

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

Parshas Chayei Sarah

November 17, 2006

Sponsored by:

Robert and Roberta Hadi

In Honor of Their Son

**Jonathan's
Bar Mitzvah**

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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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
November 17, 2006

B"H

Parshas Chayei Sarah

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Visual Impressions Make the Difference

The Midrash states, "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.

The Torah states, "**You must revere your mother and father and My Shabbos you will keep.**" Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains that 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 explains that 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.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that 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 rules in the Laws of the Study of Torah that a rebbe/mentor is not permitted to behave in a light-hearted 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.

2. The Meritorious Must Have Merit

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, “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.” The Midrash answers, “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 Kohaine (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.

3. When is More is Better?

The Midrash states, “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 (Sachris, Mincha, Maariv)? It is to teach us that one must add to his prayers (mosif b'tefilos).” The Gemara in Tractate Berachos discusses the basis for the obligation of prayer.

The Gemara cites the verse which states, **“You shall serve Him with all your heart.”** The Gemara asks, “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?

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. Rambam explains that 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.) are 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. The Gemara tells us that 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 become 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.

4. The Standard To Which The Jews Are Held

The Torah tells us that Avraham instructed his faithful servant to seek out an appropriate wife for Yitzchak. The Torah states, **“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 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 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.

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 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 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.

The Torah tells us that 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 tell us that the basis for his 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 immersing 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 explain that Yaakov would only be worthy to lord over Esav if there is an advanced level of Torah study and adherence. As it states in the 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."

5. The Importance of Believing in Oneself

(from Vayeira)

The Torah states 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 slavewoman with her son, for the son of that slavewoman shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak.’** Chazal explain the word “mocking (*mitzacheik*)” to mean 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 explains the term “mocking (*mitzacheik*)” differently than Chazal. He explains, “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.” The Midrash tells us that 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?

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Kamah tells us that 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.”**

The Midrash tells us that 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.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that 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 the Torah. The Mishna tells us that 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. As the Tana Dvei Eliyahu states, "One must say - When will my accomplishments be as great as my ancestors – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov."

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- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Taanis**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Taanis**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

1:00—2:00 pm **Derech Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Taanis** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL)