful bride, peered nervously out the window. “When will he finally arrive?” she asked herself repeatedly. Today was the day she would wed the holy Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, whom she had never seen. They had been engaged for over six months, yet every time a meeting was scheduled, inclement weather or some other extenuating circumstance postponed their meeting.

Now the hall was filled with the greatest dignitaries in Galicia (Southern Poland), who had come from many miles to attend the wedding of the holy rabbi. Finally the moment arrived and a horse-drawn carriage approached the hall. Rabbi Chaim emerged from the carriage, limping like the hunchback of Notre Dame.

In a fury, the bride called for her father: “Why didn’t you tell me he was a cripple?” she demanded. Trying to calm her, he replied, “He is so learned, pious and holy, you won’t even notice his physical handicap.”

Unmoved, Rachel announced: “I refuse to marry him!”

Imagine the chaos as word spread that the bride was backing out. In order to avoid this embarrassment, her relatives and friends (especially the caterer!) all tried their best to convince her, but to no avail.

Finally, the groom himself requested five minutes to speak with her privately. After they’d spoken for a few minutes, the bride turned to the crowd, smiling broadly, and announced that the wedding was on!

What did he tell her??

The Chasidim revealed: He quoted the Talmud that says, "Forty days before the formation of the embryo, a heavenly voice announces: So-and-so will marry so-and-so."

The holy Rabbi Chaim told Rachel: "Forty days before you were formed, I heard the heavenly voice and requested to see my future bride. The image that greeted me was a baby whose legs were mangled. What a sad thing for a girl to be handicapped for life. So I prayed that I would take the handicap in your stead."

"Matches are made in heaven" is the theme of this week's Parsha. The marriage of Isaac and Rebecca teaches us many Torah values and insights with regard to love and marriage.

#### THE DEATH OF SARAH

The Parsha begins with the death of Sarah. According to tradition this occurred as an immediate result of the "Akeida" (Binding of Isaac). The Midrash says that Abraham told Sarah he was taking Isaac to study Torah in Hebron. (Now we understand why he rose early, before she could change her mind!)

When the news came to their home in Be'er Sheva that Isaac had been taken to the altar, Sarah raced to Hebron to check on him. (This explains why she died in Hebron.) The message she received was: "Your husband Abraham has tied Isaac on the altar as a burnt offering..." Yet before Sarah could hear the rest of the message - that Isaac was safe - she passed away. She was so emotionally connected to Isaac that she couldn't bear the thought of his death.

"And Abraham came to cry and eulogize his wife Sarah." (Genesis 23:2)

Question: Where did Abraham come from? And what was his eulogy?

Answer: The sages explain that Abraham arrived from the "Akeida" to find Sarah dead, a direct result of his great deed. This was another test for Abraham: Would he regret his good deed and thus lose the merit (just as regretting evil deeds removes the punishment)?

Abraham did not regret, and this reaction formed the essence of the eulogy: the fact that Sarah had a husband and son who were ready to sacrifice everything to God. This was the greatest eulogy she could have!

#### THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH

The Midrash says that when Abraham was ready to slaughter the calf for his guests (see Parshat Vayeira), the calf ran away. Abraham chased it all the way to the cave of Machpelah in Hebron. When Abraham entered the cave, he found there the graves of Adam and Eve. It was then that he decided he wanted this holy place for his family burial plot.

In a famous negotiation, Abraham tried to buy the Machpelah cave from Efron the Hittite. The 19th century commentator Malbim explains that although Abraham's neighbors respected him greatly, they refused to confer upon him the legal status of citizen, and the law stated that only citizens could purchase burial plots.

The Hittites offered Abraham a nice gravesite for Sarah, saying, "No one will hold back his grave from you, to bury your dead" (Genesis 23:6). Their intent was to say: "The land is ours, but we will grant you a grave in our plot."

After bowing to express appreciation for their generosity, Abraham explained that in his view, not to bury loved ones in a family plot would be equivalent to abandoning the corpse. He then provided them with a legal loophole: Don't sell me the cave, just "give it to me" (as a present), and of course I will recompense you -- "with full money shall he give it to me" (Genesis 23:9). This would avoid the legal question of selling to non-citizens.

All Abraham wanted was the cave, and he stressed that it was located at the end of the field, as not to disturb Efron's farming. Efron politely replied, "I have given you the field and the cave" - emphasizing that it was a package deal, so if you want the cave you have to buy the field as well.

At this point Abraham showed some silver coins and said, "Please take my money already" (Genesis 23:13) - i.e. in my eyes it is as if you have taken it already.

Efron's greed took hold: "My master, for the measly sum of 400 silver shekels (the average annual income was about 10 shekels), why make such a commotion between such good friends?" (Genesis 23:15 - Rashi)

Abraham paid the money in full, with absolutely no concessions or reductions; Efron even demanded totally marketable coins. Efron was the classic example of "Say much and deliver little."

At this point, the field and cave actually experienced a spiritual elevation and became the possession of Abraham and the Jewish people forever.

It is noteworthy that Hebron was bought fairly by Abraham, as was Shechem by Jacob, and Jerusalem by King David, as recorded explicitly in the Bible. It is interesting that today these are the places of greatest contention with our neighbors!

#### A BRIDE FOR ISAAC

After coming so close to losing his beloved son Isaac, Abraham decided the time had come to marry him off. Abraham called his trusty Canaanite servant Eliezer and administered an oath. (Although Abraham trusted him totally to manage his finances, to marry off his son was a spiritual enterprise for which he wanted an oath.) Eliezer swore not to take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanite women, and not to return Isaac to live in the "old country."

Rashi tells us that Eliezer also had an eligible daughter whom he offered, but Abraham declined, saying, "I am blessed and the Canaanites are cursed. That doesn't make a good match."

Question: Ideologically, shouldn't the daughters of Abraham's Canaanite disciples, such as Eliezer, have been much more desirable than the idolaters of Abraham's hometown? Why bother returning home?

Answer: Ideology can be changed with the proper persuasion. However, character traits are inborn and extremely difficult to alter. The Canaanites were the children of Cham and Canaan, who were cursed by Noah, and for all of their good ideology they still retained Cham's character. On the other hand, the family of Abraham had good character traits even if they did worship idols.

In a marriage, character traits should be the most important factor; ideology can change more easily.

#### ELIEZER'S MISSION: STEP-BY-STEP ACCOUNT

(1) Eliezer took 10 of his master's camels (recognizable as such by their muzzles, which were only removed when they were in ownerless fields) and all of the wealth of his master in his hand. (Genesis 24:10)

Question: How could Eliezer take all the riches of wealthy Abraham in his hand? ("He's got the whole wide world in his hands!")

Answer: Abraham wrote a document (dated the day of Eliezer's journey) bequeathing Isaac as his sole heir. Thus Eliezer held this document, representing all of Abraham's wealth, in his hand.

(2) "He arose and went to Aram" (Genesis 24:10), with no mention of his traveling time. The sages say that Eliezer experienced a "miraculous shortening of the trip"; moments after departing, he arrived.

(3) "He rested the camels by the well toward evening" (Genesis 24:11). Eliezer had a bias and did not mind failing in his mission to find Isaac a wife, in order to give his daughter a chance. Yet Eliezer overcame these thoughts, and prayed to God to succeed in his mission for the sake of his holy master Abraham.

(4) Eliezer's main problem was not who would want to marry Isaac. Every eligible woman wanted to be his wife, and every father would want to be related to the famous Abraham. But how was Eliezer to know who was the right one? He prayed and suddenly had a flash of genius: Whoever would offer to water the camels, had incorporated the principle of kindness into her life. This was a necessary requirement to join the family of Abraham.

(5) Eliezer had just finished his prayer, when Rebecca (the cousin of Isaac) came to draw water from the well. As she approached the well, the waters miraculously came up to meet her. She filled her pitcher with the family's drinking water and was on her way.

(6) Eliezer ran toward Rebecca: "Please give me a sip of water from your pitcher!" (Genesis 24:17) Rebecca hurried to comply. "Drink my master!" she said to Eliezer, and he drank his fill. No sooner had he finished drinking, when Rebecca offered to water the 10 camels as well. (Genesis 24:19)

Question: Why was she suddenly so concerned about the camels?

