

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

HAYYE SARAH

NOVEMBER 9-10, 2012

25 HESHVAN 5773

DEDICATIONS: To the volunteers who are helping with the storm recovery.

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Take a peek into Kosher Culinary Arts School in Jerusalem with my daughter Mikhayla who is going through a rigorous 6 month program.
bitemebymik.blogspot.com

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100. Sam, Michael and Hymie Cohen ... we'll need you next week.

EDITORS NOTES

Week Two of Hurricane Sandy

My house may soon get power back. Could be a few days or it could be a few weeks, but when it does and I get to turn real lights on instead of a Home Depot LED Lantern, I better learn to appreciate it. When I have hot water, I better learn to be grateful. And when there is heat, I need to remember to offer thanks. How much do we take for granted? I often speak about Rabbi Abittan telling us how thankful we should be that we have running water and toilets that flush, yet are we? (Take a look at the article that follows by Charlie Harary).

I have to say my nerves are shot. I've spent countless hours on the phone with LIPA (In hindsight this was a total waste of time filled with incorrect information and an obvious disconnect between departments – I could testify before the State as to everything that went wrong). I've spoken with every government official I know – who also couldn't do much and

are as frustrated with LIPA as I am.

I've formed relationships with National Guard members who I will be able to count on as friends in the future. I've spoken in person with Assemblymen, soldiers, state troopers, EMT workers and we should be proud that we have such dedicated people.

And I've spent time with volunteers; and they truly are amazing. They are bringing food to the hungry, cleaning homes, inviting people to live with them, supplying clothes and doing anything needed. The community has really come together.

I want to thank all of you who have emailed and called. I am so sorry I did not get back to each and every one of you.

On a personal level, we are OK. Eventually we'll get power back in our home. Unfortunately, Chantelle with Aryana and Moses were struck in their car at an unlit intersection by a speeding vehicle whose driver didn't look left. It was a scare, but they are OK. Hatzalah as usual was wonderful. I thank Rabbi David Fohrman and his family for taking them in until we could get them. Everyone, please be careful out there.

Our small Long Beach community has been devastated. People lost their homes and their cars. And it will take time to rebuild. I am getting emails asking what we need. B'H, we are being sent food and its being distributed through the Young Israel which miraculously got power last night. Rabbi Wakslak has been amazing

and we are all appreciative. Food is also available at Shaar Yashuv Yeshiva in Far Rockaway along with clothes. Volunteers are coming, especially this Sunday to assist with houses that need to be cleaned and cleared. If you want to bring a crew to help us, please contact Sam Shetrit at popperservice@gmail.com. A number of groups of qualified mechanics have arrived from Israel to help. Amazing!

We have at least a hundred families in need of funds. Rabbi Wakslak has been distributing funds to those who find themselves with nowhere else to turn. We are hoping to give a micro loan or a grant of \$2000 to each family in need. We are anticipating that many of you out there will each adopt a family or if not at least donate to assist one. We know everyone is collecting from every organization, but being in the position we are in, we don't know where the money is going. It's certainly not making it to our people. We had been asking community members to donate to specific organizations, but out of frustration we think it's best if we get commitments. The situation is bad and we need to help people now. Whatever you commit to, we'll front the money and distribute it immediately. This is what we did last week based on your emails.

Let us know what you can send and make the check to "The Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach" and add Storm relief in the memo. Mail it to me: David Bibi, 979 Third Ave. Suite 1705, NYC NY 10022. Email me and let me know what you'll be sending.

I also need cars. Anyone have an old car they are not using? A car they might be trading in? Let us know. Someone desperately needs it to get to work and put food on the table. We have a company that will assist with the title exchange.

Honored by Rabbi Elie Abadie, I had the pleasure of speaking in the Safra Synagogue in Manhattan last Shabbat where we were joined by Mr. Sheldon Silver, the speaker of the NY Assembly. These parshiot that we are reading are all about doing Chesed, kindness to others. They are not just stories to read. They are actions to mimic. Even if the storm passed you by, we are feeling it. And we need your help.

I noted that Lot last week invites the angels in. They refuse saying they will stay in the street. But he insists and they come in and save him.

You all know someone affected. You have a relative or a friend, or a relative of a relative or a friend of a friend. Reach out to them. And even if they say they are fine. Guess what? They are not. You must do something. And if you can't help financially or you can't be there to help physically, then at least help emotionally. Be sure to call. Say, "I am thinking of you!"

This week we read about Rebecca. She sees a man who asks for water and surmises if he can't get water for himself, he probably can't get for his camels. So she proceeds to give him to drink and all his camels. This week many of us are Eliezer. We need help, our families need help and our camels need help. Rebecca where are you?

This is a time for all of us to be there for each other. Are you in or are you out?

A YESHIVA FOR ADULTS

One more thought while I have you.

Many of us never had an opportunity to spend a year in Israel. We send our children. We go and visit. But while there, we are typical tourists.

Many of us find the time to attend classes at home, but more often than not, we sit back and hear lectures. Even Daf Yomi is spoon fed to us.

What if we could take a few days, a week, a month or more and experience real learning? And what if we could do this in the Old City of Yerushalayim? Imagine walking away with real tools to continue our learning?

When I was in Israel I had the pleasure of sitting with Rabbi Shalom Gold. Rabbi Gold is the founder of a number of successful institutions, the latest being Yeshiva Rabbi Akiva where men ranging in age from 32 to 84 are grabbing Torah as their rightful inheritance.

A unique aspect of Yeshivas Rabbi Akiva is Rabbi Gold's teaching technique of the Hebrew language structure so that he takes a man from his present level to soar above his own expectations. Author of the DikDukBuk, Rabbi Gold, using his method, takes a bright beginning student into much higher levels of classes within weeks. For students who have had learning difficulties their entire lives, they can now break through those difficulties. For Rabbi Gold relating to the LD and ADD students is a personal 'knowing'. "I painfully grappled with Hebrew, which prevented me from enjoying the wonders of Torah. Finally, I was able to unlock the seemingly hidden, yet obvious

and clear, patterns of the language."

Rabbi Gold, a veteran Torah teacher, is a master in giving over the structure of Hebrew for Jews at every level, has dedicated the past twenty years in handing those keys over to others. Seeing the need for a learning setting where an older student would not merely be spoon fed with executive lectures, Rabbi Gold offered Yeshivas Rabbi Akiva as an alternative challenge to those who are willing to forge ahead if only they had the tools. Men who have never encountered Torah in depth are now experiencing an excitement they don't want to keep to themselves.

"Everyone deserves a piece of this," says Mr. S., 84, happily learning at the Yeshiva. I met this man who they call the Chairman of the Board. A few years ago those in Jerusalem challenged Rabbi Gold to get this man to come to a class. Now the man comes every day and is swimming in Torah.

We all know the story of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva became one of the greatest teachers during the time of the Mishnah. He started his Torah learning later in life. "Though Rabbi Akiva was already 40 years old, he persisted just like the drops of stream water he observed boring a hole through stone. It is said that Akiva didn't even know the alef-bet, but he overcame any embarrassment in starting at the lowest beginner's level. And who grew greater than Rabbi Akiva?"

The yeshiva's morning schedule begins with Chumash with Rashi commentary. Since the emphasis is on understanding the Hebrew structure within the text, the pleasure in learning these words straight from holy books

stimulates the desire to stick with it even through the difficulties.

The day continues with Gemarah with Rashi commentary. Again, Hebrew and Aramaic language learning is highlighted amidst breaking down the simple meaning of a page. Halacha class with the Mishna Berura gives added opportunity for translation and word identification. This allows students to learn the halacha which originated from the Gemarah learned that morning.

A selection of respected guest Rabbis deliver lesson in Chumash, Prophets, Midrash, Jerusalem Talmud and Mussar. (Wednesday evenings, a women's class is held on the secrets of prayer, using a breakdown of Hebrew grammar.)

For the many who believed their lack of Hebrew skills prohibited them from in-depth and meaningful study, Yeshivas Rabbi Akiva is a fresh path. Plan to spend a few days with them on your next trip to Jerusalem. For more information, please call Rabbi Shalom Gold - USA line (rings in Israel): 732-587-5188. In Jerusalem: 02-6281874 or 054-636-7868 or by e-mail: rabiakivayeshiva@gmail.com. Or stop by the Yeshivas' Bet Midrish at 3 Gal-ed Street in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City – right near the Hurva Synagogue.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Hurricane Sandy: The Aftermath by [Charlie Harary](#)

Sandy brought her game. Now it's time to bring ours.

Tuesday, October 30, 2012.
12:00 am EST

"Hello, 911?"

"Yes. How can we help?"

"There is water outside my house and it is rising fast. It's already on my first step and I see water bubbling in the middle of the street. I'm not sure what's happening but I'm scared that my house may fill up with water in the next few hours."

"Sir, we are looking at your location and our emergency personnel can't make it down your block."

"But I have five little children here? What am I supposed to do?"

"We're sorry sir. We can't help you. Good luck."

Click.

There I was, staring out my bedroom window with the phone at my ear as water was rushing up my front steps. In the other room, my wife and five children were sound asleep. I stood there overwhelmed. I turned to God and asked for help. Then I ran down the stairs.

Welcome to Hurricane Sandy, one of the worst hurricanes to hit the Northeast, ever. Hundreds injured, over 50 dead. Thousands without homes. Millions without power.

As I sit here in Sandy's aftermath, sirens screaming in the background and debris in front my house, I keep thinking of one maxim: "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Judging by Sandy's onslaught, there is some serious strength waiting for us. Sandy brought her game, now it's time to bring ours.

So I decided to make few resolutions.

#1: Be Happy with Normal

I remember when I was 16 years old. I was home on Saturday night with nothing to do, moping around, feeling sorry for myself when my grandparents came over.

"What's the matter?" my grandmother asked.

"I'm having a bad night, my plans unraveled and I have nothing to do," I kvetched.

My grandmother, who at my age was in Auschwitz, commented, "Boy, what I would have given to have nothing to do when I was your age."

Enough said. Checkmate. Perspective gained.

It's amazing how when our lives are functionally normally, we focus on what we are missing. We run through our days barely paying attention to all the things we have like health, shelter, family, electricity and heat. We are too busy coming and going, buzzing and beeping, thinking and worrying about what more we can get, to slow down and see what we already have.

Then something threatens our "normal." A loved one gets sick. We encounter tragedy. We are in danger. Almost instantly, we shift perspective. We stop focusing on more. We stop worrying about what's next. We just want it to go back to "normal."

My Hurricane Sandy experience began Monday evening. We had been inside the house all day. The winds were howling and the trees were shaking. The lights began to flicker, and then ... black.

We lost power. They told us power outages were likely but you can never fully prepare to lose

power. It was dark. Real dark. For the next few hours, we slowly felt the effects. No internet, cell phones, heat, hot water, refrigeration. We huddled together. I couldn't help but think, pray and silently beg for power. That's all I wanted. I didn't even care what it was powering; just power.

Power? Who appreciates power? I have never once turned on a light and said, "Wow, power. Amazing!"

But at that moment, that's all I wanted.

Our Sages define happiness as the ability to take pleasure in what we have, and not pain in what we don't. Positive Psychology gurus like Tal Ben Shachar speak about the scientific relationship between happiness and gratitude. We all know this, but we never seem to integrate it into our lives.

We live in a time where most of the civilized world enjoys more luxuries than the wealthy elite just decades earlier. We have so much, and yet we just want more. We are waiting for something to make us happy. But there is nothing that can make us happy. Happiness is a choice.

Of course we should strive. Growth is part of our life. But we need to make sure we live with perspective. We have to start to take pleasure in "normal." We have to start to enjoy life the way we have it. We shouldn't need a Category 1 hurricane to have us cheer and hug when the lights go back on.

Resolution #1: Every day, notice one thing in my "normal" life and be grateful for it.

#2: Trust the Greatness Within

As I stood there, staring out the window, it hit me. No one was coming. No one.

I always thought there would be someone to turn to in times of need. A police officer, firefighter, emergency personnel, family or friend are just a phone call away if the going got rough.

I was wrong.

I was alone, and responsible, and in need of help.

Standing in my room, a thought popped into my mind. A person is never alone. God is not in the sky watching down at the earth. He is Infinite and All-encompassing, in every bit of reality. He is not just "up there," He is "right here," the glue holding us together. We all have a depth of strength, wisdom and perseverance that we can draw on. He is with us, always. I prayed that I can find Him, and now.

An idea came to me. Grab the family and run out the back. But before I woke them, I needed to make sure we had a place to go.

I ran down the stairs, out the back door to the backyard. I jumped a tall fence, through a patch of trees and then to the back of a home that faced another street. I climbed the back stairs and saw a window. I banged and banged until someone answered.

Thankfully, they were home and welcoming. Within minutes, I went back to my house, woke my family and then, one by one, retraced our steps until everyone was in the house, safe.

My actions were but a pittance of the courage, heroism and strength brought on during Sandy.

Throughout the storm, thousands of "regular" people tapped into an

internal source they may have never previously accessed. Doctors and nurses moved hospitals wards and saved lives. Police and firefighters swam, ran and drove boats to save people from underwater homes. Neighbors, friends and total strangers literally saved people's lives.

Why? It's not because crisis breeds heroes. Crisis enables people to bring out the heroism they always had within them.

We are created with a soul that is Divine. Like a well, the more we draw, the more we recognize its depth. Sometimes it takes tragedy to realize how kind, caring and generous we are. Sometimes a crisis reveals the courage, bravery and strength that we never saw before.

Resolution #2: Dare to be great. Every day, set one goal beyond my perceived limitations and go for it. Push to see how much potential I really have.

3. Restructure Your Life to Align with your Priorities

Famed author and speaker, Dr. Stephen Covey, ran a seminar where he invited people to place different size rocks into a bucket. After multiple failed attempts to get all the rocks in, [Covey demonstrated](#) how to do it. He started with the big rocks and after careful placement, all the rocks fit. He turned to the audience and surmised: "If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in."

How many times do we feel overwhelmed but unfulfilled? Busy but out of control? Sensing that life should feel different than it currently does. The reason is that, many times, our lives don't align with our priorities. We are out of balance and we feel it.

There is nothing like a crisis to realign our actions to our priorities.

After I secured the safety of my family, I headed back home to get some basic items. On the way back in, I surveyed the damage. My car was under water, my home was filling up. I realized that this storm may wipe out my possessions.

I tried to be upset but I couldn't. I didn't care. Not even a bit. I knew I would care tomorrow, but for tonight, there were more important things. I rushed to collect diapers, water, socks and pajamas and headed back to my family. Stuff is what it is, stuff. For tonight, it didn't make the top of my list.

How many times do our loved ones get rescheduled for our work? How many conversations did we miss even though we were physically there? How many family members get less attention than our hobbies?

And we wonder why we feel unfulfilled.

There is a family in my neighborhood that awoke to water gushing into their home. They climbed to their attic until they were rescued hours later. The next day, I saw the father walking with his kids. He had a gym bag of his possessions. His house was under water. I asked him how he was. He responded "Thank God, everything is great!" Seeing my facial response, he continued, "I'm not sure if I have a house, but I have my wife and kids. That's all I need."

Lesson #3: Each day, hug each kid, tight. Pick a family member to call to say I love you.

#4: Giving is what makes the world go 'round

"The world was built on kindness" (Psalms 89:3)

As we sat in my neighbor's house, I couldn't help but smile. We were practically strangers. Yet their outpouring of support was amazing. They made us feel as welcome as can be. They brought food, water and blankets. We made quite a mess and a ruckus, and they were not bothered in the slightest.

Giving feels better than taking because giving is a Divine quality, and the more Godly we act, the better it feels.

There is something about crisis that brings out the best in many of us. Deep down, we know we are one people. During "normal" times, it's easy to focus on the differences. It's easy to entrench and protect ourselves. But when our normal is threatened, we realize that we need each other. Our differences are eclipsed by are similarities. We are free to be our true selves. We are free to give.

The day after the storm, I walked up the street. People were outside their homes offering help to each other. We were sharing sub pumps and wet-vacs. One woman, whose house was spared, drove by and brought us groceries. Someone else dropped off a pie of pizza. At night, a friend stopped by with heaters. Families moved in with others. Our phones are buzzing with well-wishers.

Resolution #4: The next time I have an opportunity to give, I will just give.

Tuesday, October 30, 2012. 9:00 am EST

I walked outside my home to survey the damage. The streets were still filled with water. Coast guard boats were evacuating

people from their homes. Sirens were blaring down the streets.

"What happens now, Daddy?" my son asked.

"There is only one place to go from here," I answered.

"Where?" "Forward."

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.

Avarham 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 Avsholom, 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

“And it was when the camels had finished drinking, the man took a golden nose ring, its weight a beka.” (Beresheet 24:22)

Eliezer, the slave of Abraham Abinu, was given the mission to find a wife for Yitzhak. He created a sign that would show that the woman was worthy. If she, upon being asked for a drink, would offer to give the camels to drink, then she is the one. However, we find Eliezer did not really stick to the deal. The pasuk says that after the camels finished drinking, Eliezer gave her the jewelry. Why did he wait? After all, as soon as she gave the correct response, that she would give water to the camels, she showed her great level of righteousness. He should have given her the jewelry then.

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus z"l quotes the Seforno for a beautiful answer. Eliezer wanted to wait and see after she finished the job, if she would request any kindness or favor in return. He wanted to see if she would ask not only for something big, but if she wanted some form of accolades and large thank yous or not. However, Ribkah performed perfectly. After she finished this Herculean job, she turned around and started heading home, as if she did nothing at all. She didn't feel that she did anything so special. This was true greatness. She showed a true love of hesed. The highest level is to love hesed and not just responding to someone's troubles (which is also a very good thing).

A great litmus test for ourselves is to see if we feel the need to be thanked. Ribkah loved doing it and didn't think it was a big deal. Shabbat Shalom. 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"! Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Rabbi Wein

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

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

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

I am always reminded of the rueful comment of Rabbi Yaakov Emden who famously said that "it is regrettable that 'not to steal' was a commandment and not a custom for had it been a custom more people would attempt to observe it." Part of the problem in

today's society is the prioritization of omens and signs and questionable customs over the values and observances of Judaism itself as proscribed by the Torah and rabbinic writings. The spooks apparently always win out.

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

A parable is related in the name of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (Chafetz Chaim): A person who never saw a railroad train before stands at a crossing and sees the train whiz by his eyes. He notices that all of the cars of the train are moving at the speed as is the locomotive. He does not therefore realize that the cars have no power of their own independent of the locomotive. When the locomotive can pull no longer then all of the cars will come to a halt.

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

Sir Jonathan Sacks Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

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

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

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

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

(3) Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of

Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to take possession of it.” (15: 7)

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

(5) “I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your G-d and the god of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and to your descendants after you; and I will be their G-d.” (17: 7-8)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

– is in fact the prelude to a demand for an inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. At last, however, Abraham owns the land. The final transfer of ownership is recorded in precise legal prose (23: 17-20) to signal that, at last, Abraham owns part of the land. It is a small part: one field and a cave. A burial place, bought at great expense. That is all of the Divine promise of the land that Abraham will see in his lifetime.

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

These are, then, no minor episodes. They tell a difficult story. Yes, Abraham will have a land. He will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, or suddenly, or easily. Nor will they occur without

human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower will bring them about. The divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that G-d will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation, from G-d to Abraham and his children that they should act. G-d will help them. The outcome will be what G-d said it would. But not without total commitment from Abraham's family against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable obstacles.

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

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 Kindness, 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 Kindness, 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
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