

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

November 17, 2011

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**

*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, 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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## Chayei Sarah

Presented by

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

**Dean**

### 1. Achieving G'dliness Through Challenge

The Torah states regarding the Akeidah, which was the most difficult of the ten tests that G'd presented to Avraham, **“And it happened after these things that G'd tested Avraham...”** Sforno explains, “Since Avraham had the potential to be the beloved of G'd, he should be seen as he was in potential. As a result of this, he will have a greater semblance to his Creator, Who is good to the world in actuality. The intent of the essence of man is to resemble his Creator to his best ability as the Torah attests regarding the creation of man, ‘(G'd said to the angels) **Let us make man in our image and in our form...**” Thus, by presenting man with challenges and tests, man is able to emulate G'd. If man is able to succeed by meeting the test, he will have a greater commonality with Him. The objective of the test of the Akeidah was to actualize Avraham's love for G'd and thus allow him to cleave to his Maker to a greater degree.

There is a positive commandment that a Jew must emulate G'd. As it states, **“You shall walk in His ways...”** The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, “Just as G'd is Merciful, you must be merciful. Just as G'd is Gracious, you must be gracious...” What is the value of emulating the characteristics of G'd? G'd gave man the ability to emulate Him in order to establish a commonality with his Creator. By doing so, man is able to attach himself to G'd to establish an intimate relationship with Him. Ramchal writes that the reason man was given the power of choice was in order to allow man to possess G'd's characteristic of choice. Choice being the characteristic that discerns man from the unintelligible creature is a G'dly characteristic.

Maharal explains the reason the original man was called “Adam (earth)” is because he was taken from the earth (*adamah*). Earth, if left fallow, is only a clump of earth with no intrinsic value; however, if one were to address its potential and cultivate it then all life will emanate from it. Thus, the essence of the human being is reflected through “Adam (earth).” Just as earth has potential that can be actualized, so too is man's essence something that can be actualized by making correct and proper choices.

### 2. Sarah's Perceiving Goodness in All of Her Travails

The Torah states, **“Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years these were the years of Sarah's life.”** If Sarah had lived 127 years, it is obvious that these were the years of her life. Why does the verse conclude with the words **“these were the years of Sarah's life”**? Rashi cites Chazal who explain the conclusion of the verse to mean, “All of the years of Sarah were equally good.” How is it possible to say that all the years of Sarah's life were equally good when her life was fraught with difficulty, pain and trauma?

Until she had reached the age of eighty-nine she was barren. She believed that she would never merit to be the Matriarch of the Jewish people. When Sarah and Avraham were in the community of Charan they were regarded as pariahs. Her husband Avraham was taken by the evil king Nimrod to be thrown into the fiery kiln of Kasdim because he refused to bow to the idol. Avraham and Sarah had gone to Canaan as G'd had instructed them to do. However when they were confronted with a famine, they chose to go to Egypt. In Egypt Sarah was taken by Pharaoh and was nearly defiled by him, if it were not for G'd's intervention. Later again, Avraham and Sarah journeyed to Gerar where she was nearly defiled by the Philistine king, Avimelech. After ten years of being in Canaan, Sarah told Avraham to take her maidservant as a wife because she was certain that she was barren, and would not have a child. Hagar bore a son to Avraham. This episode with Hagar caused Sarah great humiliation and was ultimately the cause of Sarah's passing when she received the news of the Akeidah. The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that when Hagar became pregnant, she treated her mistress with disrespect. Sarah, being upset said to Avraham, “Let G'd judge between me and you.” Because she had summoned Divine Justice upon Avraham, she was subject to Divine Justice and thus she was not protected from the words of Satan, who informed her about the Akeidah, which was the cause of her passing.

Despite all of these difficult moments and painful events, Chazal tell us that all of the years of Sarah's life were equally good. Perhaps we can understand the words of Chazal with the concept of *“Gamzu la'tova – it is all for the best.”* . As the Mishna in Tractate Berachos states,

“Just as one blesses for the good, one must bless for what is (perceived as) the bad.” Ultimately, everything is in the best interest of the individual. Because of the level of trust that Sarah had in G’d, she envisioned her entire life for the good. However, it is difficult to say that this is what the Torah is communicating through these words.

Sarah, our Matriarch, did not only believe that the years of her life were “good” despite their difficulty, she understood and perceived the goodness in every one of the events. She appreciated and understood that every event in her life was integral to her own spiritual growth and the future spiritual development of the Jewish people. Although Avraham was thrown into the fiery kiln of Kasdim, when he had immersed, he was established as the founding father of the eternal people.

When Sarah was taken by Pharaoh and not defiled as a result of her own initiative, which was through summoning an angel to strike Pharaoh, the ramifications of her initiative offered Divine Protection to the Jewish women during the period of bondage in Egypt for 210 years. Chazal tell us that there is a principle, “The actions/experiences of the Patriarchs are a sign for the children.” Meaning, the actions of the Patriarchs set in motion and establish future events that the Jewish people will experience and of which they will be the beneficiaries. The Midrash tells us that the Jewish women, who were in Egypt for a period of 210 years, were not defiled by their Egyptian masters. The Midrash explains that the Jewish women in Egypt remained pure in the merit of Sarah our Matriarch. Sarah, our Matriarch was taken by Pharaoh who wished to make her his queen. She could have succumbed to the allure of the prestige and glory of becoming the queen of the most advanced civilization. However, because of her dimension of devout piety, she would not consider it for a moment. Thus, the Jewish women in Egypt merited Divine Protection and therefore the pedigree of the Jewish people was not put in jeopardy.

The Torah tells that as a result of the sin of Baal Peor, there 24,000 casualties that died in a plague. Because of this loss, G’d said that a census of the Jewish people must be taken to determine their number. When the Torah refers to the families of the tribes that were counted, it adds the letters “hey” and “yud” to their names. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The nations of the world were disgracing the families of the Jewish people. They had said, ‘How could you deceive the world by claiming that you are pure? It is something that is obviously impossible. If the Egyptians controlled and dominated the bodies of the Jewish males in bondage, is it not logical to

say that they defiled their women? G’d therefore associated His Name “Yud and Hey” with the tribes to attest to the fact that they are pure and were not fathered by their Egyptian masters.” It was because of this pedigree of the Jewish people that they were the only nation qualified to receive the Torah at Sinai. All this was only possible because Sarah, our Matriarch chose to not allow herself to be defiled. Despite the fact that being taken by Pharaoh was a difficult moment at the time in Sarah’s life, its consequence addressed and allowed the purpose of existence to be actualized, which was the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. Before Sarah’s passing, she had perceived all of the goodness in her life.

Sarah had requested of Avraham to take Hagar as a wife in order for her to merit children through her. Ultimately, Hagar and Ishmael were driven from Avraham’s home because of Ishmael’s subtle negative influence on Yitzchak. Ishmael fathered twelve tribes. Chazal tell us that the twelve tribes of Ishmael correspond to the twelve tribes of the Jewish people, who are quantified as “the tribes of G’d.” Despite the fact that events surrounding Hagar and Ishmael were difficult and painful, Sarah understood and appreciated the necessity of having a counter balance to the Jewish people. Sarah’s faith in G’d went beyond trusting that is good, but rather she perceived the actual goodness that G’d had brought upon her.

### ***3. The Obstacle to Spiritual Ascent***

Chazal tell us that the words of the Torah are concise and specific. Many fundamental laws are drawn from a single letter of a word that is contained within the Torah. Nevertheless, the narrative of Eliezer’s mission regarding locating the appropriate wife for Yitzchak is repeated multiple times. Rashi cites the Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin, “Rav Acha says, ‘We learn from the repetition of the narrative of Eliezer that the ordinary speech of the servants of the Patriarchs are more beautiful (to G’d) than the Torah of the children.’” Evidently, since there is nothing that is superfluous in the Torah, there is a profound lesson to be learned and applied from the narrative of Eliezer.

The Torah identifies Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, as “***Damesek Eliezer – Eliezer from Damascus.***” The Gemara in Tractate Yomah explains that the Torah is not informing us of Eliezer’s origin, that he came from the city of Damascus, but rather the term “*Damesek*” is an acronym that connotes – “He drew from the wellspring of Torah of his master (Avraham).”

Meaning, all the Torah that Avraham had learned was transmitted to his servant Eliezer. As a result of becoming a repository and disseminator of his master's teachings, Eliezer radiated a holiness that had a semblance of his master's. The Midrash tells us that when Eliezer had arrived at the home of Besuel to negotiate for the hand of Rivka, on behalf of Avraham, they had mistakenly believed that he was Avraham. In addition to Eliezer's spiritual dimension, Avraham had fully entrusted Eliezer with all of his wealth to be the guardian of his fortune. Eliezer's dimension as a person in the spiritual and material realm was outstanding and unique.

Despite his dimension of being and capacity, Eliezer's name, within the context of locating a wife for Yitzchak, is not mentioned. When Eliezer beseeched G'd to succeed in his mission of finding the appropriate wife for Yitzchak, it was only for the sake of kindness with his master of Avraham. As it states, **"Do a kindness for my master Avraham."** Although he possessed exceptional personal spiritual worth capability, he had no self-interest in succeeding. All Eliezer wanted was to succeed for the sake of Avraham. When he presented himself to Besuel, the father of Rivka, he identified himself as **"I am the servant of Avraham."** He did not identify himself by name. Despite his level of accomplishment and renown, he was fully negated to his master Avraham.

Moshe is never identified or quantified by the Torah or Chazal as "the most devout or pious Jew" who ever lived, but rather, as "the most humble man on the face of the earth." The basis for Moshe's unparalleled dimension of spirituality was due to the fact that he was completely negated and nullified to G'd, his Master. He is identified by G'd as **"Moshe, My servant,"** just as Eliezer had presented himself as **"the servant of Avraham."** It was because of this level of negation that Moshe merited that G'd should speak to him in a wake-state at a level of face to face. His total being was thus spiritualized. In order for one to appreciate and revere the Torah for its unlimited dimension of spirituality and to fulfill its mitzvos in the most meticulous manner, one must negate himself to G'd. This prerequisite is vital to succeed in the observance of the Torah and its acquisition. This is the reason the narrative of Eliezer is repeated a number of times in the Torah. It is for us to understand how the subject of a master must negate himself to him, despite the individual's accomplishments and ability. Identically, in order to succeed in the service of G'd, one must negate himself to his Maker. Only then will he perform the Torah selflessly and meticulously. It is therefore sufficient for the

laws of the Torah to be alluded to through inference and not necessarily being explicit.

#### ***4. Yitzchak, Encompassing the Destiny of the Jewish People***

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 the numerical value of the word "ba kol – everything" is the equivalent numerical value of the word "ben- son." Meaning, the verse **"Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything (ba kol)"** is referring to Yitzchak his son. Despite the unparalleled spiritual accomplishments of Avraham and his great wealth and renown, his greatest achievement in life was the fathering of Yitzchak. Prior to Yitzchak, all of Avraham's accomplishments were only a means to an end, qualifying him to father the future Patriarch of the Jewish people.

The Torah states regarding G'd's promise to Avraham that he will have a son, **"...your wife Sarah will bear a son and you shall call him Yitzchak..."** Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that the name Yitzchak is an acronym. The letter 'yud' which has the numerical value of ten alludes to the ten tests that G'd presented to Avraham. The letter 'tzadi' which has the numerical value of ninety corresponds to the age at which Sarah had given birth to Yitzchak. The letter 'koof' which has the numerical value of 100, represents the age of Avraham when he father his son. The letter 'ches' which has the numerical value of eight alludes to the fact that Yitzchak was circumcised eight days after he was born. We are able to understand from the name that was chosen by G'd for Yitzchak, that the ten tests that were presented to Avraham have relevance to Yitzchak. Although Avraham himself advanced spiritually with every test, the true value of that spiritual growth was only as it related to Yitzchak, the future Patriarch of the Jewish people. The fact that Avraham and Sarah were barren until the age of 100 and 90, respectively, was only because it has relevance to the future potential of Yitzchak. Everything that Avraham our Patriarch and Sarah our Matriarch achieved in their lives was manifested in "Yitzchak." He truly encompassed everything that they had accomplished because he was the one to determine the future destiny of the Jewish people.

Since Yitzchak was to be the one who would address the objective of existence as a Patriarch of the Jewish people, then he surely needed the appropriate wife who would qualify to be the matriarch. Avraham was the

only one who fully understood and appreciated what qualifications were needed for the future matriarch. Any deviation from the specific spiritual criteria that were required of the matriarch of the Jewish people would have negative ramifications regarding the destiny of existence. Therefore, despite the fact that Eliezer was the dedicated servant of Avraham and a spiritual giant in his own right, Avraham bound him with an oath to ensure that he would carry out his mission of finding the appropriate wife exactly as Avraham had instructed him. If Eliezer were to deviate as much as an iota from Avraham's prerequisites, he would forfeit his life in this world and his share in the world to come. Although Avraham entrusted Eliezer with his entire material estate, he could not risk the future of existence to anyone without binding them with an oath. This is because Avraham understood and appreciated that he was blessed with Yitzchak who encompassed "everything" as the future Patriarch.

### **5. Lot, the Antithesis of Avraham** (from Vayeira)

The Torah tells us that although Sodom was destroyed by the wrath of G'd, Lot, Avraham's nephew and his two daughters were spared from destruction. After they had escaped with their lives, Lot and his daughters sought refuge in a cave. The daughters of Lot believed that just as Sodom was destroyed, so too was the rest of existence. They believed that they and their father were the only survivors of humanity. The Torah states, **"The older one said to the younger, 'Our father is old and there is no man in the land to marry us in the usual manner. Come let us ply our father with wine and lay with him that he may give life to offspring...thus Lot's two daughters conceived from their father. The older daughter bore a son and she called him Moav...and the younger one bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi, he is the ancestor of the children of Ammon until this day.'"**

