

***Yad Avraham Institute***  
**Weekly Torah Commentaries Series**  
*The Portion of*  
***Chayei Sarah***

November 20, 2008

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

<b><i>Inside This Week's Edition</i></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b><i>1. The Value of One's Years</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>
<b><i>2. The Potency of the Shofar</i></b>	<b><i>3</i></b>
<b><i>3. Ego, the Impediment to Clarity</i></b>	<b><i>4</i></b>
<b><i>4. Yitzchak, the all encompassing Patriarch</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>
<b><i>5. The Profound Impact of Circumcision Upon the Jew</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>

**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, Hashkofa, 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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**New York**  
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**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 (shofar) 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 succeeded in 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 before 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. This would result in 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. Its 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 Throne of Judgment and ascends the Throne 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.

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. *Yitzchak, the all encompassing Patriarch*

The Torah states, **"Now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything (ba'kol)."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that **"ba'kol"** alludes to Yitzchak. **"The numerical value of 'ba'kol'- everything' is equivalent to 'ben (son)', which is fifty two."** After Yitzchak was born, Avraham had everything.

The Torah tells us that the only species that qualify as an offering are the ox (shor), sheep (kesev), and goat (eiz). It is through the sacrifices of these species that the Mercy of G'd is evoked. Chazal explain that the ox was chosen to be one of the species qualified to be an offering in the merit of Avraham, our Patriarch. As the verse states, **"Avraham ran to the cattle..."** Thus, Avraham is associated with the ox. The sheep (kesev) was chosen to be an offering in the merit of Yitzchak. Just as Avraham was about to slaughter Yitzchak, an angel had told him not to harm Yitzchak. At that moment, Avraham had seen a ram caught in the thicket. As the verse states, **"And Avraham looked up and saw- behold a ram – after it had been caught in the thicket..."** Avraham thus sacrificed the ram in the place of his son Yitzchak in order to consummate the act of the Akeidah. Why do Chazal associate the sheep with Yitzchak? One would think that since the Akeidah was the most difficult test that was presented to Avraham and he was the one to slaughter the ram, the species of the sheep should also be attributed to his merit and not to Yitzchak. Why then do Chazal tell us that it is in the merit of Yitzchak that the sheep qualifies to be a sacrifice?

It is understood that the Akeidah was a test that was presented to Avraham. However, the unique spiritual value of the Akeidah is not only derived from Avraham's selfless desire to follow the dictate of G'd but rather it is based on the special dimension of Yitzchak. He was meant to be the Patriarch of the Jewish people who encompassed everything. As the Torah refers to him as **"everything."** The Akeidah will impact upon the spirituality of the Jewish people until the end of time because of the special spiritual dimension of Yitzchak. He had chosen to live his life in a manner that elevated him to be worthy of becoming a Patriarch. The ram was

slaughtered in his stead. Thus, the ram assumed a special value because Yitzchak was special. Therefore, the sheep qualifies to be a sacrifice in the merit of Yitzchak.

Once Avraham had Yitzchak, he truly had everything because it would be through him that the spiritual future of the Jewish people would be guaranteed. Through the Akeidah, Yitzchak was also elevated. It became evident to Avraham that the world would center around the descendants of his beloved son, who he had taken to the Akeidah.

The Midrash continues, **"Now that Avraham had a son, he needed to find him the proper wife."** When Eliezer was charged with the responsibility of locating the appropriate wife for Yitzchak, he had difficulty understanding why his own daughter, who was devoutly righteous, was not suitable for the future Patriarch. In order for Avraham to ensure that Eliezer would not deviate from his instruction he bound him by an oath saying, **"Place now your hand under my thigh. And I will have you swear by Hashem, G'd of heaven and G'd of earth, that you not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites."**

Eliezer was the administrator of all of Avraham's assets and household. Chazal tell us that Avraham had taught Eliezer all the Torah that he had learned. He was at such an advanced spiritual level that he radiated with a similar holiness as that of his master and mentor. He had proven his worthiness many times. Despite all of this, Avraham would not consider Eliezer's daughter as an appropriate wife because he understood that someone who was as special as Yitzchak, needed to have a Matriarch that was equally special. If Avraham did not fully appreciate the unique dimension of his son, he may not have been as careful in selecting an appropriate wife for him.

The Torah tells us that Noach cursed Canaan, the son of Cham, who was the forbearer of the Canaanites. Eliezer was a Canaanite. Thus, Eliezer and his family possessed cursed genes. Avraham said to Eliezer, **"You come from a cursed stock and I, a descendant of Shem (the most special son of Noach who had received his blessing) come from a blessed stock. Something that is cursed cannot cleave to something that is blessed."** Therefore, Eliezer's daughter, as devout as she was, did not qualify to be the future Matriarch.

Selecting the proper wife for Yitzchak was essential for the future of the Jewish people. Yitzchak's wife would be the future Matriarch who would mother

third and most special Patriarch, Yaakov who was the father of the Jewish people. There could not be even the slightest trace of impurity within her spiritual make up. Therefore, Avraham appreciating the spiritual dimension of Yitzchak and what was at stake bound Eliezer to an oath to find the appropriate wife.

## 5. *The Profound Impact of Circumcision Upon the Jew* (From Vayeira)

The Midrash states, “The mitzvah of circumcision is so important that it supersedes the Shabbos. Circumcision is so great because it is through it that the child enters to be counted among the generations (of Jews). As it states in Psalms, ‘About the seed of those who have served Him it will be told of the Lord to the generations.’” Eitz Yosef, a commentator on the Midrash explains the verse to mean, “The one who has been circumcised will be counted among the generations.”

The Midrash continues, “Reb Yitzchak says, ‘We find that King David refers to circumcision as ‘service’ (avodah). We also find that sacrifices are also referred to as ‘avodah.’ Just as the service of the sacrifices is based on the (sprinkling of) blood [as the Gemara in Tractate Zevachim states, ‘there is no atonement only through (the sprinkling of) the blood], so too is the service of circumcision based on the blood. Why is the blood of circumcision equated to the blood of sacrifices? It is because when the child is circumcised the droplet of blood is beloved to G’d as the blood from the sacrifice is beloved to Him. This is the reason the Divine Presence (Shechina) appeared to Avraham only after he had been circumcised. As the verse states (in the Portion of Shemini), **‘And a bull and a ram for a peace-offering to slaughter before Hashem...for today Hashem appears to you.’**” Thus, the droplet of blood associated with circumcision with the blood of sacrifices. Both are beloved by G’d and cause the Divine Presence to come upon the individual.

The Torah tells us that G’d gave the Jewish people the mitzvah of circumcision and the mitzvah of the Pascal offering as a prerequisite for their redemption. As it is stated in Yechezkel, “And you are naked and devoid (of mitzvos).” Since the Jewish people were spiritually detached in Egypt, they needed to express their spirituality through an action/mitzvah to make them worthy of redemption. G’d presented them with the mitzvos of circumcision and the Pascal lamb. As the Prophet Yechezkel concludes, “I saw you wallowing in your bloods. Through your blood, you shall live. Through your

blood you shall live.” The Gemara explains that the repetition of the term “blood” is referring to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal lamb. It is understood that the term “blood” alludes to sacrifices because it is only through the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice is one atoned. However, why is “blood” equated with circumcision? It cannot be because when one performs the circumcision a wound is created.

It is evident from the verse from Yechezkel that the letting of blood during circumcision is an essential component of the mitzvah. When G’d saw the blood of the circumcision which is more than a mere consequence of the procedure He said, “Through the blood you will live.” This refers to the mitzvah of circumcision performed in its most complete form. This can be appreciated with the verse in Psalms that states that circumcision is classified as “service”, similar to a sacrifice. When G’d sees the blood of the circumcision, it is the equivalent of the blood of the sacrifice being sprinkled on the altar. When the Jewish people circumcised themselves in Egypt, they merited life because the Divine Presence had come upon them as we find regarding Avraham, our Patriarch after his circumcision.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that a woman had brought her son, who was jaundice, to one of the Tanaim (great rabbis) to be evaluated as to when he would be able to be circumcised. The Gemara states, “He said, ‘I did not see in him the blood of circumcision. I thus told his mother to wait until the blood would be fully absorbed in his body.’” Rashi in his commentary explains, “If the blood is not fully absorbed in the body, there are two issues. Firstly, if the child is circumcised he will not bleed. And there is a mitzvah that a droplet of blood must come forth through circumcision. As it is written in Zacharia, ‘Also in the blood of My covenant...’ The second issue is if the blood of the child has not been fully absorbed into his body, then his life will be put in danger if he is to be circumcised.”

The Gemara in Tractate Menachos tells us that King David was in the bathhouse and he became distraught. He had realized that in the bathhouse he was devoid of all mitzvos and thus detached from G’d. (Because one is not permitted to mediate in Torah in an unclean location). However, when he gazed down upon his circumcision he became elated. He said, “I rejoice over Your words as one who has found great spoils...” Why was King David elated from the sight of his circumcision? The mitzvah had been performed long ago. What relevance did his circumcision have to his present predicament, where he felt detached from G’d?

Chazal tell us that circumcision is the prerequisite for the Divine Presence to come upon the Jewish people as It had come upon Avraham after he had been circumcised. Only one in a circumcised state has relevance to the Divine Presence. When King David saw that he was in a circumcised state, he rejoiced because although he was devoid of mitzvah performance at that moment, he was nevertheless attached to the Divine Presence.

With the understanding of the profound impact that circumcision brings upon the child, that through it he merits a relationship with the Divine Presence, we are able to understand the second blessing of the “Birchas HaMazon” Grace after meals. It is stated in the blessing, “...and the covenant that You have sealed in our flesh; for the Torah which You taught us...” What is the connection between the covenant engraved in our flesh and the Jew’s capacity to study Torah? Just as at Sinai, the Jew only had relevance to the Torah when the Divine Presence came upon them, so too does every Jew merit his potential in Torah when the Divine Presence has relevance to his existence. This occurs only if one is circumcised. However, in order to merit the ultimate elucidation, we must merit the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, when the Divine Presence will dwell again on the most intense level amongst the Jewish people. This is the prayer with which we conclude the Amidah, “It should be the Will of G’d that the Temple should be built speedily, and we should merit our portion in His Torah.”

#### **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—Tractate 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**

11:00 –12:00pm **Duties of The Heart**  
 Location: Yad Avraham  
 12:30 – 1:30 pm **Talmud: Megilah** Sunrise Capital 641  
 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL)