

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES**  
*The Portion of*  
**Chayei Sarah**

November 1, 2007

*Dedicated by Bat-Sheva and Albert Waitman  
and the entire Waitman Family*

In loving memory of his mother  
**Chaya Bas Yaakov Yehudah a'h**  
Ida Waitman a'h  
(20 Cheshvan)

May her neshama have an aliyah.

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkafa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute  
New York  
November 1, 2007

B"H

# Chayei Sarah

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*  
Dean

## 1. The Value of One's Years

The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, "G'd knows the days of those who are perfect. Their portion shall be forever." Just as these individuals are perfect/whole so too shall their days be complete. This is referring to Sarah, whose days were complete. As it states, **'...the years of Sarah's life.'** What is her portion? It is the accomplishments of her lifetime." G'd gives complete days to those individuals who are complete. Every moment of life that G'd bestows upon an individual is to be used for a specific objective. One who is righteous, a tzaddik, devotes every moment of his life to fulfill his intended objective, which is to fulfill the Will of G'd. Thus, G'd bestows upon the tzaddik a full life. In contrast, one who invests his life in pursuing his own interests, not as G'd would have wanted it to be, will not achieve perfection. Therefore, G'd may shorten his days, since he is not utilizing his time as it was intended to be used. Sarah, our Matriarch was perfect/whole. She had fully invested her life in fulfilling the Will of G'd. Thus, she was given all the days that were intended to be hers and her accomplishments were her portion.

The Midrash states, "Rebbe Akiva was lecturing before the community and he noticed that some of them were nodding off to sleep. He wanted to arouse their attention. He asked, 'Why did Esther, (the wife of the Persian Emperor), merit to rule over 127 nations? Because let the granddaughter of Sarah, our Matriarch who lived 127 years, rule over 127 countries.'" The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that there were three kings who had ruled over the world supreme. Achashveirosh, the Persian Emperor, was one of those who ruled the entire world that was comprised of 127 countries. Esther, a descendant of Sarah, merited to be in a position to the wife of the one who ruled over 127 countries. What relevance does the fact that Sarah lived 127 years have to Esther ruling over 127 countries?

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra states, "The progeny of Esav can only fall in the hands of the progeny of Rachel." This refers to Yosef and his children (Ephraim and Menasha) as well as Binyamin. The Gemara explains that the Jewish people never engaged in a battle with Amalek (descendent of Esav) and were victorious, unless the progeny of Rachel were involved. Why is the mere presence of the progeny of Rachel sufficient to subdue and defeat the progeny of Esav?

The Torah addresses the exceptional beauty of Rachel, our Matriarch. What is the value to focus upon her beauty? Although Rachel is considered to be one of the most beautiful women who ever lived, as it is stated in the Gemara in Tractate Megillah, she had consecrated her totality to the service of G'd. Every aspect of her being only had value to her in the context spirituality. She took the physical and subordinated it to the spiritual. She did not allow her physicality and beauty to dictate whatsoever. She had totally dominated the physical.

In contrast, Esav personified physicality at the most exaggerated level. The Torah refers to him as, **"the man of the field."** The Torah tells us that Esav, the physical being, could never be sated in the physical realm. He was the consummate hedonist who was consumed by the material. To Esav, the physical was an end unto itself. Because Rachel had succeeded to subordinate and dominate the physical, she and her progeny were therefore able to subordinate and defeat the descendants of Esav, who epitomize the physical.

Identically, Sarah lived a perfect life as one who was fully invested and dedicated to her spirituality. She consecrated the physical in order to actualize her spiritual potential. Sarah had invested her entire life for the sake of G'd. Initially, the Torah identifies Sarah as Sarai, without the letter "hey" in her name. As Sarai, she had only dominated her proximity. However, after G'd added the letter "hey" to her name, making her Sarah, she ruled over all existence because she had dominated over the physical.

The name “Sarah” means “she rules over all.” Therefore, Rebbe Akiva traced Esther’s merit to rule over the world in its entirety to her antecedent, Sarah, our Matriarch.

