

# OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH · 23 CHESHVAN 5766 · NOV. 26, 2005 · VOL. 13 NO. 5

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### LENS ON LIFE

“...the life of Sara...” (23:1)

**W**e are fragile people living in a fragile world. Our greatest joy can be shattered in an instant. In this week’s Torah portion, Avraham returns to his beloved wife Sarah, elated with the news that their son Yitzchak had been saved from death, only to find that Sarah had passed away.

How can we relate to situations that mix such extremes of feeling? How can we make sense of such unbearable contradictions?

Once, a noble from the town of Kabul invited the Sages to his son’s wedding feast. As the meal progressed, the king noticed that there was no wine left on the tables. He despatched his son the bridegroom to bring a new barrel from the upper chamber. The son climbed the stairway and entered the chamber. At that moment, a snake slithered out from between the barrels and bit him. The bridegroom fell to the floor, dead. When his son failed to re-appear, the king himself made his way up to the wine store. There, he found his beloved son lying lifeless between the barrels. He returned to the meal quietly. He said nothing. Such was the composure of the king that nobody guessed that anything untoward had happened.

The banquet came to its end and the guests wanted to say the blessings after the meal. The king stood up and said, “You have not come here to recite the bless-

ing for the bridegroom; you have come to recite with me the blessing for mourners. You have not come here to celebrate my son’s marriage but to accompany him to his grave.”

If the king had such control over his emotions that he was able to return to his son’s wedding banquet and act as though nothing had happened, if he was able to contain his grief to such an extent, why didn’t he control his grief further and let the guests go home unaware of the tragedy?

In truth, it was not a lack of control that made the king speak out. As long as there was no halachic necessity for him to reveal his grief, the king kept silent. However, when the time came for the blessings after the meal to be recited it would have been incorrect to recite the version that refers to the bridegroom. At that point, the correct version of the blessings after the meal was the one that seeks to comfort the mourner and his loss.

The halacha is our lens on existence, our point of interface between ourselves and the world. It is the point where our feelings and objective reality coincide. The Torah gives us the matrix of response to both the greatest joy and the uttermost sadness. There is no situation in life that the Torah ignores or bypasses. The Torah empowers us to relate to situations that extend from the everyday and the prosaic to the extraordinary and the unheard of, and by fulfilling its precepts we find order, tranquillity and meaning in our lives.

The Torah is our lens on life.

לע"נ

חיה צירל ע"ה בת צבי נ"ו

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**S**arah, 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

### NEGOTIATING FOR OUR OWN

**O**ne of the most frustrating experiences in life is the need to bargain with another party for something which is really yours.

Whether we accept the pessimistic position of Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz that no agreement can be reached by Israel with the current generation of Palestinians or the optimistic view of Prime Minister Sharon that it is possible, there is a consensus that the negotiations are nerve-rackingly tough. This recalls the posthumous tribute paid by G-d to Avraham Avinu (the Patriarch Avraham) for maintain-

ing his faith despite the fact that he had to negotiate with the Hittite residents of Hebron for a burial site for his wife Sarah in the Land which was given to him by the Creator.

Our Sages teach us that everything experienced by the Patriarchs was a preview of what would be experienced by their descendants. While there seems to be no alternative to continuing such frustrating negotiations with an impossible "partner", it is crucial for us, like our Forefather, to maintain our faith in the Divine promise that Israel is ours and will remain so forever.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT IT

**T**he Succot Holiday in Eretz Yisrael offers many old friends an opportunity to get together. People who went to school together abroad and haven't seen each other in years meet as a result of a visit to the Holy Land by those who remain in the Diaspora.

The convivial reminiscing about old times and old friends inevitably hits a soft spot in the road when Yom Tov Sheini Shel Goluyot (the second day of the holiday observed in the Diaspora) comes around. The good humor which prevails even when one friend is observing Simchat Torah while the

other is already wearing his weekday clothes can be seen in the dialogue overheard at the conclusion of the past Succot.

