

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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 G-d 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 forced 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 G-d 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 relation 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. One way or another, 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 fulfilment 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). G-d "took [Abram] outside and said, 'Look at the sky and count the stars. See if you can count them.' [G-d] 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 G-d 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 "G-d 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;

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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). G-d 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 G-d and faith that others would complete what he had begun. The same was surely true of Sarah.

To place your life in G-d'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. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“And this is the life of Sarah" " (Genesis 23: 1). This week's portion of Chaye Sarah - literally "The Life of Sarah" - is spread across two and

a half chapters of the Bible. Chapter 23 of the Book of Genesis deals with Sarah's death and Abraham's protracted negotiations for the purchase of a grave for his beloved wife, chapter 24 details the painstaking search by Abraham's trusted servant Eliezer, for a suitable wife for Isaac, and the first half of chapter 25 describes the death and burial of Abraham himself, concluding with the death of his son Ishmael. Is it not strange that a portion which is largely dedicated to the death of our major protagonists is named "The Life of Sarah"? Moreover, is there an overarching connecting thread which unites the two major pursuits in our portions: the acquisition of a burial plot and the "acquisition" of Rebekah?

Let us begin with our second question, mindful of the fact that Sarah's burial plot, the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron is the first Hebrew land acquisition in the Promised Land of Israel.

We read in last week's portion about the "Covenant Between the Pieces," the unique covenantal partnership between G-d and Abraham in which the patriarch is promised, nay guaranteed, two things: progeny and land. Abraham will have progeny more numerous than the stars and his children will inherit a land whose borders will extend from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen. 15: 18).

If indeed the land belonged to Abraham, why did he go to such lengths to convince the Hittites to sell it to him referring to them as his "masters", bowing down to them (Gen. 23: 12) and eventually paying them the exorbitant price of 400 shekels of silver? Is this the way G-d bestows His gifts?

Apparently, a covenantal promise must be seen as a mutual endeavor in which G-d gives guarantees, but only after the recipient earns that Divine gift. We must be morally worthy of the gift: The covenant is predicated upon our compassionate righteousness and moral justice (Gen. 18:18, 19) and we must be willing to make financial and even the ultimate sacrifice for the land. From this perspective, it is prophetic that our first acquisition in the land of Israel is a grave. How many graves have been filled with the remains of our best and brightest who sacrificed their lives in order for us to acquire a secure resting-place in our promised homeland?

And the same prerequisite is necessary for the fulfillment of the second promise of the Covenant: progeny or seed. Hebrew progeny depends upon finding a proper mate and life-partner from the "family" of the covenantal people, either by birth or through conversion. It means marrying an individual with the right values, deeply committed to the Abrahamic vision of ethical monotheism and living a Jewish life in practice. Generally speaking, one can only acquire a proper mate if one is - himself or herself - a proper mate. This is why Abraham makes Eliezer swear that the woman will live in his land, and why Eliezer's "fitness" test is based upon compassionate

righteousness - for a servant as well as for a beast. Seeing to it that our children will be - and will seek - proper mates with whom to build a family dedicated to the continuity of the Jewish narrative is first and foremost our responsibility; only then can G-d's covenantal promise of progeny "more numerous than the stars" be fulfilled.

Why is our portion called Chaye Sarah, the life of Sarah, if it chronicles her death and even Abraham's death? The answer is that the death of the older generation is the way of the world, and it is not tragic as long as that generation gives rise to a subsequent generation which follows in its footsteps. That is what breeds an "eternal building," eternal life.

And so towards the end of this week's portion we find, "And Isaac brought [Rebekah] into his mother Sarah's tent and he loved her... and Isaac was comforted after his mother's [death]." And Rashi (Gen. 24:67 ad loc) cites a most apt midrashic comment: "Rebekah became modeled after Sarah. As long as Sarah lived, a light remained kindled from Shabbat eve to Shabbat eve, there was a special [hospitality] blessing in the dough, and the Divine cloud rested upon Abraham's familial tent. When Sarah died, these expressions of love and light; Shabbat lights, halla and family purity ceased: but when Rebekah arrived, they returned." And Sarah lived again! ©2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Sleek sports cars, trendy clothing, hip hairstyles. So many middle-aged and even old people are pre-occupied with these things, trying to make themselves look young and up-to-the-minute.

