

Parshas Chayei Sarah

Presented By Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky Shlita, Dean

1. The Linkage between the Passing of Sarah our Matriarch and the Akeidah

The Torah juxtaposes the passing of Sarah our Matriarch to the *Akeidah* (the binding of Yitzchak). Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that the juxtaposition communicates to us that the *Akeidah* was the direct cause of Sarah's demise. The Midrash tells us that when Avraham bound Yitzchak and was about to slaughter him, satan shared this with Sarah. Upon hearing this, she believed that Avraham carried through and slaughtered her only beloved son and this caused her to expire. She was unaware that G-d had had only tested Avraham to see if he would slaughter his son. G-d did not intend Avraham to actually slaughter Yitzchak.

It is interesting to note that the Midrash says that satan had continuously attempted to deter and stop Avraham from going to the *Akeidah*. Satan understood that if Avraham were to succeed and carry through as Hashem had dictated to him, the merit of this act would stand by the Jewish people for all eternity to silence his prosecution against them. Therefore on Rosh Hashanah – the Day of Judgment- we blow the shofar (ram's horn) which is synonymous with the *Akeidah* to silence satan.

When Avraham was traveling with Yitzchak to the *Akeidah*, satan had presented himself as a raging river which made it impossible for Avraham to continue. Avraham beseeched Hashem that he wished to carry out His Will but it was not possible because his life was in jeopardy. Immediately the river ceased to exist. After Avraham had succeeded with the *Akeidah* and was told not to inflict any wound upon Yitzchak, G-d sent a ram in the place of Yitzchak to be slaughtered by Avraham. In this way Avraham was able to actualize his feelings and it gave him the opportunity to concretize his selfless dedication to the Will of G-d. Because Avraham had actualized the *Akeidah* through the ram, the merit was established for all time to silence the prosecution of satan.

Satan was defeated. Although it appeared that Avraham was secure in his accomplishment and that from this point forward Jewish people would forever be protected from the prosecution of satan, nevertheless this was not necessarily the case. Rambam states in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (the Laws of Repentance) that if a person was evil his entire life and does teshuvah (repentance) at the last moment, all of his evil deeds will not be mentioned and his classification would be *tzaddik* (devout). Conversely, if a person lived his life as a *tzaddik* and at the last moment he regrets all the good deeds and accomplishments that he had performed, his positive record would be removed and not even mentioned by the Heavenly Court at the time of judgment. He would thus be classified as a *rasha* (evil person).

Satan believed that although Avraham had succeeded with the *Akeidah*, there was a possibility that he would be able to nullify and negate the positive value of the Binding of Yitzchak. Satan felt that if the *Akeidah* would be the direct cause of the death of Sarah our Matriarch, there would be a possibility that Avraham would be angered and regret what he had done – thus nullifying the eternal defense from prosecution against the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us that despite Avraham's understanding and linkage of events, his faith and trust in Hashem remained unshaken. He did not regret for a moment what he had done. The fact that Avraham did not regret the Akeidah – despite the pain that he had experienced by losing his life's partner (Sarah), solidified and eternalized the effect of the *Akeidah*. Satan could no longer negate its value.

Every day we say in the closing beracha (blessing) of the Morning Blessings, "... Hashem...do not bring us to the power of error, nor into the power of transgression and sin, nor into the power of challenge, nor into the power of disgrace. Let not the Evil Inclination dominate us." Based on what precedes and follows the word "disgrace" it is evident that it is addressing something within the context of spirituality and not in the physical.

Reb Elchanon Wasserman zt'l, visited the London community prior to WWII for the sole purpose of raising funds for his Yeshiva in Branovich. He was accompanied by one of the leaders of the London Jewish. Most households would only contribute a few coins and slam the door behind them. Despite this demeaning treatment, Reb Elchanon persisted in his door to door fundraising because he appreciated the great financial needs of his Yeshiva. The communal leader accompanying him asked, "How are you able to tolerate this ongoing abuse and disgrace?" Reb Elchanon responded, "My Rebbe, the Chofetz Chaim zt'l taught me that in life everyone needs to experience a certain amount of embarrassment. The question is - in what context does one experience it. Is it for the sake of Torah or for the sake of something else? I prefer to experience it for the sake of Torah." Torah is the ultimate glory. As it is stated in Pirkei Avos, "There is no glory other than Torah."

If Torah/one's spirituality is the ultimate glory, then it stands to reason that the ultimate disgrace is within the context of spirituality/ Torah. We say in the Amidah (silent Prayer) in the blessing of the Tzadikim (righteous), "...Put our lot with them (tzadikim and Chassidim) forever, and we will not feel ashamed, for we trust in You..." We are not devoutly righteous nor are we scrupulously pious (Chasidim); however we say that in the merit of our "trust" in Hashem we should not be embarrassed. We beseech Hashem to "put our lot with them" – meaning that our share in the world to come should be among the righteous and there we should not be disgraced. Although we may not succeed sufficiently within the spiritual context to be counted among the tzaddikim, we pray that in the merit of our "trust" in G-d that we should not be disgraced. The ultimate disgrace is to be spiritually blemished for all eternity.

We must pray that although there are many events which we witness and do not understand, we should not come to the point of negating our spiritual accomplishments. We must remember how Satan attempted to create a situation that could have nullified the greatest accomplishment of Avraham our Patriarch.

2. The Focus of Avraham and Sarah

The Torah states, "**Now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything (*ba kol*).**" One may think that when the Torah states "Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything" it is referring to the great wealth that Avraham had received or his renowned status as the father of all nations. Chazal teach us differently. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the word "ba kol – everything" is referring to Yitzchak his son. The numerical value of "ba kol" is the same numerical value

of “ben – son.” Meaning, the Torah is telling us that Yitzchak, the son of Avraham, was everything to his father. Prior to Yitzchak, all of Avraham’s accomplishments were only a means to an end, namely fathering the Patriarch of the Jewish people.

The Portion begins, “**V’yiheu chayei Sarah – Sarah’s lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years...**” Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the numerical value of “**V’yiheu**” is 37. Meaning, the only years that Sarah our Matriarch considered and valued were the 37 years that she had experienced with her son Yitzchak – from his birth until her passing. Is this because Yitzchak, her only child, satisfied the maternal need within her? The question is even more difficult to understand because the Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us, “Tzaddikim (the righteous) even after they have passed away are considered living” because the essence of the tzaddik is his spirituality. If this is so then it is definitely the case that Sarah our Matriarch, whose entire life was spirituality, was considered alive for all 127 years of her life. Despite this fact, the Torah tells us that out of the 127 years of Sarah’s life, only 37 of them she considered herself as “living.”

In the Portion of Vayeira, the Torah tells us that Sarah observed the inappropriate behavior of Yishmael and that prompted her to request of Avraham that he and his mother Hagar should be sent away. She was concerned that Yishmael may in some way have a negative affect on the spiritual development of her son Yitzchak. Because she understood that Yitzchak was the Patriarch and the future of the Jewish people, her responsibility was to ensure that he was to meet his full potential and not be diminished in any way. Even the slightest degree of negative influence would have untold ramifications in the spiritual development of the Jewish people. Initially Avraham did not agree with his wife; however, G-d informed him that he should heed her words because her level of prophecy was even greater than his own.

Sarah, our Matriarch, understood that the purpose of her existence was to bring the future Patriarch of the Jewish people into existence. Her life was defined by her mothering Yitzchak and guaranteeing his development to become that qualified person. Despite the fact that together with Avraham she had devoted herself to converting pagans to monotheism, her primary purpose was to be the Matriarch. Sarah was destined to be the mother of the Jewish people. With this we can understand that Yitzchak was the “ba kol - everything” for Avraham as well as for Sarah. Yitzchak was the ultimate of Avraham and Sarah’s life.

Understanding that Yitzchak was the “ba kol-everything” to his father Avraham, we are able to appreciate why he was so meticulous in his instruction to his dedicated servant Eliezer regarding finding the proper wife for Yitzchak. Avraham made him take an oath, that if he should violate any of the specifications of his mission, his life in this world and the world to come would be forfeited. It is important to note that Eliezer was not merely a chattel. He radiated with a holiness that had a semblance of his master Avraham. All the Torah that Avraham possessed was communicated to his servant Eliezer. Yet, despite all of Eliezer’s qualifications and devoutness, Avraham took every precaution to ensure that he should choose the proper wife for his son Yitzchak, who would be the future Patriarch. Yitzchak was the “Ba kol” of his father.

The aspiration of every Jew should be to emulate our Patriarchs. Just as their lives were only a means to a spiritual end, so too the endeavors of every Jew must focus on a similar purpose.

3. One’s Questions are a Reflection of One’s Perspective

The Torah states, **“And Avraham said to his servant (Eliezer), the elder of his household who controlled all that was his: “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 Canaanites, among who I dwell.”** Avraham our Patriarch gave specific instructions to his dedicated servant Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham made Eliezer swear not to deviate from the criteria that was set forth. Chazal explain that if Eliezer had violated the oath, he would have forfeited his share in the physical as well as the spiritual world.

The Torah refers to Eliezer as **”eved- slave/servant,”** to indicate that he was totally subordinated and subservient to his master Avraham. He was the chattel of his master. Eliezer was **“the elder (*zikan*) of his household who controlled all that was his (Avraham’s).”** Meaning, Avraham trusted his faithful servant Eliezer to administer all of his affairs – both financial and spiritual. Eliezer was involved in the dissemination of Torah together with his master. When Avraham went to battle the four kings, the Torah tells us that he took 318 men along with him. Chazal explain that the 318 men referred to in the verse were in fact Eliezer. “Eliezer” has the same numerical value as 318; although he was one individual, his dimension of value was the equivalent of 318 men.

The Midrash tells us that the radiance and the presence of Eliezer resembled that of his master Avraham. The Talmud in Tractate Yomah tells us that Avraham taught Eliezer all of the Torah that he knew which is alluded to through the word “Damesic” which is an acronym for “He draws and he waters others with the Torah of his master.” Although Eliezer’s pedigree was Canaanite, which is a cursed state, (as the Torah tells us - Noach cursed Canaan, the son of Cham), he nevertheless transcended that state to become spiritualized through the teachings of his master Avraham. The Midrash tells us that when Eliezer approached the house of Besuel to negotiate for the hand of Rivka (Rebecca) – on behalf of Yitzchak, they mistakenly believed that Eliezer was the master, Avraham. Despite Eliezer’s unique spiritual dimension and the selfless dedication that he had exhibited towards his master Avraham, he was instructed to take an oath to ensure and guarantee that he would take the proper wife for Yitzchak and not “from the daughters of Canaanites.” Why did Avraham need subject Eliezer to such a serious oath if in fact he was so special?

The Torah states, “The servant (Eliezer) said to him (Avraham), “Perhaps the woman shall not wish to follow me...” Despite the fact that the Torah identifies Eliezer as “servant” which indicates that his total being was subservient to his master Avraham, nevertheless, he questioned his master with “Perhaps...” Evidently the question that was asked by Eliezer was not contradictory to his subservience to his master. However, because of this, Avraham understood that the question was emanating from Eliezer’s personal conflict of interest.

Eliezer had a daughter who was devoutly righteous and seemed to be a suitable wife for Yitzchak. Avraham did not consider this suggestion for a moment. Why was this the case?

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 carried the curse of Noach. Avraham said to Eliezer, **“You come from a cursed stock and I (a descendant of Shem) come from a blessed stock and something that is blessed cannot attach itself to something that is cursed.”** Although Eliezer was dedicated to his master to the fullest extent, Avraham nevertheless bound him with a serious oath so that he should not deviate from his criteria. If Eliezer understood that he was not to be considered

because as Avraham had explained to him that he was from a “cursed stock,” then why was it necessary for Avraham to impose an oath upon him?

The Yalkut tells us that when Rivka returned with Eliezer to marry Yitzchak, she noticed him from a distance walking in the field. She was awestruck by the holiness which he radiated. Yitzchak had just returned from Mt. Moriah where he had remained for 3 years after the Akeidah order to internalize the experience. As a result of being overwhelmed by seeing this level of holiness, she slipped off of her camel and ruptured her hymen on a rock. This mishap caused her to lose her virginity. After Yitzchak had taken Rivka as his wife, he realized she was not a virgin when he consummated the marriage. He suspected that Eliezer had defiled her. In order to dispel the suspicion of Eliezer, who was fully innocent G-d sent the angel Gabriel to retrieve the rock with Rivka’s blood to show Yitzchak that she was not defiled. The Midrash tells us that because Yitzchak unjustly suspected Eliezer, his essence of being “cursed” was converted into being “blessed.”

With this fact we can now understand why Eliezer initially considered his daughter to be a suitable wife for Yitzchak. Although he understood that his essence and status was “cursed,” he had sensed that this was only something of a temporary nature. It was a condition that could eventually be overcome. Thus, his daughter was qualified to be the future Matriarch of the Jewish people. Eliezer was correct regarding his own status because he did in fact later assume the classification of being blessed. However, Eliezer was not correct regarding his daughter. Despite her devoutness, she would ultimately remain “cursed.” Avraham sensed that Eliezer was questioning the permanence of the “cursed” state, so he subjected him to an oath.

Often when one asks a certain type of question, it is a clear indication that he is coming from a certain vantage point. One’s questions, choices, behaviors, and reactions are a reflection of who he is or where he is at that moment. The questions can either stem from our conflicts of interest or flaws in our character. If this is correct, then how does one know whether his question, response, or reaction is proper or not? Perhaps our perception of reality is tainted by our own self-interests. Eliezer had Avraham to correctly guide and assist him to deal with all of his own issues. Avraham immediately understood from Eliezer’s question of “Perhaps...” that because of his serious conflict of interest, he had to be bound by an oath to guarantee the success of the mission. Who do we have to evaluate our behavior, expressions, and choices? The Mishna in Pirkei Avos states, “Make for yourself a rav (teacher) and acquire for yourself a friend.” Rabbeinu Yonah explains that the “rav” is referring to a teacher who is responsible for teaching one Torah. “Friend” is referring to an individual who does not share common conflicts of interest with the individual. The “friend” is a person who is objective regarding his fellow’s behavior. Thus, he is qualified to evaluate and guide his fellow.

4. The Consequence of Spiritual Blockage

The Torah tells us that after Eliezer had identified Rivka as the appropriate wife for his master’s son, he approached her father Besuel to negotiate for her hand in marriage. He shared with her family the many miracles that had transpired to bring him to this point. The same day that he had left Canaan was the day that he arrived in Aram Naharayim (the community of Rivka) which was a journey that would normally take many days. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that in the history of the world there were only a few instances in which people experienced this kind of miracle. This indicated the importance of this mission and that Rivka was destined to be future Matriarch of the Jewish people.

Eliezer then informs them that Yitzchak was born to Avraham and Sarah in their “old age” – thus alluding to the fact that Yitzchak’s conception and birth was a miracle. When Sarah gave birth to Yitzchak she said, “Whoever will hear what has happened to me will rejoice for me.” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Torah is telling to us that when Yitzchak was conceived and born, many women throughout the world who were barren miraculously became fertile and were thus able to conceive and give birth. The day Sarah our Matriarch had given birth was one of the most joyous in history because many benefited from the miracle surrounding this event. The world was thus aware of Yitzchak’s miraculous birth.

The Midrash tells us that when Yitzchak was weaned at the age of three, his father Avraham had celebrated by hosting world leaders, such as Shem, Ever and Avimelech. All the events surrounding Yitzchak’s life were public knowledge. Despite the fact that this information was known, Eliezer reiterated it to Rivka’s family.

Eliezer said to Besuel and Lavan, **“If you intend to do a kindness and truth with my master, tell me...”** Meaning it would be a chesed (kindness) to Avraham if they would allow Rivka to be taken as the wife of Yitzchak. After Eliezer had described the special and unique background of Yitzchak one would think Avraham was doing a kindness to Rivka’s family rather than Avraham being a beneficiary of their kindness. Additionally Eliezer negotiated for her hand with a document that was given to him by his master Avraham which stated that all of his wealth was transferred to his son Yitzchak. Thus, Rivka would be marrying a person with a substantial financial fortune.

Eliezer understood that Besuel and Lavan (his son) may not appreciate the spiritual value of Yitzchak or the fact that Rivka would be the future Matriarch of the Jewish People. However, Eliezer believed that they would value the fact that Rivka would be marrying into a family that was enormously wealthy. Besuel and Lavan attempted to poison Eliezer so that they could take the wealth that he possessed. Realizing that Rivka’s family had no relevance to appreciate all that he had said until this point, Eliezer requested of them to do a chesed with his master and give the hand of their daughter. Despite Eliezer’s negotiating skills they resisted his offer. As it is clearly seen from the verse, **“Let the maiden remain with us a year or ten months; then she will go...”** How could they have appreciated this unique opportunity to allow Rivka to marry Yitzchak? Additionally, it is difficult to understand Besuel and Lavan’s lack of interest after they had already acknowledged “The events leading to this point stemmed from Hashem!” – recognizing that Eliezer’s mission was divine in nature.

When a person has no relevance to spirituality, he may say the “matter stemmed from Hashem,” and even witness miracles without being impressed.

People often experience recurring difficulties in their lives but remain unaffected by them. They do not understand that these continuous difficulties are alerting them that a spiritual problem exists. They dismiss their unusual experiences as being “happenstance” and “bad luck.” When one assumes this posture and does not address the issues, as he should, his predicament may only become graver. Rabbeinu Yona in his work Shaarei Teshuvah explains that G-d initially causes one to experience difficulties to alert him that he must introspect and make the necessary corrections. However if these difficulties are dismissed as “happenstance,” then G-d will intensify the individual’s suffering until he either corrects his ways or is completely destroyed.

Although Besuel and his son Lavan had witnessed and heard many things that caused them to understand that Avraham and Yitzchak were unique and special, they were

not impressed. They remained unaffected. Many people say that if we would only have greater leaders, our generation would be at a more spiritually advanced level because of their influences and teachings. However we see that this is not the case. Regardless of what one is exposed to, those who have no interest or relevance to spirituality will remain unaffected and spiritually deficient. Only individuals who have an appreciation for spiritual growth will benefit from those special individuals.

5. One's Behavior is a Reflection of What One Understands (from *Vayeira*)

The Torah tells us that prior to the destruction of Sodom, an angel was sent to save Lot and his family. The angel escorted Lot, his wife, and two daughters out of Sodom. However, because Lot's wife looked back to witness the destruction of Sodom (which was not permitted) she was turned into a pillar of salt. Lot and his two daughters sought refuge in a cave fearing that the world was ending. Lot's older daughter impressed upon the younger one that since the end of the world was at hand, they needed to perpetuate the human race through cohabiting with their father. They gave their father enough wine to intoxicate him and then they cohabited with him. Subsequently each gave birth to male children who were the forbearers to the nations of Ammon and Moav.

