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PARSHA INSIGHTS

COVER UP

"...she then took the veil and covered herself." (24:65)

Not too long ago, in Victorian times, no lady would be seen on the street with a centimeter of flesh visible lower than her chin. Victorian women were covered quite literally from "head to toe."

Not that secular society in Victorian times was demonstrably any more moral than it is today. Just there was some kind of a concept of discretion. You may call it *hypocrisy*; others might call it *guilt*. At any rate, even secular society had some kind of an idea of what is called in Hebrew: *tzniut*.

Tzniut is often mistranslated as "modesty." But really it means *inwardness*. As the verse says, "All the honor of the daughter of the king is inwardness" (Tehillim 45:14). Every Jewish girl is a "daughter of the king" (not a 'Jewish Princess') and her greatest glory is her inner world.

One of the greatest challenges to Jewish life in our generation is *tzniut*. A woman's nature is to want to look attractive. When this desire is to be beautiful in her husband's eyes, a woman in the total privacy of her home may go to great lengths.

However, if this instinct does not find its intended home in family life and wanders out onto the street, it

becomes a highly destructive force. Especially as the current standards of what is called 'decently dressed' would more correctly befit the animals in a zoo.

"...she then took the veil and covered herself."

Rashi comments that the phrase "...and (she) covered herself," is grammatically passive rather than reflexive and literally translated would read, "and she was covered." He goes on to cite two examples of this syntax: as in, "and she was buried, and "...and it was broken."

Of all the grammatical examples that Rashi could have given, why did he chose *burial* and *breakage*?

'Being buried' and 'breaking' are two things that a person can never do to himself. They are two of the most involuntary things that can happen to you.

When Rivka covered herself, it was with such immediacy and so automatic and with such control of herself that it was as though someone else was covering her.

"...and she was covered."

• Source: *In the name of the Mirrer Mashgiach as seen in Lekach Tov*

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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.

TALMUD *Tips*

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

YEVAMOT 44 - 50

Rabbi Chelbo said, "Coverts are as problematic for the Jewish People as 'sapachat' (a word found in the Torah to denote a physical skin disease due to spiritual lacking, such as speaking slander)."

This statement of Rabbi Chelbo is taught on our *daf* to explain why we inform a potential conversion candidate of an assortment of *mitzvot* — some less severe and some more severe. If they choose to change their minds before conversion, let them and it is not our worry since they can be difficult for us as Rabbi Chelbo states.

Why does Rabbi Chelbo call them "*sapachat*" and in what way are they problematic? Many answers are offered in explanation. Here are a few:

The convert may continue to "hold onto" their initial ways that are forbidden to the Jewish People, and we might possibly be influenced to learn from their wrong ways and rely upon them to know what is right and what is wrong for us (Rashi). According to Rashi it seems that the word "*sapachat*" does not refer to the disease mentioned in the Torah, but is a word meaning "holders-on" or "clingers". We are concerned they will hold onto their former non-Jewish behavior, and that they will cling to the Jewish People and be a negative influence.

One of the various answers in Tosefot here is that we are commanded to be especially sensitive to the needs and feelings of the convert. Since it is very difficult to fulfill this *mitzvah* correctly, we might be deserving punishment.

Another answer cited in Tosefot in Tractate Kiddushin (70a) is that righteous converts are often even more careful in their fulfillment of the Torah and its *mitzvot*, and this may cast the rest of the Jewish People in a negative light by comparison.

• *Yevamot 47b*

Naomi said to Ruth, "If you convert to Judaism, idolatry is forbidden to us!" Ruth answered "Your G-d is my G-d."

This is part of the test of sincerity that a prospective convert must pass in order to be accepted as a "*ger tzedek*" — a righteous convert — as taught in our *gemara*. The Maharsha asks why Naomi informed Ruth, as part of the test, that if she converts she would no longer be allowed to worship idols. Even as a non-Jewess idol worship was forbidden to Ruth!

The Maharsha answers that Naomi was actually telling Ruth that if she converts she must accept upon herself not to leave the Land of Israel, despite of the great temptation to leave for her former land of Moav due to her status there as the "daughter of kings". If she converts she must remain in the Land of Israel, since one who lives outside of the Land of Israel is considered "as without a G-d" (Ketuvot 110b). (In fact, Ruth would eventually become the "Mother of Royalty" for the Jewish People, with King David as her descendant.) Other commentaries teach that what was being emphasized is that while a non-Jew may receive benefit from an object that was worshipped, a Jew may not.

• *Yevamot 47b*

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sarah 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 Sarah, 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!

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

"MAMA RACHEL"

Two Yahrzeits were observed in Israel on the 11th day of Marcheshvan, November 4th this year. Traditional Jews flocked to the Bethlehem tomb of the Matriarch Rachel to pray there on the anniversary of her passing just as she entered Eretz Yisrael.

The secular media, however, focused on another Yahrzeit, the nineteenth anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin. There is an interesting historical anecdote linking these two. Back in 1995 two Knesset Members met with Rabin concerning



plans for turning over the Rachel Tomb area to the Palestinians. While Hanan Porat was stressing the security and nationalistic ramifications of such a move, Menachem Porush stood up, approached Rabin, embraced him and burst into tears, sobbing and shouting. "It is Mama Rachel, how can you give away her grave?"

Rabin was sufficiently moved to re-examine the issue and to decide to retain Israeli control over this sacred site. A few months later he was assassinated - on the eve of Rachel's passing.

Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

The Parsha begins with Sarah's death and Avraham's successful purchase of a burial plot for her. Abarbanel is puzzled by both the necessity of the Torah to go into a detailed description of the transaction as well as the unusual tact taken by Avraham to effect the purchase of the burial plot. Avraham knows prophetically that the Machpelah Cave was the burial place of Adam and Chava and that it would be so for himself as well as for Yitzchak, Yaakov and their wives. Avraham was certain that if Ephron, the owner of the field in which the cave was located, knew of its significance, he would never consider parting with such an important piece of property. As a result, Avraham devised a strategy that would insure his obtaining permanent ownership of the plot.

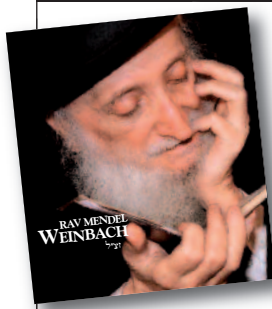
Instead of dealing with Ephron directly, he makes his wishes known to the Bnei Chet, the townspeople, and asks them to intercede on his behalf with Ephron. The townspeople had enormous respect for Avraham and Sarah and indicated that "You are a prince of G-d in our midst; in the choicest of our burial places bury your dead; none of us will withhold his burial place from you, from burying your dead." Avraham calculated that Ephron would not embarrass himself publicly by contradicting this sweeping promise. Additionally, when Avraham made his initial request from the Bnei Chet he did not mention that he intended to pay full price. He only mentioned this when he asked them to intercede for him to purchase Ephron's land: "Let him grant it to me for its full price, in your midst, as an estate for a burial place."

Ephron responds, within earshot of the Bnei Chet, that he had already decided to give Avraham both the cave and the surrounding field as a gift. Clearly not trusting Ephron, Avraham makes it clear that he never had any intention of accepting it as a gift but that he always had in mind to guarantee his possession not only by purchasing it but by giving the money to Ephron prior to the burial. Once Ephron sees that

Avraham intends to pay for it, instead of just naming the price — four hundred pure talents of silver — he curiously responds, "Land worth four hundred silver shekels; between me and you — what is it? Bury your dead." Again, Ephron is trying to give himself an opening to back out of the transaction. He wants Avraham to bury Sarah first, before receiving any payment. He can then maintain his possession after the burial is complete. Avraham sees through this ruse as well and insists that he will pay that price, (which may have been what Ephron himself had paid for it, or its actual market value, or it may have been a grossly inflated price since Ephron saw how anxious Avraham was to complete the transaction), *prior* to the burial. Also, in order that Ephron shouldn't delay further by counting and weighing the silver, Avraham handed it over to the city's merchants who could immediately make the proper evaluation. The Torah then makes it clear that he acquired both the cave and its adjacent fields and that the entire transaction was witnessed by the gathering of the Bnei Chet.