Answer: Firstly, she had a technical problem. "How can I bring this drinking water home after a stranger drank from it? Maybe he isn't healthy?" On the other hand, to spill out the water and refill it after his few sips would embarrass him publicly. What was Rebecca's solution? Give it to the camels!

Secondly, this man had just arrived from a lengthy voyage. He was sitting near the well, yet lacked the strength to even draw water and drink. That's why he asked her for water. If so, he certainly isn't able to draw water for the poor thirsty camels!

(7) Rebecca performed a superhuman feat. The young girl made tens of trips to the well to water 10 camels (approximately 140 gallons each) until they were finished drinking. Obviously, this was not Rebecca's first act of kindness. The Torah is not a history book and does not record every story. If she was capable of this act, she obviously had built herself up through many prior instances.

Question: Who was Rebecca's mentor? Who inspired a young girl, living among idolaters, to develop such golden character traits? (The sages refer to her as "the rose in the thorn bush.")

Answer: Abraham opened his tent to all wayfarers and preached to them about a loving God, who wants us to be kind to others. When these wayfarers came to the land of Aram, they visited Rebecca's family and told about their Uncle Abraham and all of his kind deeds. Rebecca absorbed these stories, took them to heart, and decided to follow Abraham's path by constantly doing kindness, culminating in this exceptional deed. (Rabbi Avigdor Miller)

(8) Eliezer, without asking questions, took out a gold nose ring weighing one "bekah," and a necklace weighing 10 gold pieces. Rebecca informed him of her identity (as Abraham's relative) and the servant immediately bowed to the ground and thanked God.

Rashi tells us that the ring was symbolic of the Shekel (silver coin donated to the temple for communal sacrifices) which weighed a "bekah," and the 10 gold pieces corresponded to the Ten Commandments.

Question: What is their relevance here?

Answer: The Talmudic "Ethics of the Fathers" informs us that the world exists on three pillars: Torah, Divine service, and acts of kindness. Since Rebecca displayed tremendous acts of kindness, Eliezer informed her that her children would also accept the Ten Commandments (Torah), and bring offerings to the Temple (Divine service).

(9) Rebecca ran home to tell her mother. She showed off her gold jewelry and told everyone about the man who believed in God and thanked Him. Her brother Lavan (although his name means white, "there was nothing white about him except his name!") ran to meet the stranger. Lavan thought to himself, "Look how much he paid for a drink of water, can you imagine how much he'll pay for a night's lodging?!"

Lavan exclaimed: "Come, blessed of God! I cleaned

the house" (Genesis 24:31), by emptying it of idols (Rashi). Why is Lavan suddenly so righteous? He figured: If Eliezer believes in God and has a lot of money, then I'll believe in God, too!

(10) Eliezer entered their home and was invited to eat. He proclaimed: "I cannot eat before I say my words" (i.e. wash my hands and recite the blessing, as well as the blessing on the bread). "I am the servant of Abraham" (i.e. we keep the Torah and cannot eat non-kosher food). (Genesis 24:34 - Baal HaTurim)

(11) Eliezer repeated the entire story of his meeting with Rebecca, and showed them the document (with today's date, proving his ultra-quick journey), and requested the hand of Rebecca to marry Isaac. In case they didn't agree, Eliezer again hinted about his own daughter.

Question: Hadn't Abraham already told Eliezer, "I am blessed and you are cursed"? Why did Eliezer continue to mention it?

Answer: After Lavan blessed Eliezer with "blessed of God," Eliezer now considered himself blessed.

(12) Rebecca's family replied: "From God the matter has come forth" (Genesis 24:50), from which the Talmud derives "Matches are made in Heaven." Judaism believes in Divine Providence in every aspect of life. God provides all our needs throughout life. In finding a marriage partner, God's hand can be particularly seen.

(13) Lavan planned to poison Eliezer so he could take all his money. But an angel turned the table (Russian roulette), and Rebecca's father Betuel (who planned to delay the wedding) was poisoned instead. When Rebecca's mother and brother then tried to delay matters, Rebecca herself said that she wanted things to move forward. We learn from here that the bride and groom must both agree to marry, and that parents may not force their will on a child.