## 2. The Potency of the Shofar

The most difficult of the ten tests that were presented to Avraham by G’d was the Akeidah (the binding of Yitzchak). He was told by G’d to take his beloved son Yitzchak and bring him up as a “burnt offering.” Although G’d had previously promised Avraham that Yitzchak would be the future Patriarch, he did not question G’d’s command. He submitted to G’d’s Will without hesitation because his sole objective in life was only to do the Will of G’d. When G’d saw that Avraham was willing to slaughter his son he was told to withdraw his hand and not bring any degree of harm upon Yitzchak. A ram appeared to be used in the place of Yitzchak as sacrifice. As it states, “**...Behold, a ram! – afterwards caught in the thicket by its horns.**” It is because of Avraham’s unparalleled spiritual achievement at the Akeidah that the Jewish people are able to withstand the intense level of prosecution by satan that is in effect on Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment. The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that when the ram’s horn (shoar) is sounded, satan is silenced. The merit of the Akeidah dispels every level of prosecution that is brought against the Jewish people until the end of time.

The Torah juxtaposes the passing of Sarah our Matriarch to the Akeidah. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Sarah passed away as a direct result of the Akeidah. The Midrash states, “When Avraham was returning from Mount Moriah in peace, having accomplished his test, satan was enraged that he was unsuccessful in his attempt to interfere with and undermine the sacrifice (ram) that was brought at the time of the Akeidah. Satan decided to retaliate against Avraham by informing Sarah, ‘Are you aware of what has happened? Avraham has taken your son Yitzchak and slaughtered him on the altar and sacrificed him as a burnt offering.’ Sarah began crying and wailing. She cried three cries which correspond to the three uninterrupted sounds of the shofar (*tekia*). She then wailed three times, which correspond to the other soundings of the shofar (*teruah* and *shevarim*). Then Sarah passed away.” It is interesting to note that the Gemara in Rosh Hashanah states that the interim sounds that must be blown from the shofar must resemble the sounds of one whimpering or sobbing. This interim sound is preceded by an uninterrupted blast and followed by one (*tekia*). What did satan attempt to accomplish by causing the demise of Sarah our Matriarch?

Rambam writes in The Laws of Repentance that if one lives as a devoutly righteous (tzaddik) person all of his life and regrets before his passing all the good deeds that he had accomplished, they are not mentioned as part of his record when presented the Heavenly Court. Although that individual was fully invested to bring glory to G’d throughout his lifetime, if he were to regret his good deeds it would be considered as if they were never done.

Satan had failed in his desperate attempt to prevent Avraham from succeeding regarding the test of the Akeidah. The result of that test will silence satan’s prosecution against the Jewish people until the end of time. Therefore it was an imperative for satan to negate Avraham’s accomplishment at the Akeidah at all costs.

Satan believed that there was a possibility that he could still succeed in undermining Avraham’s achievement. He had calculated that if Avraham would realize that Sarah’s passing was only due to what had transpired at the Akeidah, he would regret that he had taken Yitzchak to be brought as an offering. If Avraham would have reacted in this manner the awesome and eternal value of the Akeidah would have been nullified. In fact Avraham did not react.

The Midrash explains that Sarah cried and wailed and then passed away. What is the correlation between her crying and whimpering to the sound that is emitted from the shofar. When Sarah sobbed and wailed after hearing what Satan had told her, she did not cry because she was a mother who had lost her beloved son that was born to her in her old age. Rather, her expression of pain was for the loss of her son who was meant to be the future Patriarch of the Jewish people. She had understood that that if there would not be a Yitzchak, there would not be a Jewish people to glorify G’d’s Name – to bring all existence to its level of perfection that was initially intended by G’d.

The Torah tells us that when Sarah had noticed certain inappropriate behavior of Ishmael, the son of her maidservant, she had said to her husband Avraham that he must be driven together with his mother from their home. Sarah, our Matriarch, understood that the slightest negative influence would jeopardize Yitzchak developing into the future Patriarch of the Jewish people. If he would not reach his potential, the future status of the Jewish people would be compromised. Thus this would cause an eternal loss to all existence.

The shofar is the mechanism through which the prosecution of satan is silenced on Rosh Hashanah. Its value is two-fold. Firstly, it symbolizes Avraham's submission and self-negation to G'd. In addition, its sound represents Sarah's pain because she had believed that the future of G'd's Glory would not come into existence. It is the dual representation that silences satan and evokes G'd's Attribute of Mercy. As it states in the Midrash, "When G'd hears the sound of the shofar, He descends the Thrown of Judgment and ascends the Thrown of Mercy."