"Do you know why we have an extra day of Yom Tov?" asked the American of his old friend who settled in Israel. "It's because G-d loves us so much that He wants to hold on to us for another day!"

"That's not how we look at it," replied the Israeli. "Jews in Eretz Yisrael are simply smarter than those abroad, so that what we can learn from one day of Yom Tov that which takes you twice as long!"

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sarah 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 Sarah, 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 MITZVOT

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

### PEAH AND LEKET

#### Torah Source

"You shall not reap every last edge of your field and not gather in the gleanings of your harvest.. you shall leave them for the poor and the proselyte." (*Vayikra* 19:9-10)

#### Fulfillment

When reaping his agricultural produce, a Jew is obligated to leave *peah* – a little of that produce at the edge of the field which will be available for the poor and proselyte.

The gleanings – those pieces that fall from the



sickle during the reaping or from the hand during the picking - must be left behind for the poor and proselyte.

#### Reason

G-d wished that the people He chose be of generous spirit. Man's character is the result of his activities and if he is involved in generosity he will become a good man worthy of G-d's blessing. By leaving behind a part of the produce of his field so that those in need can benefit from it, he will sense spiritual satisfaction and G-d will satisfy him with His boundless goodness.

- The source of the 2,000 *amot* and four *amot* measurements
- Circling or squaring the 2,000 *amot*
- Defining the rich and the poor of the *mishna* and which type of *eiruv techumim* is preferred
- The *eiruv*-maker who turned back
- How far can one go beyond the *techum* and still be allowed to return
- Defining the limits of a city
- Why the burial place of the patriarchs and matriarchs is called *me'arat hamachpeila*
- The importance of proper language
- Rabbi Yehoshua outsmarted by a woman, a boy and a girl
- Advice on succeeding in Torah
- How Torah was first taught
- Rabbi Preida and the slow student
- Square, round and bow-shaped cities
- What constitutes a dwelling for extending city limits
- Astronomical calculations and squaring the city
- Extending city limits and connecting two cities

## THE LONG SHORTCUT

“Which is the road leading to the city?” asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania of a youngster sitting at a crossroads. “This is the shorter one,” replied the lad while pointing to one road, “but it is longer. The other road is longer but shorter.”

Rabbi Yehoshua decided to take the first road mentioned as the shorter one but when he approached the city he found access to it blocked by gardens and

orchards. He returned to the crossroads and challenged his young guide for suggesting the shorter road which turned out to be the wrong one. “But I told you,” replied the boy, “that although it is shorter in distance it is longer in reaching your goal.”

The Sage was so impressed by the boy’s wisdom that he kissed him on the head and exclaimed, “How fortunate are you, O Israel, that all of your people, from old to young, are so wise!”

There are several explanations in the commentaries (*Maharsha* and *Etz Yosef*) of how it was possible for this great Sage to misunderstand the directions of the youngster. What is perhaps even more difficult to understand is why this story is mentioned by the *gemara* in this particular place.

One perspective is that it serves as a graphic illustration of how careful one must be in properly expressing himself and in understanding the nuances in the speech of others which is discussed in the previous *gemara*. *Iyun Yaakov*, however, viewed this story as an allegorical introduction to the next *gemara* which elaborates on the way one succeeds in learning Torah and remembering it. Torah is compared in several passages in Tanach to a road. There are people who aspire to be Torah scholars but are reluctant to invest the effort and make the sacrifices necessary for reaching their goal. They foolishly believe that there is a shortcut to reaching the “city” of Torah knowledge. Rabbi Yehoshua saw in his experience that the road which seems easier to travel is not the one which will lead him to his destination. He therefore praised the youngster for teaching him a vital lesson in life and did not hesitate to record for generations that it was a mere lad who cleverly taught him this lesson.

## WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Come and see how different the ways of G-d are from those of flesh and blood. A human administers a medicine and it cures one thing and can have a harmful side effect. G-d gave the People of Israel the Torah which is a life-giving medicine for the entire being.”

• *Rabbi Yehuda ben Rabbi Chiya - Eiruvim 54a*

## THE ZODIAC

From: RS

Dear Rabbi,

A Jewish college professor told me that the symbols of the Jewish month, i.e. fish, scales, scorpion, pail, bow etc. originate from the Romans. I would like to know if this is correct because I thought that they originated from the Jews. Your web site talks about the symbols so I thought you may know the answer. Thanks, RS.

Dear RS,

With due respect to your professor, it is widely accepted in academia that the zodiac signs as we know them [Aries, the Ram; Taurus, the Bull; Gemini, the Twins; Cancer, the Crab; Leo, the Lion; Virgo, the Virgin; Libra, the Balance; Scorpio, the Scorpion; Sagittarius, the Archer; Capricorn, the Goat; Aquarius, the Water Bearer; and Pisces, the Fishes] originated in ancient Mesopotamia. The Greeks later adopted the symbols from the Babylonians and passed them on to other ancient civilizations such as the Romans who came much later. If the Jews received the zodiac signs from another culture, it was not from the Romans but from the Babylonians.

However, the Jewish perspective is that the signs of the zodiac were positioned at the time of Creation, and their influence is intimated in the Torah. Thus our Talmudic Sages describe in great detail the dynamic between the progression of the creation of the zodiac signs and their corresponding influence on mankind (Pesikta, ch. 4). Furthermore, the entire wisdom of the Torah, including the knowledge of the zodiac, was taught by G-d to Adam and his descendants. Even though it was eventually perverted and incorporated by most of humanity into idol worship, a select few such as Abraham retained its true meaning.

So writes Rambam, "Their mistaken reasoning was that since G-d created the skies and spheres as part of nature, and placed them high up and gave them dignity, as servants who serve Him, it would be appropriate to laud, glorify and honor them as well...Once this matter was decided upon, they proceeded to build temples to the stars, to bring sacrifices to them, to laud and glorify them verbally and to bow down to them...But as for the Creator, only certain individuals recognized Him, such as Hanoah, Metushelach, Noah, Shem and Ever. Things continued in this manner until Abraham...was born" (Avodat Kochavim 1:1).

In fact, regarding Abraham's having no children, the Torah states, "And Abraham said, Lord G-d, what will you

give me, seeing I go childless?...And He brought him outside and said, Look toward the heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them, and He said to him, So shall thy seed be" (Gen. 15:5-8). Our Sages explained that Abraham saw in the stars that the astrological influence under which he was born dictated that he would have no children. G-d replied, I will intervene such that your offspring will be as numerous as the very stars in which you see you'll have no children (Shabbat 156a).

The Zohar, which according to Jewish tradition is attributed to the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai of the 2nd century, correlates the 12 signs of the zodiac to the 12 Hebrew months and the 12 tribes of Israel (1:173). Since the essence of each tribe is essential to the nature of the Jewish People, which is inextricably bound with the purpose of Creation and its future fruition, this supports the ideas mentioned above that the influence of the zodiac was fixed from Creation and known to the Jewish People from the time of their inception.

It is important to remember that since the Hebrew months literally correspond to the moon, each month begins and ends with the new moon, and the full moon is in the middle of the month. Therefore, unlike the common, incorrect version of the zodiac based on the Gregorian calendar, each sign is in harmony with one month, with its greatest influence during the full moon of that month. One of the earliest ancient Jewish texts called Sefer Yetzira correlates the zodiac signs with the months, tribes and 12 faculties as follows:

*The sign of Nisan is T'leh/Aries/Ram corresponding to Judah and the faculty of Speech. This is the month the Jews overcame the Egyptian deity of the ram. Judah means "thanks", related to speech and on Passover of this month the Pascal lamb was offered and we recite the haggada.*