Question: Why does the Torah tell the story of Eliezer at length - twice! - while otherwise the Torah is very particular about every word, and even important laws are often only hinted to?

Answer: The sages say, "God enjoys the conversation of the servants of the patriarchs (and certainly the conversation of the patriarchs themselves) more than the Torah of their children." In God's great love for our ancestors, He elaborates even on their mere conversations, more than the laws given later. (Of course, we can learn many

lessons from these conversations!)

The whole point of the book of Genesis is to show us how the deeds of the ancestors plant the seed for their children.

#### RETURN TO ISRAEL

Eliezer returned to Israel with Rebecca. They mounted the camels and were home in a flash. Isaac was meditating in the field, composing the afternoon Mincha prayer. When Rebecca saw Isaac, she fell off the saddle. She refused to meet him when mounted, in order to stress their equality. She donned the veil to meet her groom. Isaac married Rebecca and loved her (in that order!), and the presence of God returned to the family's tent.

The sages explain that as long as Sarah was alive, the bread that she baked stayed fresh all week. The candles that she lit stayed lit all week. Above the tent was a pillar of fire that represented God's presence. When Sarah passed away, these miracles stopped - until Isaac married Rebecca, at which point the miracles returned.

This means that the first Jewish "temple" was actually the tent of the patriarchs, with the matriarchs acting as High Priests to keep the Divine Presence there. The subsequent Tabernacle in the desert and the Holy Temples in Jerusalem were continuations of that tent.

To this day, every married couple works to bring the Divine Presence into their home, and the wife is the guardian of its sanctity.

#### DEATH OF ABRAHAM

Abraham married Keturah (traditionally understood to be Hagar) and had six children and many grandchildren. During Abraham's lifetime, he sent them off to the east. (Some say this refers to the Orientals who received spiritual powers from their father, but kept their distance from the children of Isaac.)

"And Abraham died at a ripe old age, an elder, and satiated with days" (Genesis 25:8). Abraham lived a miraculous life and his days were full of accomplishments. He made every day count while serving God. Ishmael repented during Abraham's lifetime. Esav had not yet left the fold. The Jewish nation was on its way.

#### AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And she shall say: 'Drink, and I shall give drink also to your camels'. She is the one that You have appointed for Your servant Yitzchak". (24:14)

A kindly person would have assented to the request for a drink of water. It would be quite extraordinary to volunteer to give water to the wayfarer's camel, for this would require a number of trips between the well and the watering-trough. One camel drinks much more than 30 men. To propose, without being requested, to give drink to 10 camels (24:10), was an extremely queer and unexpected form of behavior. Even had the request been made, to give drink for over 300 men would border on the insane, especially when a young girl undertakes such a task while the group of grown men to whom the camels had belonged stood by and did nothing. "Insane is the man of the Spirit" (Hoshea 9:7).

Ribka was chosen not merely for her kindness but for her flaming idealism that transcended all her contemporaries and caused her to be so far above them that she was viewed as mentally irresponsible. Even Eliezer was amazed at what he saw. (24:21).

From where did Ribka learn such behavior? Such extreme and even fanatical devotion to the services of kindness to wayfarers could have been learned solely from one model, Abraham (18:2). We know there was communication between the family in Canaan and in Mesopotamia, and that they were familiar with details (22:20). The caravans brought tidings of Abraham's behavior, and the fame of this "prince of G-d" as the Canaanites called him (23:6) had spread far and wide.

The idealistic soul of Ribka had absorbed with eagerness the stories of her exalted great-uncle, and this young girl had learned to serve G-d by deeds of unusual kindness. Thus Abraham's example was able to cause "this rose to bloom among the thorns" (Beresheet Raba 63:4).

The prelude to greatness is Kindliness, and thereby Ribka was chosen to be the mother of Yisrael. "Derech Eretz preceded the Torah (Vayikra Rabbah 9:3). The chief element in Derech Eretz is Kindliness, and thus Ribka became eligible to be the mother of the people of G-d's Torah.

Quoted from "The Beginning" By R' Miller ZT'L