### 3. Ego, the Impediment to Clarity

The Torah tells us that after Sarah, our Matriarch passed away, Avraham sought to purchase a burial place for her. His was interested in purchasing the Cave of Machpelah as her burial location. This cave was owned by Ephron. Avraham had asked the children of Cheis to assist him in convincing Ephron to sell him the Cave of Machpelah. As it states, **"He spoke to them saying, 'If it is truly your will to bury my dead from before me...intercede with Ephron, son of Zohar. Let him grant me the Cave of Machpelah.'"** After the children of Cheis agreed to present his request to Ephron, the Torah states, **"Avraham bowed before the members of the council (am haaretz)..."** The Midrash states, "It is from the bowing of Avraham, our Patriarch that we learn that one must give thanks for good tidings."

The Midrash is telling us that one must give thanks to G'd for good tidings. When Avraham bowed, he prostrated himself on the ground. This was a demonstration of his giving thanks to G'd and not to the members of the community. Why is it necessary to learn from Avraham's behavior that one must give thanks for good tidings? Is it not obvious that one needs to acknowledge the good and be thankful to G'd, who provides everything?

The Torah tells us that after Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, succeeded in his objective of securing the proper wife (Rivka) for Yitzchak, the Torah states, **"So the man, (Eliezer) bowed low and prostrated himself to Hashem. He said, 'Blessed is Hashem G'd of my master Avraham, Who has not withheld His kindness and truth from my master...'"** Rashi cites Chazal, who explain that we learn from Eliezer's behavior that one must give thanks when receiving good tidings. Once again Chazal extrapolate from Eliezer's expression of thanks, something that is obvious. It seems evident that when one is a beneficiary of anything that is good he should express his gratitude to G'd. What novel concept is the Torah

revealing to us through the behavior of Avraham and Eliezer?

The Torah states that when one brings the newly ripened fruits (*bikurim*) to the Temple mount one must make a declaration of appreciation, as described in the Torah. After the declaration is made, the individual prostrates himself before G'd. The Torah then states, **"You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem, your G'd, has given you and your household..."** The Torah is telling us that the joy and recognition of all the good that G'd had bestowed on the individual is only realized after the individual prostrates himself before G'd.

Prostration is an act of total negation of oneself. By pressing one's body against the ground he is in essence making a statement that he is no different then the dust on the ground. The posture of prostration is one that signifies and expresses humility. The only way one is able to achieve the necessary clarity to be able to recognize the good of which he is the recipient, it is to negate one's ego. If one has a sense of his own worthiness, he will not fully attribute his good fortune to G'd, but rather, he will believe that it was through his own initiative and ability that he succeeded.

Disappointment is a result of unmet expectations. If one believes that he is deserving of something based on his own sense of self, he will be disappointed when things do not evolve as he expected. This classification of person will focus on what he does not have, rather than being thankful to G'd for what he does have. This is the reason the Torah only states, **"You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem, your G'd, has given you..."** after the individual had already prostrated himself in the Sanctuary. It is only after one has negated himself and does not have that sense of worthiness, could he fully appreciate G'd's blessing.

Although Avraham understood that he was a world-renowned figure that was acclaimed to be the "father of all nations" and was esteemed by all humanity' nevertheless, when he received the good tidings that the members of the community would assist him to achieve his goal, he prostrated himself as an act of total negation before G'd. He understood that without this level of negation one can have a sense that his success is slightly attributed to his own renown. Therefore he immediately prostrated himself to fully internalize the reality of G'd's beneficence.

Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, the administrator of all of his master's affairs, was a person who was fully

accomplished in the physical and spiritual realms. Chazal tell us that his radiance was a semblance to that of his master. When he succeeded in his mission of securing Rivka to be the wife for Yitzchak, he did not attribute this to his own ability or dimension of person. Rather, he understood that it was only G'd who allowed him to succeed. Eliezer demonstrated his gratitude by negating himself, through prostration. It is only when one humbles himself can one have the clarity that is necessary to recognize the truth.

It is not that we need the Torah to teach us the lesson that one must be thankful for good tidings, but rather, we need to learn from Avraham and Eliezer that one must negate himself in order to truly feel appreciative of G'd's blessing.