*Iyar is Shor/Taurus/Bull corresponding to Issachar (Torah scholars) and the faculty of Thought. In this month we must be as strong and stubborn as a bull in preparation to receive the Torah.*

*Sivan is Te'umim/Gemini/Twins corresponding to Zevulun (Torah supporters) and the faculty of Motion. This is the month of Shavuot when we received the double Tablets and should strengthen our efforts to support Torah.*

*Tamuz is Sartan/Cancer/Crab corresponding to Reuven (means "see") and the faculty of Sight. Just as the crab hides, so we should refrain from the distractions of this summer month and direct our sights toward spiritual pursuits.*

*Av is Ari/Leo/Lion corresponding to Shimon (means "hear") and the faculty of Hearing. In this month, the lion-like nations of Babylon and Rome destroyed the Temple and we must listen to the lesson and return to G-d.*

*Elul is Betula/Virgo/Virgin corresponding to Gad and the*

*continued on page six*

## REACTING TO AN ANGRY OUTBURST

**Question:** How should one react to an angry outburst from someone which seems to be completely out of character but which causes you great pain?

**Answer:** When Rachel Imanu (the Matriarch Rachel), in deep despair over her childlessness, angrily demanded from her husband Yaakov Avinu (the Patriarch Yaakov) that he provide her with children or else she will die, his response was an angry one as well. It was G-d, he replied, who had withheld children from her, and He was the One to whom she must turn.

Our Talmudic Sages tell us that Yaakov was rebuked by G-d for thus responding to a woman in such deep despair, and as punishment for his insensitivity his children would someday be compelled to bow to Rachel's son, a prediction of the scene decades later when the sons of Yaakov's other wives bowed to Rachel's son in Egypt.

The lesson of this Midrash is that we must see in the uncharacteristic outburst of a normal person the powerful emotions responsible for the explosion and react with compassion rather than anger. Simply stating that you understand the outburst to be an expression of great pain and sympathize with the suffering will effect an immediate change in the disposition of your attacker.

The important thing to remember in making yourself capable of such temperance is that you are not really the target of the outburst and need not reply in kind as an act of self-defense. The tone of the outburst is only an indication of the pain. Rachel was not really blaming Yaakov for her barrenness but was merely giving vent to her profound frustration.

Let us take a cue from the Divine reaction to Yaakov's reaction and apply the lesson which our Sages derived from it.

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*continued from page five*

*faculty of Action. This is the month of repenting, to purify our thoughts and deeds in preparation of Rosh Hashana.*

*Tishrei is Moznaim/Libra/Scales corresponding to Ephraim (fruitful) and the faculty of Coition. In this month is Rosh Hashana on which we are judged, and hope to merit a productive new year.*

*Cheshvan is Akrav/Scorpio/Scorpion corresponding to Menashe and the faculty of Smell. This month lacks a holiday and may be spiritually cold as venom, yet one must work hard to change the letters of Menashe to "neshama" – spirituality.*

*Kislev is Kashet/Sagittarius/Archer corresponding to Benjamin (warriors) and the faculty of Sleep. Here we must direct and propel the inspiration from Chanuka through the rest of the winter to overcome spiritual slumber.*

*Tevet is Gedi/Capricorn/Kid corresponding to Dan (judge) and the faculty of Anger. The siege against Jerusalem began in this month as a result of baseless hatred among Jews. Here we must be as steadfast as a goat to refrain from judging unfavorably which leads to anger and destruction.*

*Shevat is D'li/Aquarius/Water Drawer corresponding to Asher (wealth) and the faculty of Taste. By this month most of the rain in Israel has fallen and we celebrate Tu b'Shevat by eating bountiful fruits.*

*Adar is Dagim/Pisces/Fish corresponding to Naftali and the faculty of Laughter. Just as fish are covered by the sea, in this month we observe Purim which celebrates the hidden miracles of G-d which bring salvation and joy to the Jewish people.*

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