Why has old age come to be perceived in modern-day society as a liability? Why are fifty-year-olds considered over-the-hill? Surely, most middle-aged people, if given the choice, want to exchange places with a teenager. The quality of their lives is usually far superior to that of a teenager. It would seem obvious that these people are not really seeking youth, only the appearance of youth. But again, why should they want to delude themselves in this way?

Let us focus on the opening verse of this week's parshah, which is called Chaye Sarah, the Lifetime of Sarah. The Torah begins by telling us that Sarah lived for one hundred and twenty-seven years and follows immediately with an account of Sarah's death. Why then is the parshah called the "Lifetime" of Sarah?

The answer goes to the heart of the Torah's perspective on time. Unfortunately, many of us have been conditioned to view time as an adversary. We look in the mirror and see a gray hair, and suddenly we feel panic. We are getting old! As the birthdays pile up into the higher numbers, they start to bring feelings of

depression rather than joy. Some of us even lie about our ages. Why? Because we feel we are losing something, that our grip on this wonderful thing called life is slipping away. And so we devise all sorts of clever schemes and stratagems to escape the tick of the clock. But whether or not we listen, the clock never ceases to tick.

In the view of the Torah, however, time is infinitely precious, and each moment has enormous value for itself. Life is a long progression of small units of time which are infused with value by the experience of living itself- by the wisdom we gain, the people whose lives we enrich, the spiritual growth we achieve. The Torah encourages us to do the best we can with these precious moments of our lives, to fashion them into jewels and ornaments to carry with us forever. Death is not the destruction of life. It is the completion of life.

A beachcomber once went down to the shore at the break of dawn, carrying an empty sack over his shoulder. For hours, he picked through the flotsam and jetsam that had washed up onto the beach, filling his sack with pretty seashells and anything else of value he could find. The sun beat down on him mercilessly, but he continued to work. By early afternoon, his sack was full. He was thoroughly exhausted but satisfied.

As he set off for home, he met a newly-arrived beachcomber carrying an empty sack. The newcomer looked at the first beachcomber and sneered.

"Look at you!" he said. "Your face is red. Your hair is matted. Your clothes are soaked with sweat. You are bent over like an old man. And look at me! I am fresh as a cucumber. Wouldn't you love to exchange places with me?"

"Are you kidding?" the first beachcomber replied. "Didn't you notice the full sack on my shoulder? If I changed places with you, I would have to start all over again filling that empty sack of yours. How would I be better off?"

This is the Torah's perspective. Life has a destination and goals, things to be accomplished, growth to be achieved. Therefore, age rather youth must be venerated. The Torah commands us, "You must stand up before the elderly." The elderly, regardless of scholarship and piety, are laden with valuables, while the "sacks" of the young are still empty. Each year of life yields wisdom and experience that the most accomplished young person cannot possibly attain. It is true that youth is bursting with strength and vigor, but a person's worth is not to be measured by physical endowments. The body is but an accessory of the soul, and the spiritual growth of old age enriches the soul.

Our matriarch Sarah lived with this perspective. Every moment was molded with loving care into a precious jewel to be carried with her-and to be enjoyed by her descendants-for all eternity. In this light, her death marked the completion of her journey and the full illumination of the "Lifetime of Sarah."

If we integrate these ideas into our own lives we will find that we have much more happiness-and much more time. We must give value and meaning to the years we spend on this earth, filling them with honesty, integrity, love, kindness, study and spirituality. Let us learn to appreciate the value of life. Let us be the beneficiaries of Sarah's legacy-to live a lifetime. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Chayei Sarah-the life of Sarah. Our parsha begins with the counting of Sarah's years upon her death. Avrohom subsequently procures ownership of Ma'aras Hamachpelah {the Tomb of the Patriarchs} and buries Sarah there. With that, Avrohom turns his attention to finding the right wife for his son, Yitzchak. "And Hashem had blessed Avrohom with everything." [24:1]

The Ramban explains that Avrohom had been blessed with wealth, property, honor, long life and sons. "And Avrohom said to his servant (Eliezer), the elder of his house, who ruled over all that he (Avrohom) had..." [24:2]

The Sages offer a number of explanations of the rule that Eliezer had over Avrohom's household. Some say that he ruled over his desires and inclinations in the same way as Avrohom. Others explain it to mean that he ruled-had mastery-over the Torah of his master, Avrohom. The simple meaning is, of course, that he was in charge of Avrohom's considerable estate and holdings. Clearly, Avrohom had absolute trust in Eliezer's integrity and judgment.

With that in mind, Rav Sholom Shwadron zt"l points out, the continuation of that very same passuk seems to be puzzling. "...place your hand beneath my thigh and I will make you swear by Hashem, the G-d of the heavens and the G-d of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son (Yitzchak) from the daughters of the Cananites amongst whom I dwell." [24:2-3]

Why was there a need for Avrohom to make Eliezer take an oath? What happened to the trust?

Rav Sholom explains with the following story. Rav Yisroel Salanter zt"l once traveled to a small village where the townspeople were impatiently awaiting the arrival of their shochet {ritual slaughterer}. Rav Yisroel wasn't known in the town but, based on his religious appearance, was approached by one of the men and asked if he would please shecht {ritually slaughter} the animals for them.

Rav Yisroel didn't answer directly but rather led the conversation in a different direction. After a short while, Rav Yisroel asked this man if he'd lend him a sum of five rubles, explaining that he had money in his house and he'd be able to repay him very quickly.

The surprised man turned to Rav Yisroel, responding that a wise man such as he should know

that you can't expect someone who doesn't really know you to give you a loan.

Having gotten him exactly where he wanted him, Rav Yisroel asked how he could trust him to shecht his animals if he didn't trust him for five rubles!

The Brisker Ruv zt"l was once asked why, after he had heard a perfectly halachic {in accordance with Jewish Law} sounding of the shofar {ram's horn blown on Rosh Hashana-the Jewish New Year}, he was still so nervously worried that perhaps he hadn't properly fulfilled his obligation.

He explained that a person who's carrying a million dollars in his pocket will incessantly check his pockets every few steps to make sure that it's still there. We don't ask why he's so worried! We don't ask why, if it was there a few seconds before, does he need to check again a few seconds later! We don't ask because we understand that a million dollars are at stake.

"To me," the Brisker Ruv concluded, "the mitzvah {commandment} of shofar is worth no less than a million dollars..."

We can trust people to shecht even though we wouldn't lend them a dime. We're worried about our possessions but can't understand when someone else is worried about shofar. Avrohom, however, had a very opposite attitude...

Avrohom had absolute trust in Eliezer when it came to the small, inconsequential matters of his life such as all of his life-savings and possessions. But when a wife for Yitzchak-the foundation upon which the entire destiny of the nation of Israel would be built-was being discussed, there Avrohom's trust fell short. "Place your hand beneath my thigh and I will make you swear by Hashem, the G-d of the heavens and the G-d of the earth." No oath, no go-eth.

It's a constant battle to keep our priorities straight, realizing what is truly valuable and important and being willing to sacrifice material gains on the altar of our spiritual convictions and responsibilities. Two of my closest talmidim {students/brothers/friends} have become quite successful in the music business. I'm always inspired by their tenacious commitment to Shabbos in the face of many tempting offers.

They set what I believe was a legal precedent when they signed a deal with a major recording label. Included in the contract was a 'Shabbos clause' stating that any deadline placed upon them would automatically not include Shabbos or any Jewish Holidays. A ninety-day deadline would thus exclude any Shabbos days, automatically turning it into a 102+ day deadline.

When the Olympics were being held in Atlanta they were in strong demand, playing close to twenty shows. In the face of strong pressure, they, of course, refused to play on Friday night. That Friday night, for those who remember, a bomb exploded under the stage where one of the bands was playing-a stage where they had previously played. When they told me

the story I recalled the saying that Shabbos keeps the Jews far more than the Jews keep Shabbos.

Priorities. Focus. Knowing when to trust and when to be suspicious. When to worry and when to chill. When to perform and when to make kiddush {Sabbath sanctification made over wine}. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Finding the right mate has always been a complicated and potentially hazardous matter. It remains so today. Just ask any parent in our current society who has marriageable age children and you will, in all probability, hear a tale of angst and frustration about the inequities of life and the illogic of it all. In this week's parsha, Avraham faces the task of finding a wife for Yitzchak. His main concern is that the prospective bride be from his extended family and not from the Canaanite women.

Jewish tradition has always viewed the family as being an important component in choosing a proper mate. Though family certainly cannot be the only criterion, it certainly is an important one. The rabbis taught us that the speech and language of a child is always a reflection of the speech and language of the father and mother of that child. People who are raised in serene and loving home environments, homes of tradition and Jewish values usually grow up to be serene, self-confident and proud Jews.

Children who are raised in dysfunctional family environments have great hurdles to overcome to achieve self-worth and a productive life. Both the Canaanites and Avraham's family in Aram were pagans. But Avraham's family had the stability and a minimum code of morality, traits that were lacking in the more permissive and licentious Canaanite society. This was the curse of the Canaanite society and Avraham felt that this factor would be impossible to ever truly overcome.

Eliezer, the loyal servant of Avraham, adds another requirement to the search for the mate of Yitzchak. Innate kindness and goodness and the willingness to sacrifice one's own comforts for the sake of others is part of the makeup of Yitzchak. He was raised in a house where concern for the welfare of others was the everyday norm. A husband and wife have to be on the same page when it comes to this issue.

I recall that in my years as a rabbi there were husbands and wives that would bring to me money to distribute to the needy of the community and caution me not to allow their respective spouse to become aware that they had done so. Sometimes there were halachic or overriding family issues present that even forced me not to accept the donation. But I was always saddened by such situations.

Eliezer's testing of Rivkah was correctly done in order to spare the couple possibly ruinous disputes in their future life together. And since in the house of Avraham and Sarah kindness of spirit and generosity of action and behavior were the fundamental norms of their family life, only a spouse that also espoused those ideals could bring to Yitzchak happiness and serenity.

The Canaanite society that tolerated and even exalted the societies of Sodom and Amorah could not produce a suitable mate for Yitzchak. The Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Rivkah. Love is based on character traits and shared values and not only on physical beauty and attraction. That is what makes its achievement so elusive for so many. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Words have the power to express ideas. But as expressive as words can be, they can sometimes be limiting. Often music can give soul and meaning to ideas that words cannot.

This concept is also true with respect to the melody (trop) used to read the Torah. The tune actually acts as a commentary on the text itself.

The highest and most prolonged trop is called the shalsholet. The word shalsholet is from the word shalosh - three. The sound of this note curves upward and then down three successive times. Commentators suggest that when a shalsholet appears, it indicates a feeling of hesitation by a character in the text.

For example, when Mrs. Potiphar attempts to seduce Yosef (Joseph), Yosef refuses, va-yemaen. (Genesis 39:8) Although saying no, Yosef, at first, may have thought about giving into temptation. The word va-yemaen has, as its trop, the shalsholet.

In last week's portion, the angels instruct Lot and his family to leave Sedom. The Torah then tells us that Lot lingered (va-yitmamah). (Genesis 19:16) Lot and his family were leaving their home. This could not have been easy. Even as they left, they hesitated. In the end, Lot's wife looks back and is overtaken by the brimstone and fire, turning into a pillar of salt. Atop va-yitmamah is the shalsholet.

In this week's Torah portion there is a less obvious shalsholet. Eliezer, Avraham's (Abraham) steward, is at the well, seeking a wife for his master's son, Yitzchak (Isaac). The Torah states "And he said" (va-yomar) (Genesis 24:12) the woman who will give camels to drink is kind and hence suitable for Yitzchak. Atop the word va-yomar is the shalsholet. One wonders why? What type of hesitation takes place in this moment?

Perhaps, deep down Eliezer, did hesitate. In his heart of hearts, he may not have wanted to succeed. Failure would mean Yitzchak would not marry, and Eliezer, being the closest aide to Avraham, would be the next in line to carry on the covenant. Alternatively, as the midrash suggests, perhaps, if he did not find a wife on this journey, Yitzchak would end up marrying Eliezer's daughter. Either way, lack of success on this mission, may have ended up personally benefiting Eliezer.

No wonder Eliezer's name never appears in the entire chapter. When he identifies himself to Yitzchak's future father-in-law Lavan, Eliezer declares, "eved Avraham anochi, I am Avraham's servant." (Genesis 24:34) It is extraordinary that Eliezer does not identify himself by name. But this omission makes sense as Eliezer works selflessly for Avraham, even at the risk of his own personal gain.

The Rambam notes that, in many areas, one who hesitates but in the end does the principled thing is on a higher level than one who acts without hesitation. Therefore, Yosef's hesitation doesn't mean he's less righteous, but rather, very human. And certainly, the act of Eliezer falls into this same category.

Most often, when people become involved in an endeavor they ask "what's in it for me?" Eliezer may have asked this most human question, but the message of the shalshet is clear. There are times when we are called upon to complete tasks that may not be in our best self interest, but we must do them nonetheless. In a world of selfishness this musical note teaches each one of us the importance of selflessness.

Interestingly, the shalshet looks like a crooked line that begins on the ground and reaches upward. It is telling us that personal feelings are real and human. But it is also teaching us that sometimes we should abandon those natural human inclinations and reach beyond ourselves. Then we will be able to reach the heavens. © 2010 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Hashem, Who is the G-d of the heavens, Who took me from my father's house and from the land I was born, and Who spoke to me and Who swore to me saying, 'I will give this land to your descendants,' He will send His angel before you, and you will [be able to] take a woman for my son from there." In this response (B'raishis 24:7) to Avraham's servant's concern that Yitzchok's perspective bride will not agree to come to Canaan, Avraham refers to G-d as "the G-d of the heavens." Aside from trying to

understand why Avraham described G-d this way, just a few verses earlier (24:3) he had asked his servant to swear "by Hashem, the G-d of the heavens and the G-d of the earth." Why did Avraham change the way he described G-d?

"Hashem, Who is the G-d of the heavens, Who took me from my father's house and from the land I was born, and Who spoke to me and Who swore to me saying, 'I will give this land to your descendants,' He will send His angel before you, and you will [be able to] take a woman for my son from there." In this response (B'raishis 24:7) to Avraham's servant's concern that Yitzchok's perspective bride will not agree to come to Canaan, Avraham refers to G-d as "the G-d of the heavens." Aside from trying to understand why Avraham described G-d this way, just a few verses earlier (24:3) he had asked his servant to swear "by Hashem, the G-d of the heavens and the G-d of the earth." Why did Avraham change the way he described G-d?

Rashi addresses the latter issue, explaining that when Avraham was "taken from his father's house" G-d was not yet known on earth; it was only after Avraham spread monotheism to more than a few individuals that G-d could also be described as "the G-d of the earth." Therefore, when making his servant swear (which was after G-d became widely known), Avraham referred to G-d as both "the G-d of the heavens" and "the G-d of the earth," while when referencing the situation that existed when he left his hometown, he refers to Him as only "the G-d of the heavens."

This explains the discrepancy very well, but does not address why Avraham would bring it up in the conversation in the first place. Why did Avraham want to remind his servant that originally no one had been aware of G-d? And why did he mention G-d currently being "the G-d of the heavens and the G-d of the earth," two "components," rather than just saying "G-d" (without delineating His domain) or using a more inclusive term, such as "of the world" or "of everything?"

Several commentators address this last issue (see Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ralbag, Kli Yakar, Tzror HaMor and Netziv), without explaining whether, or how, it is connected to Avraham only saying "G-d of the heavens" the second time. It is possible to combine one of the approaches that explain why Avraham referred to G-d as "the G-d of the heavens and the G-d of the earth" with Rashi's explanation for why Avraham changed the description the second time. However, if there was a specific message implied in describing G-d in a way that indicates His involvement in our lives (which is why He is "the G-d of the earth"), not mentioning it the second time would imply that before Avraham "brought G-d down to earth" (as it were), He wasn't really involved with it. It seems a bit awkward for the same exact words used (or purposely left out) in one verse (24:3) to mean something totally different just a few verses later (24:7). Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam does suggest that

Avraham meant the exact same thing in both verses; there was no need to repeat the entire description since the concept(s) had just been discussed. [Obviously, Rashi does not understand the second (shorter) expression to be a shorthand way of repeating the first one (or he wouldn't need to explain the discrepancy).]

S'fornu addresses each part individually, with Avraham reminding his servant that if he violates the oath G-d will punish him in this world (as he is "the G-d of the earth") and/or the next one (as he is "the G-d of the heavens"), while referring only to "the G-d of the heavens" when he asks G-d to send a heavenly angel to help (or states that He will), since that is where angels reside. [Malbim also has one explanation for the first expression and a separate one for the second.] Ramban is among the commentators (see Toldos Yitzchok on our verse and Aderes Eliyahu on Devarim 1:6) who understands "Elokay Ha'aretz" as "the G-d of the Land," referring to the Promised Land, rather than "the G-d of the earth," which would refer to every land. Therefore, when referring to his hometown (which was outside the Promised Land), Avraham does not say "the G-d of the land." It could be suggested that before sending his servant to Charan, Avraham reminded him about the difference between G-d's providence inside the Promised Land and outside of it. In his response to the servant's concern that the bride will not want to move to Canaan, Avraham told him not to be concerned that G-d won't help him be successful, as He helped Avraham before he moved to Canaan and will send His angel to help now as well. We are still left wondering, though, why-according to Rashi-Avraham reminds his servant that before he spread the word, no one knew about G-d.

Although Rashi introduces the notion that G-d was not really "the G-d of the earth" until Avraham made everyone aware of Him in his commentary on the second verse (to explain why the second verse is different than the first), the Midrash (B'raishis Rabbah 59:8) uses it to explain the first verse; He was "the G-d of the heavens" until Avraham came along, and became [also] "the G-d of the earth" afterwards. It would therefore seem that whatever message Avraham was trying to give his servant, his intent was to send it the first time, not (just) the second time. The question remains as to what that message was, but now also becomes why Avraham had to repeat it, or say it more explicitly.

The purpose of the conversation, and the oath that resulted from it, was to make sure that the servant did not take a Canaanite woman to be Yitzchok's wife. Earlier (57:3), B'raishis Rabbah had explained that Avraham was told that Nachor had children "after" Avraham had wondered whether he was mistaken for not marrying Yitzchok off to one of the daughters of Aner, Eshkol or Mamray. After all, had he gone through with the straight-forward meaning of G-d's command to

"bring Yitzchok up as an offering," Yitzchok would have died without any children. The daughters of his close friends were righteous, so the only reason not to take one of them as his daughter-in-law would have been their lineage, and "what do I (Avraham) care about lineage?" It was at this point in Avraham's thought process that G-d told Avraham, either through prophecy (Maharzo) or by arranging that word would get to him (Eitz Yosef), that Nachor had children-from whom Yitzchok could find a wife (see Rashi on 22:20). Avraham understood this to be a direct message not to marry Yitzchok off to one of his neighbors, so he made sure that his servant wouldn't do so, but would travel back to Avraham's hometown (Charan), to his family, instead.

[Rashi (24:8) does say that if she refuses to come to Canaan the servant can marry Yitzchok off to one of the daughters of Aner, Eshkol or Mamray, but this does not mean it was the backup plan. There is some discussion as to whether Avraham was asking G-d to send His angel to help the servant in his mission, or if it was a prophetic statement, that G-d will, without a doubt, send His angel to help. In a "lost" section of Rashi "found" by Rabbi Sh'muel Yehoshua Gold, z"l (Iyunim B'Rashi, page 130), Rashi is adamant that it is not a request but a prophecy. If Avraham was certain that the mission would be successful, and was trying to convey this confidence to his servant, the only reason to tell him that if she refuses to come back with him he is freed from the oath would be to show how confident he was that she would in fact return. It is as if Avraham was saying "I am so certain that the mission will be a success and she will be willing to come to Canaan, that if I am wrong I will allow Yitzchok to marry one of the very girls I am going out of my way to prevent you from marrying him off to." The oath was only being given based on Avraham's confidence that G-d had told him Yitzchok shouldn't marry one of his neighbor's daughters; if he was wrong, it would have been administered under false pretenses.

This would explain why Avraham would reference the daughters of Aner, Eshkol and Mamray if it didn't work out in Charan rather than someone from the family of Lot or Yishmael (see Rashi on 24:49 and Mizrahi and Gur Aryeh on 24:8); it wasn't a set of instructions to be followed if "plan A" didn't work, but a means of expressing how confident he was that "plan A" would work.]