#### 4. The Fortitude of Avraham, our Patriarch

The Torah tells us that when Avraham returned from the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak) to find that his beloved wife Sarah had passed away, it states, "**Avraham had come...**" The Midrash asks, "From where did he come? Reb Levy says, 'He had come from burying his father Terach to find that Sarah had passed away.' Reb Yose replied, 'Was it not so that the burial of Terach had preceded the passing of Sarah by two years? It must be that Avraham was coming from Mount Moriah to find that Sarah had passed away....'" If in fact the juxtaposition between Avraham's coming to eulogize his wife is to teach us that the cause of her passing was the Akeidah (the binding of Yitzchak), then a valuable lesson can be learned. However, if the Torah is revealing that Avraham had come from the burial of his father Terach, what is there to be learned from that? It is evident that had it not been for the time discrepancy between the death of Terach and the passing of Sarah, the interpretation that Avraham had come from his father's burial would have been cogent and had value.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos, Ethics of our Fathers, states that G'd presented Avraham with ten tests. According to every opinion, returning from the Akeidah to find that his wife Sarah had passed away because of what had transpired was not considered to be a test. He did not react with remorse due to the unfortunate passing of his wife, despite that it had occurred as a result of the Akeidah. One would think that being confronted with such a painful and tragic moment (and not reacting), would have been considered a test for Avraham, our Patriarch. However, it was not. Evidently, as painful as it was, the

passing of his wife was a challenge that was not comparable to any of the other tests.

It is interesting to note that the Midrash does not say that Avraham had come from "the Akeidah" rather it states, "he came from Mount Moriah." Why does the Midrash choose to identify the location of the Akeidah rather than the event itself? Chazal tell us that one of the appellations for the Temple was "Mount Moriah" because it is from that location that the halachic rulings emanated for the Jewish people. This is referring to the location that the Sanhedrin (High Court of Israel) convened – the chamber of cut stone (*lishkas hagazis*). The Sanhedrin, which was responsible for adjudicating and elucidating all laws that pertained to the Jewish people convened on the Temple mount – Mount Moriah. It is in this location that the judges of the Sanhedrin merited a special clarity from G'd to be able to adjudicate all matters that were presented before them. The reason the Sanhedrin was able to draw upon this Divine Assistance was because it was there, that Avraham succeeded in the test of the Akeidah. It was a result of Avraham's awesome spiritual accomplishment that took place there.

The Midrash chooses to the reference of "Mount Moriah" rather than the Akeidah to emphasize the point that Avraham was returning from something that brought about eternal value. Although the passing of Sarah was tragic, being confronted with this information, was not a test for Avraham. Because of the eternal value of what had transpired on Mount Moriah, the Jewish people will be endowed with a clarity of mind and relationship with G'd forever. Therefore regardless of the tragic consequence of the Akeidah, Avraham could not feel anger.

According to the interpretation of Reb Levy, that Avraham had come from the burial of Terach, what in fact are we to learn from this information? What relevance does it have to the passing of Sarah, our Matriarch. The Torah tells us that Avraham had left Choron after his father Terach had passed away. Chazal tell us that although in fact Terach did not pass away until many years later, nevertheless, the Torah states that he had died. What is its value? Chazal explain that it was important to state that Terach had died because if Avraham, his son had left Choron during his lifetime it would have been perceived as something disrespectful. How could a son abandon his father in his old age?

Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that when Avraham had left his father's household to go to Canaan, he assumed another dimension of spirituality. He began to establish the foundation of the Jewish people. Every

initiative that he would take from that time onward would affect the future of the Jewish people. Because of his dimension of being, he in essence, no longer had any relevance to his father Terach, who was evil. His only connection to Terach was that he was his biological father. In the realm of spirituality, there was no connection. Thus, although Terach was alive, it was as if he had passed away. Chazal tell us that Terach was so evil that Avraham's descending from him was the equivalent of extracting light from darkness, which seems to be an impossibility.

The lesson to be learned from Avraham coming from the burying of his father to find that Sarah had passed away, is to give us an understanding why he was not discouraged when he had found out that his wife was suddenly taken from him. Avraham, understanding from where and from what he descended, to come upon truth was the ultimate accomplishment. Regardless of what he was confronted with, he was not to be deterred. He understood that whatever G'd presented him was only another setting for him to advance his spirituality. He understood that G'd's judgment is perfect and without inequity. Therefore, Avraham internalized his tragedy to be the equivalent of as "One must Bless G'd for the good, identically as one must bless G'd for the bad."

Very often there are painful moments in life that could undermine one's relationship with G'd. However, because of one's education and previous experiences, one is not weakened or challenged by those painful moments.