The final two verses of this section seem to be repetitious, but they allude to two important points. "And afterwards Avraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah...which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan...The field with its cave was confirmed as Avraham's as an estate for a burial site from the children of Chet." Firstly, the repetition of 'Hebron' and 'Canaan' tells us that this is the burial place of Adam and Chava in the holy land of Canaan. Secondly, besides taking possession through the transfer of money, Avraham also took possession through the concept of '*chazaka*' which is essentially creating a situation of 'facts on the ground' which is recognized by the entire population. By stating 'from the children of Chet' rather than 'from the children of Ephron', the Torah is emphasizing that the entire population recognized Avraham's solid and permanent claim to the burial site.

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Proceeds will be used for the Gemach Charity Fund established by Rav Weinbach, zt"l.

UNTIMELY DEATH

From: Jennifer

Dear Rabbi,
Someone I know recently died in a way that some described as "before her time". I'm puzzled by this. Since life and death are in G-d's hands, is there such a thing in Judaism as "dying before one's time"? If so, how can this be? What would happen to the soul of such a person?

Dear Jennifer,

I am sorry to hear of this tragedy, which I assume involved a young person in very unfortunate circumstances.

As difficult as it is to understand, Jewish sources and teachings do indicate that a person may die before their time.

The Talmud (Menachot 41a) discusses what would be the punishment for someone who, rather than proactively transgressing a prohibition, passively refrains from fulfilling a commandment. Since the person did not actually do a forbidden act, he should not be punished in physical terms. The Sages taught that although this is the case, during a time of Divine anger, such a person can nevertheless be ensnared, even though he's not otherwise "deserving" of such a punishment.

Similarly, the Talmud (Bava Kama 60a) states: "Rav Yosef taught, what is intended by the verse, 'and you shall not go out, any man from the entrance of his house until morning' (Ex. 12:22)? (Meaning, since the plague of the first-borns was directed against the Egyptians, why shouldn't the Jews be allowed to leave their homes?) This teaches that when the Angel of Death is given permission to destroy, it doesn't differentiate between righteous and wicked.

Here too, then, we see that innocent people who otherwise should not be ensnared by death may nevertheless die in a way that would be tantamount to "before their time".

Perhaps the most explicit teaching regarding untimely death is found in Tractate Chagiga 4b (paraphrased, and based on commentaries):

"Is there such a thing as one dying before his allotted time? Yes, as in the story of Rabbi Bibi bar Abaye who was once told by the Angel of Death that he sent his messenger to take Miriam 'the women's hairdresser' but he brought Miriam 'the children's

nurse instead'. The messenger asked, 'Shall I restore her to the living and bring the other Miriam instead?' The Angel of Death replied, 'Since you've already taken her, let her remain counted among the dead.'

Rabbi Bibi asked the Angel of Death, 'But how were you able to take her since her time had not arrived?' The Angel of Death answered that she was tending a stove and burned her foot, thus impairing her *mazal*. Rabbi Bibi questioned how she could be removed from her generation in which she was an integral part, and without which the generation could not be completed. The Angel answered that he doesn't remove such souls from the world at that time but rather shepherds them through the world bodiless until their generation is completed. Rabbi Bibi then challenged, 'But what do you do with the remaining years in which these souls were supposed to have lived in bodies?' The Angel of Death replied that these years are granted to certain young, humble and unassuming Torah scholars upon whom it was decreed to die, whose lives are thereby lengthened."

This teaching is fascinating for its implications regarding the reasons for premature death, the phenomenon of a person coming back to life, and the experience of bodiless souls roaming through the world. Although I won't be able to elaborate on these issues here, regarding your specific question about the spiritual destiny of such souls, the following insights of one of the commentators are particularly comforting.

Note that the deceased's unfulfilled years are not transferred to just any person, nor to any Torah scholar, but rather to particularly unpresumptuous Torah scholars. Why? The souls of the prematurely departed could rightly claim before G-d that they were prevented from fulfilling their spiritual potential. G-d, in His merciful compassion, therefore transfers their unrealized years to those who will use them well, ensuring benefit for the souls to whom these years really belong. Thus, only a truly refined and humble scholar, who will not begrudge sharing his merit with his soul-partner, is given these years.

So while the loss of people before their time is certainly tragic, at least we may be consoled to know that their untapped years are used to prolong the lives of others, specifically those of young, morally-refined Torah scholars whose merit accrued through these additional years is shared with and benefits the souls of their prematurely-departed spiritual partners.

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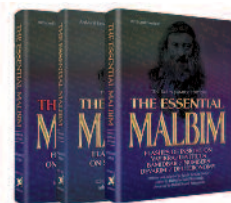
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THE SHEMONEH ESREI: THE SIXTH BLESSING - PART I

The blessing of forgiveness follows immediately after our request for repentance (*teshuvah*). This is because it is not at all appropriate to ask forgiveness for one's transgressions before first doing *teshuvah*. Would a spouse ask forgiveness without first saying "sorry" for his or her wrong doing?

However, once one expresses sincere regret over his transgressions, resolving not to repeat them, he can then ask G-d for forgiveness in the hope that he will be forgiven. For once one takes the initiative to repent, G-d will surely have mercy on him as scripture indicates, "Let the wicked one abandon his ways and the sinful man his thoughts, and return to G-d, and He will show him mercy" (Isaiah 55:7). From the verse we see the importance for one to change both his actions as well as his thoughts in order to truly be worthy of G-d's complete forgiveness.

"Forgive us our Father... Pardon us our King..."

Why does the blessing first mention G-d as our Father and then as our King?

Since a father has a natural love for his son he is therefore always ready to forgive him. So we mention G-d as our Father in order to recall the great love and mercy He has for us as His children. Thus, even if one has betrayed G-d in the

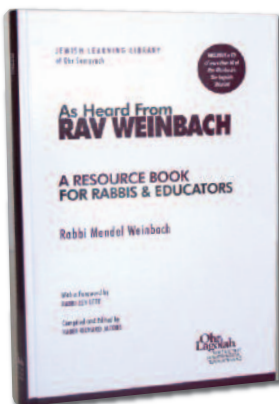
past, by turning to Him as a son he may merit G-d's forgiveness.

In contrast to this, when one betrays a king he faces the potential for severe punishment. This may be so even if his actions were done accidentally, for according to the strict letter of the law one can be punished for even an accidental crime.

We thus appeal to G-d as our Father in order to awaken His love and care for us. Once we have been accepted by G-d we can address him as our King, since there is no longer the fear of being rejected.

According to the above, we can gain a deeper appreciation of the prayer "Avinu Malkeinu" ("Our Father, Our King"), which is said during the High Holiday period. One of G-d's functions as King is to judge the world. This can be done through the attribute of strict judgment or through the attribute of mercy, as in the verse, "G-d (of Kindness), King, who sits on His throne of mercy, and deals with us kindly."

In order to arouse G-d's great love for us we refer to Him first as our loving Father; only afterwards do we address Him as our King. We are hoping that the result will be that He will continue to look upon us with love and mercy even in His function as King, thereby enabling us to gain a favorable judgment.



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Going Out On a Limb

Jeremy is from a little town in upstate New York. He spent a couple of years studying at Yeshiva in Israel before returning to his hometown. There aren't many Jews in his town, and he is the only one of them to have attended Yeshiva. As such, he is viewed by his local coreligionists as a "Rabbi" of sorts. Especially on Shabbat, when they aren't able to phone halachic authorities who live elsewhere, they tend to come to Jeremy and ask him what to do.

Mr. Soldat is a veteran of Afghanistan and Iraq, where he was severely wounded, and had to have his foot amputated. He has a state-of-the-art prosthetic foot, which, when he inserts the stump of his leg into it, enables him to walk around quite well. When his foot was amputated the doctors inserted small connectors into the stump of his leg, which enable the prosthetic foot to be attached. One Shabbat Mr. Soldat makes his way to shul and Jeremy notices the prosthetic leg. He casts his mind back to his Yeshiva days and remembers a *mishna* in Tractate Shabbat (66a):

A man who is lacking a foot may go out (on Shabbat) with his "wooden foot" according to Rabbi Meir; but Rabbi Yossi forbids it.

In the times of the Mishna it was common for people crippled in this way to carve a piece of wood into the shape of a foot, so as to hide their disability. This *mishna* is talking about a place where there is no *eruv*, which would allow someone to carry from a private domain to public domain on Shabbat (and vice versa). Anything which is considered a garment and is being worn is of course fine. Rashi, our essential commentary on the Gemara, explains that the disagreement between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yossi seems to be that Rabbi Meir regards this prosthetic wooden "foot" as close enough to a shoe to be considered a shoe, whereas Rabbi Yossi is of the opinion that it is not considered a shoe, perhaps because shoes are not generally wooden — clogs were not known in those times! The halacha (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 201:15) follows the opinion of Rabbi Yossi, and the wooden foot may not be "worn" to go outside on Shabbat. It seems then, thinks Jeremy to himself, that this law would apply to the Mr. Soldat's prosthetic leg and that the poor man will be confined to his quarters over Shabbat until such time as the town council can be convinced to allow an *eruv* to be built, which is not likely to be anytime this century.

But, as with everything in Judaism, it's not quite that simple!

Rabbeinu Tam, whose mother was Rashi's daughter, disagreed with his grandfather's understanding of the dispute between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yossi. Remember Rashi thought that they argued over whether the wooden foot

could be considered a shoe. Being as the halacha follows Rabbi Yossi, the conclusion would be that it is not a shoe and therefore forbidden. But Rabbeinu Tam (Tosafot *ibid.*) says the point of disagreement cannot be the shoe-status of the wooden foot because elsewhere in the Gemara (Yoma 78b), it is apparent that Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yossi agree that this wooden "foot" may not be worn on Yom Kippur, as it is considered a (comfortable) shoe! He therefore explains that both Rabbis agree that it is considered a shoe, and according to Torah law it may be worn outside on Shabbat. Rabbi Yossi, however, is of the opinion that the Sages enacted a rabbinical prohibition because they were concerned that the wooden foot, being only loosely attached, might become detached and a person might then pick it up while outside and carry it four cubits, which would definitely be forbidden.

According to this explanation of Rabbeinu Tam, Rabbi Yossi's rationale for forbidding wearing the rudimentary, wooden prosthetic "foot" outside is as a safeguard, lest someone be tempted to pick it up and carry it should it become disconnected. But, as Rabbi Moshe Isserles writes in his addenda to the Code of Jewish Law (201:15)

...it is permissible to wear a wooden shoe into which the foot is inserted and one need not be concerned that it may fall off.

The same logic may surely be extended to Mr. Soldat's top-of-the-line modern prosthetic foot, which is firmly fastened to his leg. Since there is no reason to be concerned that it will come off, there is no need to forbid wearing it. Jeremy may tell Mr. Soldat that he is free to walk around on Shabbat to his heart's content.

It takes much more knowledge for someone who is trying to be religious to say that something is *allowed* than to say that it is *forbidden*. There is sometimes an attitude of "Well, I might as well not do that in case it's forbidden". To allow something requires education. Whereas a person's intentions in disallowing something may be laudable, it is preferable to learn enough to be able to decide accurately whether something is actually allowed. The answer is often surprising, and those things which may seem at first glance to be forbidden may actually be perfectly fine (and vice versa!) Therefore, we should be wary of jumping to conclusions on the basis on limited information. Thank G-d we have been born into a world where there are so many opportunities to become more educated. Thousands upon thousands of books about Judaism have been written, in Hebrew, English and many other languages, and many talks and lectures are available in various formats with easy access no matter where in the world we may find ourselves. We Jews have always been obsessed with education, and it's never been more accessible than it is today!