After Lot's father perished in the fiery kiln of Kasdim, Avraham had taken full responsibility for all his needs. When Avraham left Charan to go to Canaan, he had taken Lot along with him. They had traveled together to Egypt because of the famine that was in Canaan. As a result of Lot's association with his uncle Avraham in Egypt, Lot became extremely wealthy. When they returned together to Canaan with their great wealth and flocks, there was a dispute between the shepherds of Lot and those of Avraham. Avraham said to his nephew, **"Because of our disagreement, we must part our ways. If you go to the right I will go to the left..."** After Lot had separated himself from his uncle, Avraham was informed that he had

been taken captive at a later time. Despite Lot's spiritual shortcomings and evil ways, Avraham put at risk his life and all of his merits in order to rescue his nephew through miracles. After being the beneficiary of Avraham's kindness and witnessing G'd's miracles that brought about Avraham's victory, Lot decided to return to the evil community of Sodom. When G'd destroyed Sodom, Lot deserved to perish together with the community; however, he was only spared because of the merit of his righteous uncle Avraham. It is obvious that Lot never acknowledged or appreciated his uncle's dedication and contribution to his life. He was the consummate ingrate.

After Sodom was destroyed, Lot's daughters had only initiated their incestuous act with their father because they had believed that all humanity had been destroyed and they were the only survivors of existence. Just as at the beginning of creation G'd allowed Cain and Abel to procreate with their siblings for the sake of populating the world, so too did they believe that this was the beginning of a new existence. The fact that they had believed that the world was destroyed and their father was the only survivor, is a confirmation that Lot never shared with his children that he had a righteously devout uncle who was beloved by G'd. He never mentioned how he owed every aspect of his life to this special person.

The Torah tells us that until the end of time a Moabite and an Ammonite is not permitted to intermarry with the Jewish people, even after conversion to Judaism. This is because in the fortieth year of the Jewish people's wandering in the desert they had come upon the Moabites and Ammonites and were denied their hospitality. As the Torah states, **"They did not offer them their bread and water when they had left Egypt."** Ramban explains that the reason the Moabites and Ammonites are not permitted to intermarry into the Jewish people is because they should have shown their indebtedness to the Jewish people for what Avraham had done for their ancestor Lot. Had it not been for Avraham, they would not exist. Their expression of ingratitude was a reflection of the essence that was portrayed by their ancestor Lot. If one is able to repent and atone for one's spiritual failings, why should the Moabites and Ammonites not be given a chance to correct their ways? Why are they disqualified for eternity from intermarrying into the Jewish people?

The Torah states after Adam had eaten from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, **"G'd said to Adam, 'Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat? Adam responded, 'The woman whom You gave me- she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'"** Chazal

tell us that Adam was an ingrate because he had blamed his sin upon G'd. He had stated that the cause of his sin was the wife that G'd had provided for him. Rather than acknowledging that the woman was a blessing through which he could achieve spiritual perfection, he regarded her as the cause of his failing. Chazal thus quantify Adam as the ultimate ingrate "*Kafui tova* – one who perceives good as evil." Adam thus forfeited his spiritual stature as the one who would bring about the perfection of existence.

Avraham, our Patriarch, in contrast appreciated all the good that was bestowed upon himself and existence. His quest to identify his true benefactor allowed him to come upon G'd. Avraham wanted to demonstrate his thanks and dedicate his life to serving the One who provides for all existence. He had asked many times, "Who is the master of this great citadel that is illuminated? (Whom must I serve?)" Since the basis for Avraham's coming upon G'd was rooted in his desire to reciprocate to his benefactor, he therefore corrected Adam's deficiency of being an ingrate. Avraham, by purging himself of this deficiency, was able to assume the stature and potential of the original human being that was meant to bring the world to spiritual perfection. Therefore, the Moabites and Ammonites, demonstrating their ingratitude by not reciprocating to the Jewish people, revealed that they are not qualified to become part of the Jewish people. The characteristic of indebtedness and appreciation of the Jewish people would have been put in jeopardy.

#### **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 – Duties of the Heart
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Sanhedrin
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	<b>Talmud: Chagigah</b> Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 <sup>th</sup> FL.) Enter on 54 <sup>th</sup> Street
1:00-2:00 pm	<b>Ramchal: Derech Hashem</b> Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza ( 45 <sup>th</sup> FL. )

##### **Tuesday**

12:10 - 1:10pm	<b>Torah Insight Based on the Parsha</b> Location: Yad Avraham
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##### **Wednesday**

11:30 – 12:30 pm	<b>Talmud: Chagigah</b> Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 <sup>th</sup> FL.) Enter on 54 <sup>th</sup> Street
1:00—2:00 pm	<b>Maharal Gevuras Hashem</b> Location: Yad Avraham

##### **Thursday**

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