### 5. G'd's Response to the Angels, Regarding the Creation of Man *(from Veyeira)*

The Midrash states, "When G'd was about to create the world, the angels in heaven said to Him, 'What is this man (*ma enosh*) that he is not even worth mentioning? What is the worth of man that You are acknowledging?' G'd replied to them, 'You refer to man as 'enosh' and say, that he is not even worth mentioning, because you foresee the generation of Enosh who were idolaters. However, I will show you the glory of Avraham who is worth mentioning.' As it states, '**G'd remembered Avraham....**' (regarding saving Lot before the destruction of Sodom). G'd said to the angels, 'You say that man is not worth acknowledging. It states in the verse, 'G'd remembered Sarah...' (regarding the conception of Yitzchak) You will see that this woman (who was previously barren) will give birth to a son and the father will take that son to be slaughtered before Me. You will see that the son will also be willing to be slaughtered to

bring Glory to My Name. This you will see is the man who is worth acknowledging."

The angels, based on their understanding of man's potential for failure, posed a question to G'd saying, "What is this being (*ma enosh*) that is not even worth mentioning?" G'd replied that it is the glory of Avraham that is worth mentioning and he is a man worth acknowledging because he brought glory to His Name. Why did G'd only mention Avraham? Why did he not reply to the angels that Noah was a man worth mentioning? As the Torah states, "**Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations...**" It was in his merit that the world was able to continue after the Great Flood.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states, "The devoutly righteous (*tzaddikim*) are greater than the ministering angels." How is this to be understood? An angel has an understanding of G'd and a dimension of spirituality that surpasses any mortal. Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl in his work *Nefesh HaChaim*, explains that the Gemara is not referring to the *tzaddik's* capacity to understand holiness/spirituality, but rather it is referring to his innate spiritual value that is determined by his positive choices. The Gemara in Tractate Nidah tells us that before the conception of a child an angel brings the droplet of semen before G'd. G'd pronounces upon it its destiny—poor or rich, strong or weak, wise or foolish. However, G'd does not pronounce upon it – righteous or evil. The Gemara states, "From here we see that everything is predestined by heaven, except one's fear of heaven." One's choice to become a *tzaddik* or evil is determined by one's own initiative. Therefore he has greater value than the angel, whose dimension of spirituality is based upon the purpose for which it was created.

The Torah states regarding Noah, "**...Noach walked with G'd...**" Rashi cites Chazal who tell us that the verse is indicating that Noah was assisted by G'd. Had he not had Divine Assistance, Noah would have succumbed to the negative influences of his generation. Avraham, on the other hand, did not have Divine Assistance. He had the inner strength and conviction to reject the pagan beliefs of his time and come upon G'd. From the beginning of creation until Avraham, there was no one who had independently succeeded as Avraham had. Adam, who had almost absolute clarity regarding G'd's existence was the handwork of G'd Himself. Avraham, through his own initiative, advanced himself spiritually. Chazal tell us that Avraham was the equivalent of extracting "light from darkness." Avraham, the person who had devoted his life to espousing monotheism and

truth was born from Terach, a pagan, who was the equivalent of darkness. Therefore when the angels posed their question to G'd, "What is this man (*ma enosh*) that is not even worth mentioning?" G'd responded to them that it was the glory of Avraham that is worth mentioning because he was the one to come upon G'd and advance himself spiritually through his own initiative.

When the angels asked, "What is the worth of man that You are acknowledging?" G'd told them that He would bring about a miracle that Sarah would give birth at the age of 90 years old to Yitzchak. This was the first time in the history of existence that such a miracle took place. (In the era after the Great Flood, a woman of Sarah's age was beyond child bearing). G'd brought about this miracle because it would lead to a chain of events that would fulfill the purpose of existence. Avraham was willing to slaughter his beloved son Yitzchak, (who was destined to be the Patriarch) for the Glory of G'd. Yitzchak, the one who was being slaughtered was willing to give his life for G'd's Glory. The miracle that brought about the birth of Yitzchak was no less necessary in its objective than the creation of all existence. Just as G'd had created the world specifically for His Glory (as the verse states, 'for My Glory I created it...') so too was allowing Sarah to conceive at the age of 89.

### **YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE**

#### **Monday Through Friday**

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Chulin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

#### **Special Weekday Classes**

##### **Monday**

11:30 – 12:30pm **Talmud: Megilah**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

##### **Tuesday**

12:10 - 1:10pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**  
Location: Yad Avraham

##### **Wednesday**

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Megilah**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

1:00—2:00 pm **Daas Tevunos**

Location: Yad Avraham

##### **Thursday**

10:30 –11:30am **Duties of the Heart**

Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Megilah** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL)