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SHABBAT PARSHAT CHAYEI SARA · 27 CHESHVAN 5764 · NOV. 22, 2003 · VOL. 11 NO. 5

PARSHA INSIGHTS

WASTED ON THE YOUNG

“...the years of the life of Sarah.” (23:1)

Those of us who are old enough to have trouble recalling large areas of our youth will at least have no trouble remembering some standout moments of total irresponsibility: Like hitchhiking down a German autobahn at 100 miles an hour on the back of a BMW 900 in the dead of night in driving rain. Or going for a walk by yourself in a strange city and suddenly realizing that every face you see on the street and on the billboards is black.

“Youth is wasted on the young” runs the old adage. As our hair thins and our waistlines thicken we try to shed the immaturity of youth and improve our characters and our actions.

It comes out then that what we really can call our

“life” – our arriving at some kind of perfection in this world – happens pretty close to our departure from this world. Viewed in this way, our “lives” are even shorter than we thought, and even without the help of lunatic escapades and motorcycle madness.

All the above is true of the average person. However, there are those special people whose entire lives are unspoiled. Such were “the years of the life of Sarah.” As Rashi says “all of them were equal in their goodness.” None of them were wasted or misspent. And even though, of course, Sarah’s stature grew in old age, this was the dividend of a holy life spend in doing *mitzvot* and good deeds, rather than the necessity to forsake the foolishness of youth – for “all of them were equal in their goodness.”

Source:

• Based on the Sfat Emet

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham’s family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels. (Some 140 gal-

lons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka’s father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah’s tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

OHRNET magazine is published by Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College

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PROBLEM OF THE LOCAL GIRL

What's wrong with a local girl? This is the question that inevitably arises when one studies this week's Torah portion's account of the search initiated by Avraham for a bride for his son Yitzchak.

"You shall not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites," Avraham sternly commands his trusted servant Eliezer, insisting that he seek such a candidate in his native Mesopotamia instead.

Neither the inhabitants of his ancestral homeland nor those of his present one were the paragons of religiosity appropriate as marriage partners for one of the Patriarchs. Why, then, did Avraham favor one over the others?

The commentaries explain that theological distortions are not hereditary, while flaws of character are. Avraham

sought for his son a bride whose family had good character traits. The idolatrous concepts of her parents were not hereditary and could easily be abandoned once she joined Avraham's family. Such an opportunity was available in the Mesopotamian family of Lavan but not in Canaan where the corruption of character would inevitably be an inseparable part of her personality.

We live in a time when so much evil, in the form of terror and political corruption, is justified in the name of religion, when mass murder is dressed up as martyrdom. Jews have had such neighbors in the past and suffer from them today. Only by walking in the paths of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs and being solid in both our theological and character obligations can we merit to see an end to these problems for Israel forever.

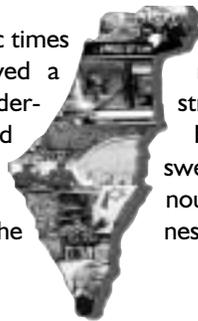
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

ERETZ ZAVAT CHALAV U'DVASH – LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

During a visit to the Bnei Brak of Talmudic times the Sage Rami bar Yechezkel observed a scene which offered him a graphic understanding of the meaning of a "land of milk and honey" which is the description given in the Torah of Eretz Yisrael.

He saw goats grazing beneath fig trees. The



honey oozing from the very ripe figs merged with the milk dripping from the bountiful goats to form a large stream of milk and honey.

Milk represents nutrition while honey is associated with sweetness. Eretz Yisrael offers both physical and spiritual nourishment achieved with an accompaniment of sweetness.

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PARSHA Q&A ? _____

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sara hear that caused her death?
3. What title of honor did the *B'nei Chet* bestow upon Avraham?
4. Where was Avraham born?
5. How were Avraham's camels distinguished?
6. What is meant by "all the good of his master in his hand?"
7. What special character trait did Eliezer seek when choosing a wife for Yitzchak?
8. Why did Avraham's servant, Eliezer, run toward Rivka?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Eliezer?
10. When Lavan told Eliezer that the house was cleared out, what did he remove?
11. Who did Eliezer want Yitzchak to marry?
12. Aside from Eliezer, to which other people did Rivka offer to give water?
13. Lavan answered Eliezer before his father, Betuel, had a chance. What does this indicate about Lavan's character?
14. What did Rivka mean when she said "I will go?"
15. What blessing did Rivka's family give her before she departed?
16. Who was *Ketura*?
17. What gift did Avraham give to Yitzchak?
18. How old was Avraham when he died?
19. For how many years did Yaakov attend the Yeshiva of *Ever*?
20. How many times is Eliezer's name mentioned in this week's Parsha?

PARSHA Q&A! _____

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 23:2 - Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah.
2. 23:2 - That Yitzchak was almost slaughtered.
3. 23:6 - Prince of G-d.
4. 24:7 - Ur Kasdim.
5. 24:10 - They were muzzled, so they wouldn't graze in the fields of others.
6. 24:10 - Eliezer carried a document in which Avraham gave all he owned to Yitzchak so that people would want their daughter to marry him.
7. 24:14 - He sought someone who excelled in performing acts of kindness.
8. 24:17 - He saw that the waters of the well rose when she approached.
9. 24:29 - Lavan coveted his money.
10. 24:31 - Idols.
11. 24:39 - His own daughter.
12. 24:44 - To the men who accompanied Eliezer.
13. 24:50 - That he was wicked.
14. 24:58 - I will go even if you don't want me to go.
15. 24:60 - That the blessings given to Avraham would continue through her children.
16. 25:1 - Hagar.
17. 25:5 - The power of blessing.
18. 25:7 - 175 years old.
19. 25:17 - 14 years.
20. None!

BONUS QUESTION ? _____

Rashi states that the "gift" that Avraham gave his children from *Ketura* was the knowledge of sorcery and black magic (25:6). The Torah punishes one who engages in witchcraft with the death penalty. So why did Avraham teach them a practice forbidden by the Torah?

BONUS ANSWER ! _____

Avraham didn't teach them sorcery with the intention that they practice it. He wanted to give them expertise in such matters so that they could overcome others who tried to use wizardry against them.

• Gur Aryeh

THE WORLD OR FOREVER

A *chok olom* is the way the Torah refers to the *minchat chavitin* (Vayikra 6:15). This flour offering was brought by every *kohen* on the day he was inaugurated into the *Beit Hamikdash* service and by the *kohen gadol* every day. The *issoron* amount of flour that the *kohen* brought was divided into two halves, one of which was burned on the altar in the morning and the other in the afternoon.

What is meant by the term *olom* used in regard to this statute? The Hebrew word *olom* can be translated as “world” or “forever”. Its meaning here is a matter of dispute between Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yehuda.

Rabbi Shimon applies the term to a situation in which the *kohen gadol* has passed away and a successor has yet to be appointed. The materials for the *mincha* during the interim must be supplied by the community from the *Beit Hamikdash* treasury and not by the heirs of the *kohen gadol*. This, Rabbi Shimon contends, is indicated by the term *olom*, which means the “world” or, more precisely, the general community.

Rabbi Yehuda, on the other hand, on the basis of the text regarding Aaron’s sons, rules that it is the heirs of the deceased *kohen gadol* who must supply the material for the *mincha* which was their father’s responsibility, until a successor is appointed to assume this responsibility. He translates the term *olom* as “forever” and views it as the Torah’s instructions regarding the inauguration process of *kohanim* is to be forever according to what is directed in that chapter. Tosefot explains that this was intended to rule out the misconception that a *kohen* who had already brought a *minchat chavitin* for his inauguration as an ordinary *kohen* is required to bring another one when he is inaugurated as a *kohen gadol* but that there is no need for the *kohen gadol* to bring such a *mincha* every day. The term *olom* is therefore used to indicate that the service of the *kohen gadol* must go on forever on a daily basis in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

• *Menachot* 51b

OLIVES AND THE JEWISH PROBLEM

The Jewish nation is compared to the olive by the Prophet Yirmiyahu: “G-d has given you the title of a beautiful, fresh olive.” (Yirmiyahu 11:16)

Several explanations are offered by our Sages for this comparison.

Rabbi Yitzchak sees in it the fulfillment of Jewish destiny in the end of days. When the Patriarch Avraham came to the ruins of the *Beit Hamikdash* to pray for his exiled descen-

dants, G-d reassured him that, despite their serious sinning that precipitated their exile, there was still hope for their survival and return. A voice from Heaven quoted the above comparison to the olive, explaining that just as the true essence of the olive is the oil which can be extracted from it at the end of its existence, so too will the true essence of the Jewish nation emerge at the end of days. How this massive return to G-d will be effected has already been outlined by our Sages who stated that in order for Jews to be worthy of redemption by Mashiach a wicked ruler will be imposed upon them by Heaven, whose draconic decrees will motivate Jews to repent their ways and return to G-d.

This concept is echoed by Rabbi Yochanan who pointed out that just as the oil is extracted from the olive by crushing it, so too do Jews return to the proper path only through suffering.

Maharsha makes an interesting observation regarding the relationship of the olive to its oil. In the Torah listing of the seven agricultural species for which Eretz Yisrael is famed, the olive is described as the “oil-producing olive” (*Devarim* 8:8), for it is the oil rather than the fruit that is the true essence of the olive.

Jewish survival is the theme of the comparison to the olive in the approach of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. His focus, however, is on the tree bearing the olives rather than the oil produced from them. Just as the olive tree does not shed its leaves both in winter and summer so will Jewry remain both in this world and in the Hereafter. Maharsha explains that winter is an allegory for the difficulties that Jews suffer in the generations preceding Mashiach, while summer symbolizes the era of redemption that awaits them.

• *Menachot* 53b

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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HEBRON YESTERDAY AND TODAY

From: Alice in Atlanta, GA

Dear Rabbi,
What is the significance of Hebron to the Jewish people?

(Editor's note: this question has a special significance in light of its relationship to this week's Torah reading.)

Dear Alice,

The Torah says, "Sara died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron, in the Land of Canaan" (*Bereishet* 23:2).

Kiryat Arba, which means "Town of the Four", is so called because of the four couples buried there: Adam and Eve,

Abraham and Sara, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah" (*Midrash Rabba*).

Ancient Hebron was not only linked to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs but is also mentioned in regard to the mission of the spies sent by Moses to scout the land. One of them — Kalev ben Yefuneh — was awarded the region of Hebron for his faithful report.

Hebron was also the seat of King David's reign for seven and a half years before he made Jerusalem his capital.

The name Hebron comes from the Hebrew root-word "chibur", meaning "connecting", since it is the place which according to mystical sources is the bridge between this world and the World-to-Come.

Today there is Jewish settlement in Hebron as well as in the adjoining city of Kiryat Arba. The Machpela Cave where the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried continues to attract Jewish worshippers and visitors from all over the world.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO? _____

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE DOUBLE ERROR

Question: I hired the services of a painter to do some extensive work in my home and he quoted a reasonable price of \$3,000 for the job. When he completed his work he asked for \$2,750. Aware that he had quoted a higher price I asked him if he wasn't making a mistake in the sum he was asking. To my surprise he replied, "Well, if you're bargaining I'll settle for \$2,500." I gladly paid him that sum but my conscience bothers me in regard to the \$500 I saved as a result of this double error. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: A similar question was put to Rabbi Yitchok Zilberstein, Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, and he compared the settlement made in your case to that of one made as the result of a mistake of a rabbinical judge.

In *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat* (25:5) we find a case

of one of the litigants in a financial lawsuit consenting to a compromise settlement in order to avoid taking an oath which the judge had imposed on him to substantiate his claim. If the judge subsequently realizes that he had erred in requiring the oath, the compromise that had been reached on its basis is no longer binding since the concession made in reaching the compromise was the result of a mistake.

In the case you mentioned, the painter also was not consciously forgoing payment due him but simply forgot the price you initially agreed upon. If you loan someone \$3,000 and later ask him to pay the \$2,500 he owes you, would you consider that a forfeiting of your claim to the other \$500 that you subsequently remember he owes you as well?

In conclusion, give the painter the \$500 you saved as a result of his double error.

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NAPOLEON, HAPPINESS AND OHR.EDU

**From: Prof. J. S.
at Roger Williams University School of Law
Bristol, RI**

To the Editor,

I just made my first visit to your website, and was deeply moved by Rabbi Sinclair's piece "The Curse of Happiness." (See Ohr.edu web page: <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/459> **Ed.**) And yet, I have been struggling to understand the connection between Rabbi Sinclair's story about Napoleon and the rest of what Rabbi Sinclair wrote. Can you help me?

Rabbi Sinclair replies:

Dear Prof. J. S.,

Thank you for your kind words about my essay "The Curse of Happiness."

Napoleon epitomizes for me the "I am the world and the world is me" attitude that, in essence, was the target of the essay. Napoleon didn't like sleeping, because then he was not directly experiencing his dominion.

He was, after all, no less 'king of the world' when asleep. However, for him, all revolved around the experience of his power. Similarly, we say we are not happy when we don't experience happiness. I was trying to convey the idea that true happiness is more than just feeling "happy." It is the sure and certain knowledge of my place in Creation.

Source:

• Based on the Sfat Emet

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE BLIND RETRIEVER

“Who left behind these bags?” This is the sort of question that can cause great alarm on a bus in terror-conscious Jerusalem. In this case, however, there was nothing to worry about because the forgotten bags were obviously filled with innocent sweets.

But to whom do they belong? The speculation about his identity soon came to an end when a blind lady

announced that she knew exactly who it was. When he entered the bus she had recognized his voice greeting her as belonging to a very special Jew who was in the habit of visiting the Senior Citizens' Home where she lived and distributing sweets. She thereupon assumed responsibility for returning them to him on his next visit.

It thus took a sightless woman to fulfill the mitzvah of returning lost property.

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