The point of the mission, then, was not to travel far away because there was nobody local who was righteous enough for Yitzchok to marry, but to find someone righteous from Nachor's family. Avraham therefore wanted his servant to know that he may be in for a rude awakening once he gets to Charan. Whereas it was now commonplace in Canaan for everyone to know about the One True G-d, the same cannot be said for Charan. Whomever Avraham and Sara had converted to monotheism made the trip with

them to Canaan (B'raishis 12:5), leaving Charan with only idol-worshippers (see Rashi on 24:31; see also Kehilas Yitzchok, who points out that Eliezer expected to find rampant idol-worship and therefore requested a place to stay that was idol-free). Lest the servant wonder if his master knew this when he rejected the righteous Canaanite daughters in favor of his own family's daughters, Avraham told him that the oath was being made to "the G-d of the heavens," i.e. even though the situation in Charan is the same as it was before monotheism became mainstream (or was at least on the map), and to "the G-d of the earth" even though there are now righteous monotheistic neighbors whom Yitzchok could theoretically marry. When the servant questioned what the "plan B" would be if she refused to come to Canaan, Avraham reassured him that there would be no need for a "plan B," as G-d, the same G-d Who had helped him when He could only be described as "the G-d of the heavens," would make sure that the mission would succeed. Just as Avraham and Sara were able to break away from their idol-worshipping roots, so would Yitzchok's wife. And even though Charan was similar to the way the world was before Avraham spread monotheism, that was where Yitzchok's wife would be found. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

“**A**nd Yitzchak brought her to the tent of his mother Sarah" [Bereishit 24:67]. "Rivka followed the model of Sarah, Yitzchak's mother. As long as Sarah was alive, the lamp was lit from the day before Shabbat to the following Shabbat, the dough was blessed, and a cloud was positioned over the tent. When she died these stopped, but when Rivka came they returned." [Rashi].

The same three signs also existed in the Tabernacle - The "western" lamp in the Menorah was the last one to be extinguished, the "lechem hapanim" - the holy bread - was blessed, and the Glory Cloud of G-d appeared over the Tabernacle.

The fact that the lamp burned from one Shabbat to the next in the tent is not simply a miracle. It teaches us that the light that is disseminated on Shabbat does not go out when Shabbat is over and that the holy atmosphere does not end when we replace our Shabbat clothing with weekday garments. Rather, the lamp we light before Shabbat continues to light up our lives in the weekdays. Judaism does not look for a dichotomy between the holy and the secular but rather wants holiness to influence the secular and to raise it to a higher level. The roof of the Tabernacle consisted of two sheets, one of five and one of six strips of cloth sewn together, which were attached to each other by loops and hooks. Why weren't all of the strips sewn

together? Or, as an alternative, why weren't the strips simply put in place side by side, without attaching them?

Sforno gives the following answer to these questions: The hooks which were located above the Parochet, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Tabernacle, are symbolic of the relationship between the different strips. Sewing them all together would indicate that there are no boundaries between them, while putting the strips down without attaching them would indicate a state of not being connected at all, of contradiction. Just as the main area of the Tabernacle and the Holy of Holies do not conflict with each other in spite of their different levels of sanctity, so the holy and the secular should not be in conflict.

This describes the essence of the Jewish home. King David had a request: "I have asked G-d for one thing... to sit in the House of G-d for all the days of my life..." [Tehillim 27:4]. Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsh finds this hard to understand. "Even the Kohanim themselves do not sit in the Temple for the entire day." His answer is that it does not refer to literally sitting in the Temple all day long but to adopting a way of life such that every place on earth become a House of G-d. That is, David asks that the Shechina should not be limited to appearing only in the Temple but should accompany us all the time and not only for the few hours of the day that we spend in the Temple.

This is a description of Sarah's tent. The lamp that she lit before Shabbat cast its light on the secular days that followed, lasting until the next Shabbat.

I remember a story that our mentor Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook told us. During one of his trips abroad, the poet Shaul Chernichovsky was with him on the boat. The poet asked Rav Kook to listen to a new poem of his. When Rav Kook agreed, Chernichovsky expressed his surprise that the rabbi was interested in a poem that did not have religious content. The rabbi replied: Judaism does not feel that there is any contradiction between the holy and the secular, there is only a difference in spiritual level. Many of the great men of Yisrael also wrote secular poems. The only place where there is a contrast is between the holy and the impure, and that is why nothing impure is allowed to enter the Temple. And then Rav Kook took the opportunity to scold Chernichovsky about the parts of his poetry that were impure.

RIVA AND REZER



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