The story of Lot's daughters cohabiting with their father raises some obvious questions. They legitimately believed that the world had in fact come to an end and thus incest was permitted. Just as Cain and Abel were permitted to cohabit with their siblings for the sake of procreation, so too were Lot's daughters justified under similar circumstances. However, there is an obvious difference between these situations. Since Cain and Abel were the first offspring of humanity, existence could not have continued unless they resorted to cohabiting with their sisters. However, at the time of the destruction of Sodom, Lot's daughters were aware that they had a special uncle – Avraham. Unquestionably, he and his family did not perish in this cosmic holocaust. If so what was their justification?

When Lot's father was cast into the fiery kiln of Kasdim and perished for not bowing to the idol, Avraham assumed full responsibility for him as if he were his own son. When Avraham left Ur Kasdim, his nephew came along with him. When Avraham left Canaan and traveled to Egypt, Lot again accompanied him and he returned with enormous wealth only because he was the nephew of Avraham. Lot was aware of the miracles that had taken place in Egypt when Sarah (Avraham's wife) was taken by the Pharaoh. Upon their return to Canaan, a dispute between the shepherds of Lot and those of Avraham arose which led to Avraham separating from Lot. Lot took up residence in the community of Sodom. When Lot was taken captive during the battle of the five kings and the four kings, Avraham did not hesitate to save his nephew (and all of his wealth) despite the fact that victory could only come about through great miracles. Had it not been for Avraham's special spiritual dimension, Lot and all he had would have perished.

Lot had been an ongoing beneficiary of his uncle's kindness and was continuously exposed to the unique dimension of his uncle's being. It is evident that not only did he lack gratitude for all that his uncle had done for him, but he never shared with his family the special, multidimensional characteristics that his uncle possessed. If Lot had truly understood and appreciated who Avraham was and all that he had done for him, he would not have suppressed his

pride in him and withheld it from his family. Where do we see that Lot did not communicate in any way to his family how special their uncle was?

This can be inferred and deduced from the decision of Lot's daughters to cohabit with their father. Their only justification for their incestuous involvement with their father was because they believed that the world had come to an end. If they had known about their uncle Avraham, who was the equivalent of a spiritual giant, they could have never believed that their father had survived the cosmic destruction of the world and their uncle, along with his family had perished. This would have been an impossibility.

After being under the tutelage of Avraham for so many years and witnessing many facets of Avraham's life (together with Sarah), how could Lot not have appreciated and prided himself in his uncle? How could he not have shared with his family his personal experiences and the relationship that he had with this special person?

Similarly, Yishmael, the son of Avraham, was loved by his father as a special son, and raised in a household of spirituality; yet he was not affected and impacted by all of his experiences. Yishmael was classified by the angel as "*perah adam* – a person whose essence is like a driven animal however he appears as a person." His behavior did not reflect to any degree the fact that he was the son of the Patriarch Avraham.

Also, we see that Esav, who was loved by his father Yitzchak (even to a greater degree than his brother Yaakov), was identified as an "Ish sadeh – man of the field." He was a heretic who denied G-d's existence. To accommodate his physicality, he had no scruples. He was totally immersed and consumed by the material despite the fact that he was the child of two parents – Yitzchak and Rivka – who were the equivalent of living angels. He was raised in a home where the Divine Presence dwelled to no lesser degree than it did in the Holy of Holies.

Evidently we see that even when one is raised, exposed, and witnesses the most unique levels of spirituality, he can still remain unaffected and oblivious to it all. Despite all that he had benefited from and witnessed, Lot chose not to process and internalize the reality of who his uncle Avraham truly was. In fact Lot despised his uncle and his beliefs.

If one studies and merits being the student of a special individual and is not influenced through his teachings, then the student truly does not appreciate and relate to who that teacher is. If he had, then he would have been inspired to emulate the qualities of his mentor. This lack of appreciation and internalization is demonstrated by the behaviors of Lot, Yishmael, and Esav.