

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

AGE AFTER BEAUTY

"And Avraham was old..." (24:1)

Every year, cosmetic companies spend major money advertising the latest wrinkle-removers. The follicly-challenged amongst us are prepared to pour all kinds of noxious smelling potions on our bald domes to encourage a little sprouting when none has sprouted in many a year. Millions of research dollars every year are spent in the pursuit of a youthful appearance.

There was a time, however, when nearly eternal youth was commonplace, when aging was unheard of. Unheard of, that is, until the father of Judaism asked G-d to change all that.

In the Midrashic commentary on this week's Torah portion, the spiritual masters (who had access to secrets of the universe) prescribe four main causes of aging:

Fear. Stress resulting from problems with children. A bad spouse. And War.

We find sources for all four in the Scriptures:

We learn the aging effects of fear from King David: The verse says, "*He was terrified because of the sword of the angel of G-d*" (*Divrei Hayamim 21:30*), and in the following verse we learn "*...and David was old.*"

That stress from problem children causes aging we learn in the Book of Shmuel: It says "*And Eli was very old and heard all that his sons did to Yisrael.*" (*2:22*)

The aging effects of a bad spouse derive from King

Shlomo: Shlomo's wives worshipped idols, which caused him to age. (*Melachim 11:4*)

The stress of war we learn from Yehoshua: The verse says "He waged war against thirty-one kings (*Yehoshua 12:24*) and immediately following it says, "...and Yehoshua was old." (*13:1*)

Even though the Torah tells us that Avraham was old, none of the above causes applies to him. Sara, his wife, held him in high esteem and was a wife of the highest caliber. His sons followed in his ways, and he was blessed with good fortune. Avraham's old age was a crown of glory.

Avraham was the first person in history to age, and his aging was of his own desire. Until the time of Avraham, outward signs of aging were unknown. People would not look any older at age 70 than at twenty. When their time came, they would pass away looking as youthful as ever.

Avraham asked G-d to change this. Avraham's son, Yitzchak, looked very similar to his father, such that when they would both enter a room people would not know which of them to accord the honor befitting the father. To avoid their embarrassment, Avraham asked G-d to age him so everyone would know who was who.

So all those medical and cosmetic companies can thank Avraham for their revenue! For, to Avraham, the appearance of eternal youth for all generations was nothing when weighed against even the possible minor embarrassment of one person

• Based on the Midrash

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels. (Some 140 gal-

lons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

ISRAEL Forever

WHEN THE POOR GET POORER

A great deal of criticism has been directed at the Israel Government's economic policy which is condemned as "making the rich richer and the poor poorer".

This week's Torah portion conveys a most important lesson for governments and individuals alike as to the importance of caring for others and reaching out to them with *chesed* (loving-kindness).

Our Patriarch Avraham sent his trusted servant Eliezer to find a young woman who would be a suitable wife for his son Yitzchak. When Eliezer arrived in Aram Naharaim, where Avraham's family lived, the only criterion he used was how

the girl would respond to his request for a drink of water. When Rivka demonstrates how compassionate she was by generously giving the water she had drawn from the well to him and offering to also supply water for his camels, Eliezer was convinced that she was the one Heaven had chosen to enter the family of the paragon of *chesed*, Avraham.

As the descendants of Avraham, all Jews are expected to have this characteristic of compassion. Serious thought must be given as to whether government cuts in child allowances, benefits for the elderly and public health care are consistent with the spirit of *chesed* which must be part of Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

BREAD OR TEHILIM

Upon arrival in one of the DP camps in Europe shortly after the end of World War Two, Rabbi Eliezer Silver, one of the leading rabbis in the U.S., made an effort to lift the spirits of the pitiful surviving Jews by organizing a communal *Kabbalat Shabbat* prayer service. Noticing the refusal of one particular Jew to join the service Rabbi Silver asked him for his reason.

"When we were in the concentration camp," the fellow explained, "there was one Jew who had a *Sefer Tehillim*. In their dark moments there were hundreds of Jews who wished to pour out their hearts to Heaven by reciting Tehillim psalms from his book. But he insisted on

receiving three slices of bread for each hour that his Tehillim book was used. If a religious Jew is capable of exploiting others in such a way I don't want to be part of the religious community and their *Kabbalat Shabbat*!"

Without any hesitation the brilliant rabbi responded. "Too bad that you look at it this way," he said in a compassionate tone. "I see it in an entirely different light. Look how noble Jews are if hundreds of them were prepared to sacrifice their bread in order to say Tehillim!"

After a few moments Rabbi Silver and this Jew could be seen walking arm in arm towards *Kabbalat Shabbat*.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sara hear that caused her death?
3. What title of honor did the *B'nei Chet* bestow upon Avraham?
4. Where was Avraham born?
5. How were Avraham's camels distinguished?
6. What is meant by "all the good of his master in his hand?"
7. What special character trait did Eliezer seek when choosing a wife for Yitzchak?
8. Why did Avraham's servant, Eliezer, run toward Rivka?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Eliezer?
10. When Lavan told Eliezer that the house was cleared out, what did he remove?
11. Who did Eliezer want Yitzchak to marry?
12. Aside from Eliezer, to which other people did Rivka offer to give water?
13. Lavan answered Eliezer before his father, Betuel, had a chance. What does this indicate about Lavan's character?
14. What did Rivka mean when she said "I will go?"
15. What blessing did Rivka's family give her before she departed?
16. Who was *Ketura*?
17. What gift did Avraham give to Yitzchak?
18. How old was Avraham when he died?
19. For how many years did Yaakov attend the Yeshiva of *Ever*?
20. How many times is Eliezer's name mentioned in this week's Parsha?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 23:2 - Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah.
2. 23:2 - That Yitzchak was almost slaughtered.
3. 23:6 - Prince of G-d.
4. 24:7 - Ur Kasdim.
5. 24:10 - They were muzzled, so they wouldn't graze in the fields of others.
6. 24:10 - Eliezer carried a document in which Avraham gave all he owned to Yitzchak so that people would want their daughter to marry him.
7. 24:14 - He sought someone who excelled in performing acts of kindness.
8. 24:17 - He saw that the waters of the well rose when she approached.
9. 24:29 - Lavan coveted his money.
10. 24:31 - Idols.
11. 24:39 - His own daughter.
12. 24:44 - To the men who accompanied Eliezer.
13. 24:50 - That he was wicked.
14. 24:58 - I will go even if you don't want me to go.
15. 24:60 - That the blessings given to Avraham would continue through her children.
16. 25:1 - Hagar.
17. 25:5 - The power of blessing.
18. 25:7 - 175 years old.
19. 25:17 - 14 years.
20. None!

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THE MISSION OF A MOUNTAIN

Mount Tavor in the north of Eretz Yisrael was the scene of a miraculous victory of Israelite forces led by the Prophetess Devora and Barak ben Avinoam over the numerically superior and better armed forces of the Canaanites.

Since it was destined to be the site of such a great miracle, the mountain asked that the Torah be given to Israel upon it. The request was rejected, says the



Midrash, because idols had been worshipped by the heathens upon it.

In the end of days, however, it will be joined with another mountain rejected for the same reason – Mount Carmel – and Mount Sinai upon which the Torah was indeed given to form the site upon which the third *Beit Hamikdash* will be built.

THE MYSTERY OF UNINTENTIONAL SIN

If a Jew unintentionally commits a sin such as eating *cheilev* (forbidden animal fats), he is obligated to offer a *chatat* sacrifice as atonement. Should he be uncertain as to whether he committed such a sin, he must offer an *asham talui* sacrifice to protect him from Heavenly punishment until he is able to ascertain whether he indeed committed the sin in question and then offer a *chatat* sacrifice.

The Sage Rav rules that there is a difference between one case and another in regard to the need for an *asham talui*. Case One is where there are two pieces of fat before a man, one of them which is permissible for consumption and the other *cheilev*, and he mistakenly assumed that both are of the permissible sort and consumed one of them. He subsequently discovers that one of them was *cheilev* but is not sure whether that is the one he ate. In such a case he must offer an *asham talui*. Case Two is where there is only one piece of fat which he assumed to be of the permissible sort only to subsequently learn that there is a doubt about its status and that it may have been *cheilev*. In this case there is no obligation to offer an *asham talui*.

Two explanations are offered by disciples of Rav for this distinction. The Sage Rava cites the passage (*Vayikra 1:17*) which discusses the *asham talui* and uses the plural term *mitzvot* to indicate that there must be more than one item involved. Rabbi Zeira, on the other hand, claims that Rav's position is that an *asham talui* is required only in a case where there is a remaining piece of fat of which an expert may be capable of ascertaining its nature and thus determining whether a sin of eating *cheilev* was indeed committed.

The difference between these two explanations of Rav's position arises in a case in which there were two pieces of fat, one of them containing the *kazyit* quantity, which is the minimal amount for which atonement is required, and the other only half of that amount. The *kazyit* was consumed and it is not clear as to whether it was *cheilev* or not. According to Rabbi Zeira's explanation there is still the possibility of clarifying this mystery through an expert examination of the remaining item. There is, therefore, an obligation for an *asham talui*. But according to Rava there is no need for such a sacrifice because there were no two items of the quantity which can fit the description of "*mitzvot*".

• Keritot 17b

EXCEPTIONAL EXCEPTIONS

One who involuntarily commits a sin for which there is a penalty of *karet* (extirpation) if done voluntarily is obligated to atone for it by offering a *chatat* sacrifice. The exception to this rule is the case of someone committing this sin while he is *mitaseik* – doing something with an object which he mistakenly thinks is something else. An example is slaughtering an animal consecrated for sacrifice outside of the *Beit Hamikdash* because he assumed that the animal was not designated for sacrifice. This exception is derived from the passage (*Vayikra 4:23*) which stresses that atonement is due only for "his sin in which he sinned". The implication is that he must be aware of the nature of the object with which he is sinning but is ignorant or forgetful of the law attached to it.

This exception also has an exception. Rabbi Nachman cites the ruling of the Sage Shmuel that if one eats *cheilev* (forbidden animal fat) he must offer a *chatat* sacrifice even if he was *mitaseik* and thought that it was permissible fat. This is so because his body derived some pleasure from this consumption.

In the same ruling we find that if one is *mitaseik* on Shabbat – he cuts a plant which is growing on the assumption that it was already detached from the earth – he is exempt from offering a *chatat* sacrifice because in regard to guilt for violation of the Shabbat laws the Torah insisted on the act being *malechet machshevet* – an act with a certain degree of direction.

To fully understand the distinction between the concepts of *mitaseik* and *malechet machshevet*, the serious scholar is directed to *Mesechta Shabbat* 72b where Tosefot elaborates on the subject. There is also a fascinating discussion in the Responsa of Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Vol. I, Res. 8) as to whether someone who is *mitaseik* is committing a sin even though he is not required to offer a sacrifice and must therefore be prevented from doing so.

• Keritot 19b

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KIDDUSH HASHEM

From: Linda

Dear Rabbi,

In the Memorial Service — the Yizkor prayer which we say on the High Holidays — we commemorate the souls of the martyrs who were “killed, murdered, slaughtered, burned, drowned and strangled” for the sanctification of the Name. The majority of victims who were killed in WWII did not go to their deaths voluntarily with the purpose of sanctifying G-d’s name, as perhaps the Marrano’s of Spain did. It seems to me that the way Jews were treated and slaughtered during those tragic years was more a “desecration” of G-d’s name. Surely, when the nations of the world saw what happened to our people, they said to themselves, “I’m glad I’m not one of the them...” Can you explain how G-d’s name was “sanctified” through the slaughter of his chosen people?

Dear Linda,

The distinction you make between the Marranos (or other victims of religious persecution throughout Jewish history) and the victims of Nazi barbarism (primarily racial persecution) is correct.

In the first instance, the perpetrators of the Inquisition were interested in waging war against Judaism by causing Jews to repudiate their ancestral faith and accept Christianity. Their war was not against the Jewish people or individual per se, and Jews who would sincerely convert would be spared and even welcomed. Under those circumstances, any Jew who, given no other alternative, chose to die for his belief rather than succumb to forced conversion, caused a sanctification of G-d’s name by forfeiting his life for his faith.

The Nazis, despite their extreme hatred of Judaism, were not interested in winning over the Jewish soul. They wanted nothing less than the complete and utter decimation of the Jewish “race”. Their anti-Jewish program began with the Jews of Germany who were to a large extent non-observant, loyal German citizens. Jews who had long since repudiated Judaism on their own volition, sometimes even having intermarried or converted to Christianity, were routed out and

destroyed. Even Aryans, who by Jewish standards were not considered Jewish, were persecuted by Nazi law for having Jewish blood.

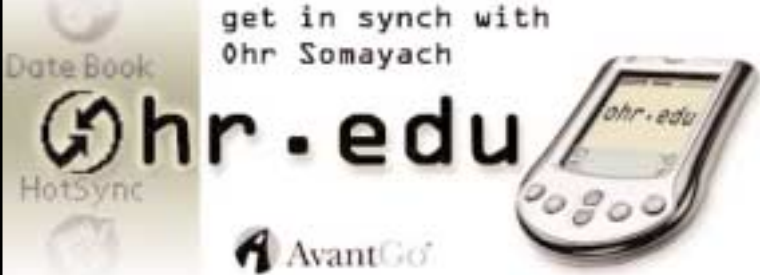
However, what seems to be your criteria for a sanctification of G-d, namely that “when the nations of the world saw what happened to our people, they said to themselves, I’m glad I’m not one of the them...”, is incorrect. Certainly, no one envied the Jews of the Spanish Inquisition. Nevertheless, the martyrs infuriated their persecutors and commanded respect from others, thereby sanctifying G-d’s name, precisely because they willingly gave up their lives for Judaism.

Did the death of the Jews of the Holocaust, who were given no choice in the matter, constitute a sanctification of G-d’s name? R’ Menachem Ziemba, who was in the ghetto, is recorded as citing Rambam that a Jew who is killed simply because he is Jewish sanctifies the Name by his death itself. Similarly, regarding the verse, “They have left the corpses of your servants as food for the birds of the sky” (Psalms 79), our Sages taught that “your servants” refers to Jews who were not righteous during their lifetime but, having died from persecution, their sins were atoned for making them servants of G-d (Sanhedrin 47). This is the source for the law that while a heretic is normally not mourned for, if he dies of persecution he is mourned for (Rama, Y.D. 340:5).

Another way in which Jews of the Holocaust sanctified G-d’s name was expressed by R’ Isaac Nissenbaum of the Warsaw ghetto. “Once when our enemies demanded our soul, the Jew martyred his body. Today when the enemy demands the body, it is the Jew’s obligation to preserve his life”. One communal leader of the ghetto remarked, “Jews cling so tenaciously to life; they fight so stubbornly for life.” In this way, the Jews contrasted dramatically the passivity and total resignation of the Russian POW’s. Even ghetto Jews who encountered them at forced labor and who offered them bread were appalled at the transformation of humans into wretchedness. In this way, the Jews’ heroic struggle for life in defiance of Nazi atrocities imbued their deaths with eternal sanctification of G-d’s name.

Sources:

- *Shoah*, Rabbi Yoel Shwartz, p. 205
- *The War Against the Jews*, Lucy Dawidowicz, Bantam Ed. 1976, pp. 291-2



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FOR WHOM THE BELL RINGS

Question: It often happens that I hear someone ringing my doorbell while I am in the middle of a telephone conversation. While I am hesitant to interrupt my telephone talk by going to the door I do appreciate the anxiety of the person at the door who is ringing. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your sensitivity towards the feelings of others is to be complimented. In regard to the question of priorities which you propose, the determination must be made as to who will suffer most from your action. Let us draw a comparison between the discomfort caused to your telephone partner who is asked to hold on for a minute and that of a

person at the door who receives no response to his ringing:

The person on the phone is aware that you are on the line and will be resuming the discussion once you answer at the door. The person at the door has no indication of whether you are at home and suffers some anxious moments until you finally show.

The investment of effort to reach you by the phone caller was no more than pressing a few buttons, while the person at the door made a considerable effort to come to your home.

The conclusion is that you should ask the party on the phone to hold on while you see who is at your door.

PUBLIC DOMAIN _____

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

The Queen's Yiddle Riddles

As per your conversation with Mrs. R. at S. High School (Queens, NY), I am sending you an e-mail to let you know that we have included 6 of the riddles from the Yiddle Riddle archive in our school newspaper. We used numbers 154, 156, 124, 126 and 97 in a Torah Riddle Quiz section and the story from number 110.

What should the process be to include other riddles in future publications of our school paper? Thank you.

• H.

Ohrnet replies:

Please continue to reprint whatever you find helpful from the riddles and other "goodies" on Ohr Somayach's website ohr.edu with appropriate notation of the source. Best wishes.

Great Graphics on Ohr.edu

I saw some wonderful graphics on your website. I would like to know if I have permission to use some of these pictures for some of my sheets for my students. I teach 1st and 2nd grade. Thank you,

• S.

Ohrnet replies:

We hope your students enjoy the graphics and their

learning is enhanced thereby. Please include the source of the graphics on your sheets of course.

Bad Samaritans

I was told by my Torah teacher that the Samaritans were once Jews who belonged to one of the Lost Northern Tribes of Israel and were loathed by the tribe of Judah for converting. Is this view in concert with your perception? I greatly enjoyed your series of articles on the lost tribes. Keep up the good work. Thank you,

• M.

Ohrnet replies:

The Samaritans first arrived in Israel when Sancheriv dispersed the nations of the world (circa 500 BCE) from the lands of Paras and Madai. The Talmud relates that the lions living in the Samaria region of Israel (hence the name Samaritans) kept attacking them and killing them, so in desperation they converted to Judaism. There is controversy whether their conversion was sincere or only for the aforementioned ulterior motive. However, according to all opinions, after a while (during the Second Temple period) it became apparent that they were in fact idol worshippers and at this point they were completely excluded from the Jewish nation.