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# A MANIFESTATION of True Greatness

## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Chayei Sara

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

**Hagar's Return to Avraham**

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**Sarah Understood Every Detail of Her Life for the Best**

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**The Value of Sarah's Life**

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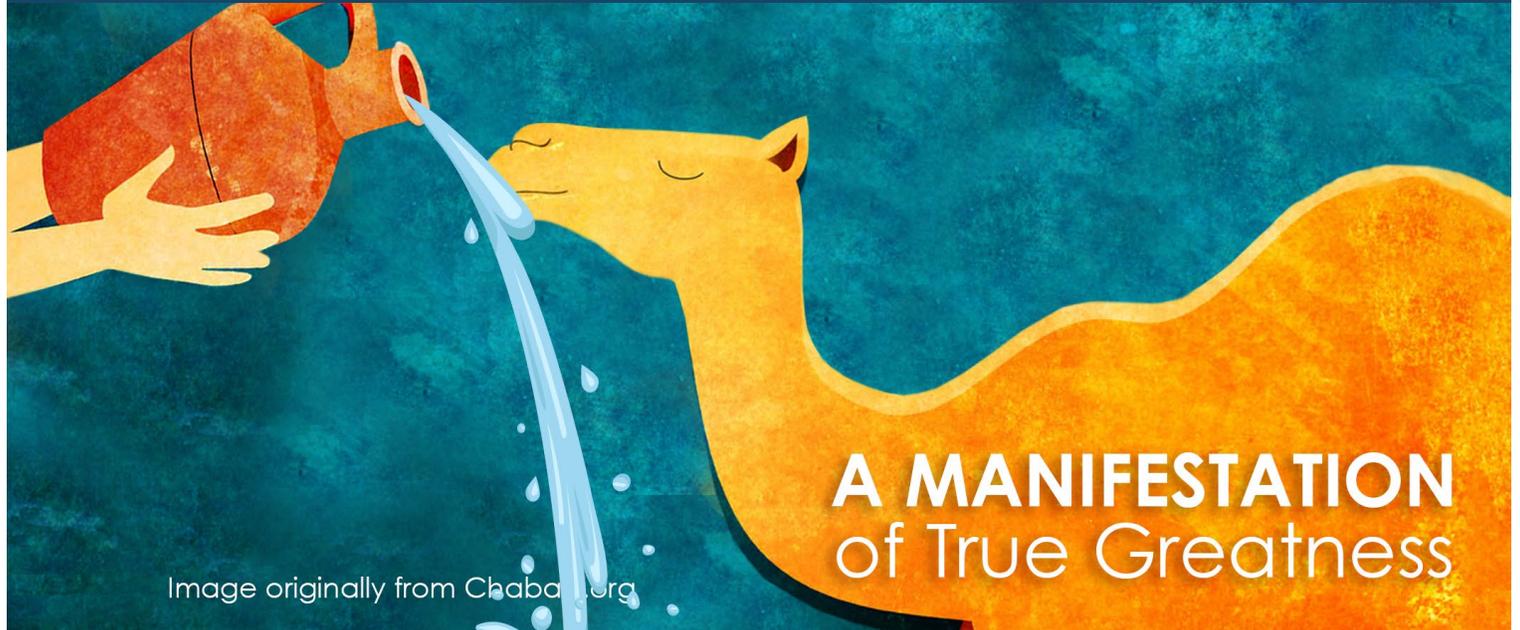


**The First Time Aging Enters Existence**

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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Chayei Sara



### Visual Impressions Make the Difference

*Midrash:* “If one has the proper mindset/thoughts during his prayers, it is guaranteed that his supplications will be heard. As it states in *Psalms*, ‘For the one who prepares his heart, the Ear of G-d will be attentive...’ There is no one who had prayed without a distraction as *Avraham*. G-d had seen *Avraham* praying on behalf of the world, that it should not be destroyed. He praised *Avraham* for his level of dedication because He does not want to destroy the world. G-d said to *Avraham* ‘You are the most special (beautiful) of all mankind.’

“*Avraham* responded, ‘In what way am I so special? I together with my son enter into a community and they are not able to differentiate between father and son (*Yitzchak* had the identical facial features as his father).’ At that time regardless of how many years one had lived there were no signs of aging. *Avraham* had asked G-d, ‘You must make a clear distinction between a father and his son. One must be able to differentiate

between an elder and a youth so that the elder could be respected by the youth.’ G-d responded, ‘I will begin with you.’ When *Avraham* had awoken from his sleep, he discovered that he had aged.”

The only reason *Avraham* wanted G-d to cause a visual discernment between the elder and the youth and a father and a son was so that the youth would acknowledge and appreciate the elder. If one cannot visually perceive a difference in age between the two individuals, he will not give his elder the proper respect because he would be viewed as a peer. Although the commandment of honoring and revering a parent was not one of the seven Noahide laws, *Avraham* understood that it was an imperative for a child to respect his parent.

*Torah:* “You must revere your mother and father and My *Shabbos* you will keep.”

*Reb Meir Simcha* of Dvinsk: The basis for the authenticity of *Torah* Judaism is tradition. It is a tradition that

has been passed on since Sinai from generation to generation– from father to son (*mesorah*). Since the child reveres and respects his parent, he thus gives credence to the teachings of his parent. Therefore the *Torah* juxtaposes the mitzvah of revering a mother and father to the observance of the *Shabbos* in order to indicate that it is only because of the reverence and esteem that a child has for his parent that the observance of the *Shabbos* is guaranteed.

Without establishing a structure of hierarchy in a family, the beliefs and teachings of the parent would be lost. Although it was not obligatory for a Noahide to revere or respect a parent, *Avraham* understood that this hierarchy within the structure of family and society must be established. It was crucial for the transmission of beliefs and values for the youth to be able to recognize and esteem the teachings of their elders. It was necessary to have a visual recognition of age for the youth to realize that the older generation has a greater understanding of life.

*Malbim*: The word “*naar* – youth” is derived from the word “empty (*minuaar*).” A young person, because of his age, lacks in knowledge and the lessons of life’s experiences. He is thus the equivalent of an empty vessel. *Avraham* therefore asked G-d to bring about visual recognition of age for one to discern between the generations. Ultimately the hierarchy within the family and society was crucial and essential to guarantee the eternity and authenticity of *Torah*.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: After *Rabon Gamliel* was impeached as the Prince of Israel, *Reb Elazar Ben Azaria* was elected to assume his position. At that time, he was only eighteen years old. Although he was one of the greatest sages of the generation, because of his young appearance he would not have been effective as a leader. Therefore, a miracle transpired – in one night, he assumed the appearance of a seventy-year old man. Although everyone knew that he was actually only eighteen years old; however, because he assumed the persona of a seventy-year old man, he was able to establish himself as the Prince of Israel.

*Rambam* in *Laws of the Study of Torah*: A *rebbe*/mentor is not permitted to behave in a lighthearted manner before his students. He should not engage with them as a peer because if they do not regard their *rebbe* with a sense of awe/reverence they will not be sufficiently attentive to his teachings. *Avraham*, understood that the future

of the world rested upon this. Therefore he requested of G-d that He bring the aging process upon mankind.

## The Meritorious Must Have Merit

*Torah*: After the passing of *Sarah* our Matriarch, “Now *Avraham* was old, well on in years, and *Hashem* had blessed *Avraham* with everything.”

*Midrash*: “After *Sarah* had passed away the *Torah* tells us that G-d had blessed *Avraham*. Why did G-d need to bless *Avraham* at this time? It is so that the world should not say that all the blessing that had come upon *Avraham* in the past was due to *Sarah*.” The *Torah* mentions G-d’s blessing after *Sarah*’s passing for us to understand that all of the blessings that *Avraham* had received were unrelated to *Sarah*’s merit (despite the fact that she special). Rather, *Avraham* was blessed because of his own meritorious status. Why is it important for the world to understand that the blessing received by *Avraham* was not attributable *Sarah*?

There is a natural tendency for people to minimize the special attributes/status of another. People tend to see another with a deprecating eye. This is even more so the case within the context of spirituality. *Avraham* had miraculously defeated the Four Mighty Kings and was proclaimed as “father of all nations.” He was able to bring about things that no one in existence could have done.

One would think that after such world renown, as an individual who has proven his special relationship with G-d, that there would be no question regarding his worthiness. Despite all that they had witnessed, it was possible that the world would have attributed *Avraham*’s accomplishments to the merit of his special wife *Sarah*. *Avraham* was crucial to existence and to G-d because of his ability to impact upon the world regarding their beliefs. Because of *Avraham*’s renown, he became even more effective. He was revered and esteemed by all mankind.

If the perception of *Avraham*’s persona were to be diminished by attributing his awesome accomplishments to someone other than himself, he would become a less effective person. It is only when *Avraham* would be perceived in his true light as that worthy individual, will he continue to be effective on the same level. Therefore, after *Sarah* passed away, G-d needed to bless *Avraham* so that the world would know that he was uniquely meritorious in his own right.

One would think that *Avraham* received G-d's blessing because he was truly deserving as a *tzaddik* of a unique dimension. Nevertheless, the *Midrash* asks, "G-d blessed *Avraham* with everything in what merit?" Evidently one needs to be meritorious in order to receive merit – as the *Talmud* states, "G-d brings merit upon those who are meritorious."

*Midrash*: "It was because *Avraham* had given tithes to *Shem* (*Malkitzedek*), the Priest for the Exalted G-d, from all of his possessions after he defeated the Four Mighty Kings. Just as he had given tithes from all (of his possessions), he was blessed with all (everything)–measure for measure." Why is the tithing of all of one's possessions make one worthy of receiving the ultimate blessing of G-d?

It is important to understand that *Avraham* had given tithes of the possessions that he had prior to the victory over the Four Kings because he did not accept any of the spoils of war. If *Shem* was in fact considered the *Kohen* (Priest) of G-d why did *Avraham* delay in the giving of his tithes until after his victory over the Four Kings? *Shem* was the most special son of *Noach* because he was the most spiritual. He was thus the Priest of G-d. The pagan world did not appreciate or value *Shem*, despite his ancestry because of his monotheistic belief.

After *Avraham* had defeated the Four Mighty Kings he was proclaimed by the entire world as "the father of all nations." He was in fact the most revered and respected person among all mankind. When he chose to give the tithes of all of his possessions to *Shem*, he validated him and his beliefs before the entire world as truth. As a result of this validation, *Shem* became an effective person vis-à-vis mankind. Therefore based on the principle of measure for measure, *Avraham* merited to be blessed after the passing of *Sarah* to be effective and impactful to all mankind.

## When is More is Better?

*Midrash*: "Our Rabbis tell us how many times a day does one have to pray (recite the *Amidah*/Silent Prayer). Why did they legislate that the *Amidah* should be recited three times a day (*Shacharis*, *Mincha*, *Maariv*)? It is to teach us that one must add to his prayers (*mosif b'tefilos*)."

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: There is a basis for the obligation of prayer. The verse states, "You shall serve

Him with all your heart." What is service of the heart? It is *tefillah* (prayer).

*Rambam* rules that *tefillah* is a *Torah* obligation which one must fulfill once a day. However, Rabbinically one must pray an additional two Silent Prayers. If the obligation of *tefillah* is on a *Torah* level, as *Rambam* states, the *Midrash* is explaining the reason the Rabbis added an additional two prayers. According to *Ramban*, there is no *Torah* obligation to pray whatsoever. However, it is a Rabbinic obligation to pray. According to his understanding, the *Midrash* is explaining the reason the Rabbis legislated three prayers a day rather than one. If one prays once a day, he will acknowledge G-d in all of His aspects and supplicate Him for all of his needs. If so, what is there to be gained when one repeats the prayer service an additional two times?

*Rambam*: The *Amidah* is comprised of three parts. The opening blessings acknowledge and praise G-d. The second segment of the prayer is composed of requests/supplications for our needs. The closing blessings are those of thanks for all that G-d has done. If one does not supplicate G-d for his needs and only recites the opening and closing blessings of the *Amidah* he does not fulfill his *Torah* obligation of prayer.

If the service of the heart/*tefillah* is meant for the individual to acknowledge G-d by expressing his understanding of G-d's dimension and the closing blessings are meant to acknowledge that one is the recipient of G-d's Kindness, why then if one makes no request of G-d does one not fulfill his obligation of prayer? If one truly believes that G-d is the source of all that exists, and continuously wills every aspect of our lives, how is it possible not to supplicate Him for his needs? It must be that he truly does not believe what he had said in the blessings. Therefore to confirm and validate his own position vis-à-vis G-d one must supplicate G-d for his needs.

In order to counter the natural tendency that exists within every human being to believe that one's accomplishment is due to his own initiative, *Chazal* legislated that one must pray three times at various intervals throughout the day. Every blessing within the *Amidah* is an acknowledgment that whatever one possesses or is, is only due to G-d's endowment. By standing before G-d and articulating that every aspect of one's life (wisdom, health, material success, etc.)

is only due to His Kindness, one will put the reality of one's belief into perspective – that all he has is only due to G-d's blessing.

*Gemara:* When one supplicates G-d it must be “as a poor man who seeks out alms.” One must truly feel that without G-d's involvement one could not exist. Therefore although the *Torah* may only require one to pray once a day, because *Chazal* understood the psyche and ego of man, they legislated an additional two prayers for the day.

Regarding the *Midrash's* statement that in addition to one's prayer, one must “add to his *Torah*,” it is communicating that although there is an explicit obligation to engage in *Torah* study continuously/day and night (at every available moment), one must apply himself in a manner to acquire a deeper understanding of the *Torah* that he studies and reviews. When one comes upon a new depth of understanding of *Torah* it changes his dimension of being.

By becoming spiritualized through *Torah* study, one is able to internalize many of the concepts that had previously been abstract. In addition when one adds to his *Torah* study both quantitatively and qualitatively, his sense of priorities and values assume another level of understanding. What had initially seemed to be a necessity will become superfluous and excessive. Therefore by adding to one's study, it will ultimately give the individual a greater appreciation for the *Torah* itself.

## **The Standard To Which The Jews Are Held**

*Torah:* *Avraham* instructed his faithful servant to seek out an appropriate wife for *Yitzchak*. “The servant (*Eliezer*) said to him (*Avraham*), “Perhaps the woman shall not wish to follow me to this land; shall I take your son back to the land from which you departed?” *Avraham* answered him, “Beware not to return my son to there... He (G-d) will send His angel before you and you will take a wife for my son from there.” We see from *Avraham's* response to *Eliezer* that he was confident that G-d would intercede on his behalf and send an angel to guarantee *Eliezer's* success. 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. *Eliezer* was the administrator of all of *Avraham's* assets and household.

*Chazal:* *Avraham* had taught *Eliezer* all of the *Torah* 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.

*Torah:* *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 and something that is cursed cannot cleave to something that is blessed.” Therefore, *Eliezer's* daughter did not qualify to be the future Matriarch.

Selecting the proper wife for *Yitzchak* was essential to the future of the Jewish people. *Yitzchak's* wife would be the future Matriarch who would mother the 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* was confident, for the sake of establishing the Jewish people, that G-d would send His angel to assist *Eliezer* in his mission.

*Torah:* After *Yaakov* had fathered eleven of his sons and was about to encounter his brother *Esav*, he was concerned that he and his family would be killed. If this were to be, there would not be a Jewish people. Despite *Yaakov's* dimension of spirituality, because of all the kindness that G-d had provided him throughout his life, he was concerned that his merits were depleted. He would thus not be worthy of G-d's Protection.

*Chazal:* The basis for *Yaakov's* vulnerability to *Esav* his brother was, “maybe the sin would be the cause of his demise.” He was concerned that because of his spiritual shortcomings, although they were minute, it would be sufficient to be concerned for his life. If *Yaakov*, the most special of the Patriarchs, was not confident that G-d would provide protection although it would put into jeopardy the future of the Jewish people, why was *Avraham* so confident that G-d would assist him in finding the future Matriarch? How could he say with such certainty, “G-d will send His angel?” In addition, because G-d had intervened on *Avraham's* behalf many times – such as emerging from the fiery

Kiln of *Kasdim* unscathed and defeating the Four Mighty Kings, why was he not concerned that his merits were not depleted?

Despite the fact that there is no perfect *tzaddik*, including *Avraham*, our Patriarch, he was nevertheless worthy of G-d's Mercy because of who he was. *Yaakov*, on the other hand, although he was the most special of the Patriarchs, was held to another standard. He had fled his father's home because he had taken the blessing from his brother *Esav* (which was rightfully his). He was qualified to have the blessing only because of his spiritual dimension and his selfless dedication to G-d. *Esav*, who had no interest or relevance to spirituality was not worthy of the birthright. By becoming the recipient of *Yitzchak's* blessing, assumed a responsibility that he must maintain an advanced level of spirituality. As the verse states regarding *Yitzchak's* quantification of *Yaakov* and *Esav* – "The voice is the voice of *Yaakov* and the hands are the hands of *Esav*."

*Chazal*: *Yaakov* would only be worthy to lord over *Esav* if there is an advanced level of *Torah* study and adherence.

*Midrash*: "As long as there are the chirpings of *Torah* in the synagogues and the sound of *Torah* study in the study halls, then the hands will not be the hands of *Esav*." Meaning, *Yaakov* is only able to repel the advances of *Esav* if he is sufficiently spiritually sound. However, if *Yaakov* should have a certain degree of spiritual failings, although they may be minimal, he would be subject to the Attribute of Justice. It is because he assumed responsibility for G-d's Glory in this world. Therefore *Yaakov* had reason to be concerned that because he had been diminished, as a result of receiving the Kindness of G-d, he would no longer be worthy of a miracle. He may have not maintained the standard of "the voice is the voice of *Yaakov*."

*Avraham*, on the other hand, merited G-d's Mercy, although he may have possessed some degree of spiritual deficiency. Thus he was confident that G-d would send His angel to assist *Eliezer* in his mission. He believed with certainty that there would be no prosecution. *Yaakov*, the Patriarch who represents *Torah*, had the mechanism to maintain clarity. He was the "perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of *Torah*)." Thus, being the Patriarch of *Torah*, he was held culpable if he did not have sufficient clarity. Since *Avraham* did not have the same relevance to *Torah* as *Yaakov*, he would not be held liable for his minimal spiritual deficiencies.

The Jewish people were given the gift of *Torah* at Sinai. As it states, "The *Torah* was commanded to us by *Moshe*, it is the heritage of the congregation of *Yaakov*." Since we have the ability to achieve clarity through the *Torah* in order to appreciate and maintain our spirituality, we are thus held to the standard of *Yaakov*, our Patriarch because "the voice is the voice of *Yaakov*."

## **The Importance of Believing in Oneself** **(from *Vayeira*)**

*Torah*: After the birth of *Yitzchak*, "Sarah saw the son of *Hagar (Ishmael)*, the Egyptian, who she had born to *Avraham*, mocking (*mitzacheik*). So she said to *Avraham*, 'Drive out this slave woman with her son, for the son of that slave woman shall not inherit with my son, with *Yitzchak*.'

*Chazal*: The word "mocking (*mitzacheik*)" means that *Ishmael* was engaging in inappropriate behavior such as idolatry, adultery, and murder. *Sarah* was concerned that having *Yitzchak* associated with *Ishmael* to any degree would have a negative influence on the future Patriarch. *Sarah* understood that the slightest negative influence would have a detrimental effect on the future of the entire Jewish people. Therefore, *Sarah* asked *Avraham* to expel *Hagar* and *Ishmael* from their home. G-d said to *Avraham*, "...Whatever *Sarah* tells you, heed her voice." *Sarah's* level of prophecy surpassed that of her husband.

*Sforno*: The term "mocking (*mitzacheik*)" means, "when *Yitzchak* was weaned, *Avraham* organized a feast and invited all of the leaders of the generation to partake of the celebration. *Shem*, *Aver*, and *Avimelech* were some of the guests who were invited to celebrate *Yitzchak's* assuming maturity. *Ishmael*, began to mock the celebration that was made in the home of *Avraham*. He had said, 'Sarah was impregnated by *Avimelech* (the Philistine king and not *Avraham*).' Thus, *Ishmael* made a mockery (*mitzacheik*) of *Yitzchak's* claimed pedigree. Although *Ishmael* had heard this slanderous comment after *Yitzchak's* birth from the scoffers of the generation, he chose to repeat it at this time. *Sarah* overheard his deprecating remark regarding *Yitzchak's* ancestry and demanded that he and his mother be driven from their home."

*Midrash*: *Yitzchak* had identical facial features as his father *Avraham*. It was to such a point that his pedigree

could not be disputed. If *Ishmael's* deprecating remark obviously had no credence, why should *Sarah* have reacted so negatively to his comments?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Kamah*: When one pays damages for embarrassing another it is evaluated based on the one who was embarrassed and the one who was doing the embarrassing. For example, if a nobleman is mocked by a pauper, person of no special status, the embarrassment is negligible. However, if the nobleman would be embarrassed by a peer, it would be considered significant.

Similarly, the remark of *Ishmael* regarding *Yitzchak's* pedigree was so obviously absurd because of his identical resemblance to his father, it should have been totally ignored. Nevertheless, *Sarah*, the Matriarch, felt that *Ishmael* and his mother deserved to be driven from their home – regardless of the consequences to them. *Sarah* believed that although *Ishmael's* remark was baseless, if it were to put the slightest doubt in *Yitzchak's* mind as to who had fathered him, it would have a detrimental effect on his total development. It could diminish his sense of his own potential, which was limitless because he was in fact the son of *Avraham*. His deep sense of purpose would be hindered. Because *Sarah* understood that *Ishmael's* continuous comments regarding *Yitzchak's* pedigree would interfere with the future of the Jewish people she asked *Avraham* to drive out *Ishmael* and his mother. This was confirmed by G-d Who had said to *Avraham*, “Heed her voice.”

*Midrash*: The reason the Jewish people merited redemption from Egypt, despite the fact that they were idolaters, was because they retained their (Hebrew) language, (Jewish) attire, and (Hebrew) names. Regardless of their level of acculturation into the pagan Egyptian society, the Jewish people had an underlying sense of pride in the fact that they were Jewish. Although they were slaves in Egypt, they understood that they had a unique pedigree being the descendants of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*. It was because of this sense of self that they retained their Jewish identity. Had it not been for this sense, they

would have not been redeemed. One needs to have a sense of one's own self-worth in order to be motivated to act upon one's potential.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: There is a rabbinic fence which prohibits one from engaging in medicinal acts on the *Shabbos*. Very often the preparation of the therapy entails pulverizing its ingredients which is a creative action that is forbidden by *Torah*.

Mishna: Rose oil was used by the ordinary person only when he had a skin ailment. However, the royalty would use this special oil on a regular basis as one would use olive oil to anoint themselves. Thus, the commoner was forbidden to use the rose oil on the *Shabbos* because it was considered a medicinal therapy. The Mishna cites the opinion of *Reb Shimon* who permits the usage of rose oil, even for the ordinary Jew, because “All the children of Israel are considered princes.”

We can only understand the position of *Reb Shimon*, to permit the rose oil, although it is only used on special occasions because of its precious value, because of the Jew's sense of self – that he is truly royalty. It is only because of his financial limitation that he does not use it on a regular basis. Therefore, according to *Reb Shimon* there is no concern that using the oil would lead to pulverizing ingredients to prepare medication.

It was because of the importance of *Yitzchak* sensing and understanding his true potential and reality to develop into the future Patriarch that it was necessary to expel *Ishmael* and *Hagar* from their home. Every Jew needs to understand that because he is a descendant of the holy Patriarchs, *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*, that he has an unlimited potential. Regardless of one's circumstance, this is something that must be appreciated.

*Tana Dvei Eliyahu*: “One must say – When will my accomplishments be as great as my ancestors – *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*.”



**Yad Avraham Institute**