

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Chayei Sarah

November 12, 2009

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. The World, A Mirror Image of Man's Behavior</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2. Maintaining Avraham's Renown</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>3. The Value of Sincere Commitment</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>4. Ego, the Impediment to Clarity</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>5. Yitzchak, the all encompassing Patriarch</i>	<i>6</i>

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.

If you would like to receive this Weekly Torah Commentary Series by email

Please call 212-371-9555 or email:

info@yadavraham.org

TUNE IN TO OUR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF CLASSES

And over

60,000 online classes 24 hours a day

Yad Avraham Institute
New York
November 12, 2009

B"H

Chayei Sarah

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. The World, A Mirror Image of Man's Behavior

The Torah states, **"The two angels came to Sodom...."** The Midrash cites the verse from the Prophet Yeshaya, 'They had acted in a bitter manner and upset His spirit. He became their enemy and fought against them...' Reb Yirmya b'reb Elazar states, 'For fifty two years G'd forewarned the members of Sodom to repent.' How did He do this? G'd shook the mountains with tremors so that they should understand that if they do not repent, they will surely be destroyed. Reb Shimon bar Yochai states, 'What happened in Sodom is explicit in a verse in Eyov, 'He removed the mountains and they were not aware. Then, G'd overturned them in His Wrath.' In what manner did G'd bring His Wrath upon Sodom? Reb Shimon Ben Lakish explains (this with an allegory), 'From an urn one may draw forth hot water and from the same vessel one is able to draw cold water. When G'd wished to provide sustenance for the Jewish people, He brought forth the Manna from heaven. From that same location in the heavens, G'd brought forth destruction upon Sodom. As it states, 'G'd rained down upon Sodom sulfur and fire.'" This is to teach us that just as G'd brought forth the Manna from heaven so too can He bring forth destructive forces from that same location.

The Jewish people had believed that the staff of Moshe only had the capacity to bring about miracles that were of a destructive nature. They had been aware that all the plagues of Egypt and the splitting of the Sea came about through the staff. Moshe demonstrated to them that this was not so. The same object, source, or location can also bring about the greatest level of blessing. When the Jewish people needed water in the desert, Moshe was instructed by G'd to strike the rock with his staff to bring forth sufficient water to provide for the Jewish people for forty years. This demonstrated to the Jewish people that the same staff that could bring about untold levels of destruction and suffering could bring about the ultimate blessing.

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, "G'd said, I have given you a good commodity (lekach tov), My Torah

you should not abandon it." The Gemara in Tractate Taanis states, "The Torah can be either a life potion or a death potion." The Gemara derives this understanding from a verse in the Portion of Haazinu, **"My Torah will pierce as hard rain and My Word will flow like the dew."** The Gemara explains that the study of Torah itself can either destroy a person like a destructive rain or enliven and invigorate like the gentle flowing dew. If one studies the Torah for its own sake with a pure intent, then the Torah becomes a "life potion". However if one studies Torah with a sinister intent (as Tosfos explains), then the Torah becomes a death potion. The same Torah can either be the ultimate source of life or it can be converted into something lethal that can bring about death and destruction.

G'd could have brought destruction upon Sodom in many ways; however, He chose to bring forth the destruction from the heavens. As it states in the verse, **"G'd rained down upon Sodom sulfur and fire...."** This is to teach us that the same location that brings about the ultimate blessing and life, as was demonstrated by the manna. That same location brought about the most intense destruction that the world had ever seen.. Based on man's initiative, one can initiate in the same context either blessing or destruction. The same entity can manifest itself as one of good or as one generating evil. This is all based upon the infusion of man through his intent. Man's choice can transform the world into a haven of blessing that continuously blossoms and continuously brings forth its bounty. Alternatively, it can be transformed into a wasteland by defying G'd's Word and rejecting His Will.

2. Maintaining Avraham's Renown

The Torah states after the passing of Sarah, our Matriarch, **"Now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything."** The Midrash states, "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 only due to the merit of Sarah. Where do we see that the verse is referring to an additional blessing that was subsequent to Sarah's passing? The verse in Yeshaya states, 'Although he was alone (because Sarah had passed

away) Avraham was blessed.’” The Torah mentions G’d’s blessing after Sarah’s passing for us to understand that Avraham was independently worthy of G’d’s blessing. His blessing was unrelated to Sarah’s merit, despite the fact that she was special. Why is it important for the world to understand that the blessing received by Avraham was due to his own spiritual accomplishment?

One would think that Avraham was worthy of blessing because he was a tzaddik of a unique dimension who had dedicated his life to the espousal of monotheism. Nevertheless, the Midrash asks, “In what merit did Avraham deserve the blessing for everything?” The Midrash answers, “It was because Avraham had given tithes to Shem (*Malkitzedek*), the Priest of the Exalted G’d, from all of his possessions after he had defeated the Four Mighty Kings. Just as he had given tithes from everything that he acquired, he was blessed with everything – measure for measure.”

The miracles that had occurred in Egypt between Sarah, our Matriarch, who was taken by Pharaoh were initiated by her. This resulted in Avraham and Sarah being treated as royalty when they left Egypt with their newly acquired wealth. The Midrash tells us that when Pharaoh attempted to approach Sarah to engage with her, she would instruct an angel to smite him. The angel would follow her command. Similarly, when she was taken by Avimelech the Philistine king, he was unable to approach her because she had invoked supernatural forces to incapacitate him and his community. Having witnessed and being aware of these revealed miracles, the world could believe that the source of all Avraham’s blessing was due to Sarah’s merit. It was due to her special dimension of piety that he was able to defeat the Four Mightiest Kings and was thus declared, “the father of all nations.” It was necessary for Avraham to be perceived in his true light in order to be esteemed and revered so that he should impact upon the world through his espousal of monotheism. Therefore, it was necessary for G’d to bless him with an additional blessing after Sarah passed away to confirm that he was worthy in his own right.

There is a natural tendency for people to minimize the special attributes of others by seeing them through a deprecating eye. This is even more so when that special individual’s value manifests itself within the context of spirituality. The Torah states, “**And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham - Avraham fathered Yitzchak...**” If the Torah identifies Yitzchak as the son of Avraham, then it is obvious that Avraham had fathered Yitzchak. Why then is it necessary for the Torah to state the obvious? Rashi cites Chazal who state,

“It is because the scoffers of the generation had said, ‘It is questionable if Avraham had actually fathered Yitzchak. Sarah had been married to him for many years and remained childless. However, after sequestering herself for only one night with Avimelech it soon became known that she had conceived. This fact would cause one to question Yitzchak’s pedigree.’” Therefore, G’d performed a miracle that Yitzchak should have the identical facial features as his father Avraham, so that all would attest to the fact that Avraham had fathered Yitzchak. Why did G’d allow such a disgraceful question to even be considered? How did He allow Sarah, our Holy Matriarch to be taken by the heathen Avimelech and placed in such a shameful situation?

G’d created existence for man to be able to make choices. Every human being is endowed with free will. Because one has the ability to choose between good or evil, one is deserving of reward for taking the positive initiative and culpable for the negative choice. Every positive situation must have a negative counterbalance. This is to maintain the balance of choice. Avraham, our Patriarch was an overwhelming and impressive personality who espoused monotheism. His counterforce was Nimrod, the king who had thrown him into the fiery kiln. He was the one who had initiated a rebellion against G’d with the tower of Babel. The day that Nimrod had died, was the same day that Avraham, our Patriarch had passed away. The world could not exist with the influence of Avraham without the negative counterbalance of Nimrod. Therefore, they both needed to die on the same day to preserve the balance of free choice. If Yitzchak would have been unquestionably seen as the child of his father Avraham, he would have been spiritual force that could not be countered. Therefore, G’d created a distasteful setting for people to question his pedigree. Was Yitzchak truly the son of Avraham? Or was he the son of the heathen Avimelech? The posing of this question was a diminishment of the aura of Yitzchak, undermining his effectiveness as the representative of truth. Once the question was posed, substantiating the truth (by causing him to resemble his father Avraham) no longer allowed truth to retain its viability.

In order for Avraham to be effective as G’d’s representation in this world, to impact upon existence through his dialogue of monotheism, it was essential for his renown not to be questioned. He had to be perceived and appreciated for what he truly was. If his effectiveness and worthiness could be attributed to anyone but himself, his persona would be diminished. Therefore, he would be a less effective person. Thus, it was imperative for G’d to bless Avraham after Sarah’s passing so that the world

could see that all of the blessing that he had was due to his own spiritual stature.

3. The Value of Sincere Commitment

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 an ecstatic state, due to the fact that he had succeeded in his most difficult test, satan was enraged that he was unsuccessful in his attempt to interfere with the actualization of the Akeidah. Satan chose to inform Sarah at the time of the Akeidah by saying, 'Are you aware of what has happened? Avraham has taken your son Yitzchak and bound him to the altar to slaughter him as a burnt offering.' Sarah began crying and wailing...Then Sarah passed away."

The Torah states, **"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years these were the years of Sarah's life."** It is obvious that if she had lived a 127 years, that these were the years of Sarah's life. If so then why does the Torah conclude with the words **"these were the years of Sarah's life?"** One could say that it was intended that Sarah, our Matriarch was intended to live for many more years beyond the time of her passing. However, because of what satan had done, she passed away prematurely. Sarah was a uniquely righteous woman who had brought many converts to monotheism and was a prophetess of a dimension that was even more advanced than her husband Avraham. Every moment of her existence was fully invested in doing the Will of G'd. The value of her life was incalculable vis-à-vis its effect upon the world. Seemingly, she was denied the value of all the years that she did not live. Losing those years of unlimited spiritual accomplishment was worse than death itself.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that although Sarah passed away at the age of 127, which was before her intended time, she was fully accredited for all the years she would have lived as a devoutly righteous woman who was fully invested in doing G'd's Will. The only reason she was not able to fully address her spiritual aspirations was because of the circumstance that had come upon her. If she would have been alive she would have achieved her spiritual potential. Therefore, she is fully accredited for all of the years she would have lived. This is the meaning of the conclusion of the verse, **"these were the years of Sarah's life."**

Rambam states in the Laws of Repentance (Hilchos Teshuvah), "If one believes that one's status as righteous (tzaddik) or evil (rasha) is predetermined, he is considered foolish for believing so. Every human being is in a position to be able to choose between good and evil. One is rewarded only because through his own choice that he did good. One is only held culpable because he chose to transgress." Rambam asks that there are several verses in the Torah which seem to contradict the concept of free choice. Regarding Pharaoh, the Torah states, **"Hashem hardened the heart of Pharaoh."** Seemingly, G'd withdrew Pharaoh's ability to choose by hardening his heart. He was thus compelled by G'd to perpetrate evil against the Jewish people. If in fact he had no choice to act in the evil manner that he had, why was he culpable for his actions? The evil that was brought upon the Jewish people should thus not be attributed to him. Nevertheless, the Torah tells us that Pharaoh was held fully accountable and was destroyed because of his evil ways.

Rambam explains that initially every human being has the power of choice; however, it is possible for one to forfeit and lose that ability through one's abuse of that choice through one's evil deeds. There are times when one acts in an extremely evil manner. It is at that time that G'd withdraws his power of choice due to the individual's choice to abuse the gift of choice. Therefore, when one forfeits his power of choice because of his perpetration of evil, he is held fully culpable although he no longer has the power of choice.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk poses the question if Moshe, after he had received the Torah at Sinai had the ability to choose to become a heretic. Reb Meir Simcha explains that Moshe's choice to become a heretic was not possible because if it were it would have undermined the basis for Torah, which was given through Moshe. If this is so, then why would Moshe be deserving of reward for not becoming a heretic if his choice had been taken from him? Reb Meir Simcha answers that Moshe was fully deserving of his position of belief in G'd because it was only through his own actions and choices that he was chosen to be the conduit through which the Torah was transmitted to the Jewish people. Thus, it was through his own choice to no longer have the choice to become a heretic. Therefore, he was fully deserving of reward.

Identically, although Sarah did not live out the years of her life that were intended for her G'd accredited her as if she did live the full length of her life in a righteous manner. Rabbeinu Yona explains in the Gates of Repentance and in his commentary on Pirkei Avos based on avos d' Reb Nosson that if a person is committed to live

a life of spirituality and piety, although his life may be cut short, he is fully accredited for all that he would have accomplished if he had lived. For example, if one were to commit to learning the entire Torah and he were to pass away prior to completing his task, he would receive full credit for his aspiration as if he had completed it. Why is this so?

One can only take the initiative to achieve certain goals. The circumstance to be able to actualize and fulfill them is dependant on G'd – if he allows the setting to be created for their performance. Sarah, our Matriarch, was committed to live a life that was fully invested in G'd. Her life was cut short because Satan had shared with her the events of the Akeidah. G'd therefore acknowledged her devotion to him not only in terms of being accredited in the world to come but also regarding her spiritual status while one is still alive.

4. 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. He 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 than 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.

5. 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.

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 – Path of the Just
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Chulin —Gid Hanasheh
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Basra
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm **Talmud: Megilah**

Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)

Enter on 54th Street

1:00-2:00 pm **Ramchal: Derech Hashem**

Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45th FL.)

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 (25th FL.)

Enter on 54th 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 (25th FL)