

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### The Time Machine

*“Sarah’s lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years” (23:1)*

There are many disadvantages of age: receding hairline, receding memory, oncoming waistline, oncoming expenses as you marry off your children, and more. But a great advantage is perspective. I seem to remember that the distance between my seventh and eighth birthdays was about a hundred years. From eight to nine it was around fifty. Now as soon as we put the succah away, we seem to be ready for *bedikat chametz* for Pesach. I have a theory that our sense of time is a function of time already lived.

So, every year that you live is perceived as a percentage of the total years of your life to date. As the percentage gets smaller, the years get “shorter.” But why did Hashem makes us this way? However long your life is, it’s very, very short, in a sense. And, as you get older, you actually see time contracting, faster and faster, rushing towards “the end.” An

intelligent person will take heed of this and try to use his time wisely.

“Youth is wasted on the young” is a quotation often attributed to George Bernard Shaw (although there is no source for him saying exactly that). “If youth knew; age could” is another version of this idea.

*“Sarah’s lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years”*

Maybe we can understand the seemingly redundant repetition of the word “years” three times in this verse to mean that Sarah’s perception of time when she was seven was no different from at twenty or at one hundred. Just as at one hundred years old she knew how precious every G-d given second is, so too was it at age twenty, when she stopped being a teenager, and also at age seven, when our lives in this world seem eternal.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

### The Land’s Shidduch

The Midrash extols the perfect match between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel in the following way:

“Sometimes there is a man who has a pleasant appearance but his garments are repulsive. Sometimes there are pleasant garments on a repulsive person. The People of

Israel and the Land of Israel, however, form a perfect match, for both are so pleasant.”

The People of Israel were given mitzvahs by G-d, and the Land of Israel is a place to which G-d gives special attention and in which more mitzvahs can be performed than anywhere else – a perfect match!

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Vayera: Nidah 23-29

### Laughing Out Loud

*Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, "It is forbidden for a person to fill his mouth with laughter in this world."*

This statement, found not on our *daf* but in Masechet Berachot 31a, is based on a verse in Tehillim that we say (sing) before *Bircat Hamazon* on Shabbat and Holidays. "Then our mouths will be filled with laughter, and our tongues with joy." When is "then" – the time when it will be permitted to fill our mouths with laughter and joy? When "the nations will say: Hashem has done great deeds with them (i.e. the Jewish nation)." (*Tehillim 126:2*) It would seem that the time referred to is the era of Mashiach, when there will be no more threat to the Jewish People and the nations of the world will learn to know Hashem.

This teaching regarding the prohibition against laughter in our time is cited as halacha in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 560:5, "It is forbidden for a person to fill his mouth with laughter in this world." The Mishna Berurah explains that the reason for this prohibition is that too much rejoicing might cause one to forget the mitzvahs. He adds that, according to the Taz and the Prisha, even when rejoicing in fulfilling a mitzvah, such as at a wedding or on Purim, one should not *fill* his mouth with laughter.

In our *sugya* we learn that Rabbi Yirmiyah asked Rabbi Zeira what the halacha would be in a certain hypothetical case. This case has roots in various Torah laws but is one that involves extremely unusual circumstances. These circumstances not only make the case appear absurd, but would also be an impossible case in reality, as the *gemara* explains. So why did he pose this question? Rabbi Yaakov bar Ada explained that Rabbi Yirmiya was trying to get Rabbi Zeira to laugh, but did not succeed.

Rashi elaborates that Rabbi Yirmiya posed this incongruous scenario in order that Rabbi Zeira laugh, in addition to other times in Shas that we find Rabbi Yirmiya acting in a similar way with the same motive in mind. Despite Rabbi Yirmiya's efforts, Rabbi Zeira did not show amusement, based on the prohibition against laughter taught by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Rashi concludes by saying that Rabbi Zeira was "more *machmir*," implying that he was even stricter than the prohibition taught by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

How can we understand the basic dispute between these two great Talmudic Sages regarding laughter? One approach I

have heard is that the prohibition taught by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is a ban only on "full-mouthed laughter," as opposed to a mild and restrained show of amusement. Both Rabbi Yirmiya and Rabbi Zeira agree that unbridled laughter is forbidden in this world, whereas a lesser degree of laughter is permitted according to the letter of the law. This can be seen in the verse from which Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai derives the prohibition: "Then our mouths will be *filled* with laughter." The implication is that now our mouths may not be filled with laughter – only "then" in the future – but even now our mouths may contain a lesser degree of laughter than would be deemed as "filled with laughter."

Rabbi Yirmiya felt that it was correct to permit laughter, and he acted accordingly. He wanted to convince Rabbi Zeira to do likewise, thinking that it would bring him closer to Hashem, as the verse states in Tehillim 100:2, "Serve Hashem with happiness." Although Rabbi Zeira agreed that the ban was only on full laughter but not on "partial laughter," he felt that he would come closer to Hashem if he abstained from even a small degree of laughter. He was "*machmir* on himself" – being stricter than required by the letter of the law – since he felt that this approach better suited his connection with Hashem. And this is what Rashi means when saying that Rabbi Zeira was "more *machmir*." He refrained from any laughter, acting beyond the letter of the law after his careful contemplation of his own traits, choosing the correct personal path to follow, the path that would best serve him to best serve Hashem.

An anecdote. Years ago, I learned Torah with other students from a Rabbi whom I noticed never laughed. Even when he told a story related to the subject matter that the students found quite humorous, I was astonished to observe that he didn't even crack a smile. After a while I worked up the nerve and asked him why he didn't laugh with us. He quoted to me the teaching of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai regarding being careful with laughter nowadays in order not to diminish the seriousness with which he regarded the situation of the world from the time of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. He added, however, that if I or any other student felt like laughing, it was perfectly okay for us to do so, as long as the levity did not get out of hand.

• *Nidah 23a*

## Questions

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 *Bnei 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?

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

## Answers

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!

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# ASK!

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## Is This the End?

**From: Jim in Charlotte, NC**

Dear Rabbi,  
*There is so much chaos and crisis in the world all the time. Is this the end of the world?*

Dear Jim,

Is *what* the end of the world?

A principle of Jewish faith is the belief in "Mashiach," a messianic era in which the world reaches a state of *tikun* and perfection. Rather than a twisted gnarl of meaninglessness, history is a meaningful yet misunderstood process approaching ever closer to its perfection.

This revolutionary idea is the gift to Mankind from the Jew. The words emblazoned on the United Nations building, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift sword against nation, nor will they learn war anymore," is the vision of a fifth century BCE Sabbath-observant, kashrut-observant Jew, Isaiah. He lived Israel. He said it in Hebrew.

This war-less world will be "at the end of days" (*Isaiah 2:4*) when the nations will realize that Judaism and the Torah are true and that the Jews are chosen to convey the Torah's message to the world. Everyone will look to Jerusalem and the Jews for direction; all war will cease because everyone will submit to Jewish sovereignty under the rule of a benevolent, enlightened monarch, the Mashiach.

Does this look like it's about to happen?

Still, the great turmoil, mass destruction and the "War of Gog and Magog" which are to precede the great era of peace have all been predicted in our sources; according to prophecies in our Bible and Rabbinic writings, the nations will wage war against each other and against Jerusalem, and the descendants of Ishmael will wage war against all the other nations of the world.

Does this look like it's about to happen?

The great Sage Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, known as the "Chafetz Chaim," said that "Gog and Magog" would be a three-stage process, stage one of which was the First World War. He predicted that another war even more devastating would follow in about 25 years (WWII) and said that this war would be stage two, after which there would eventually come a third war.

So, on the one hand, when we look at the horizon, we definitely don't see a peace-filled utopia anywhere out there. On the other hand, Jewish tradition tells us that it is there, and that each day brings us one day closer to it. And just as one hour and a half on September 11th seemed to change the whole world for the worse, so too can the world ever so quickly change for the infinitely better.

- Sources: *Isaiah 2:4*; *Shemot Rabbah 1*; *Zecharia 14*; *Ezekiel 38*; *Zohar Chadash Shir Hashirim 10*; *Lev Eliyahu Shemot p. 172*; *Chafetz Chaim story related by Rabbi Shimon Schwab, zatzal, who witnessed the incident*

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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*Synonyms in the Hebrew Language*  
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## The Old Man and the See

In this essay we will focus on six words for “old” that appear in the Bible and Rabbinic literature: *zaken*, *seivah*, *yashish*, *kashish*, *yashan*, and *atik*. We will also examine whether the word *vatik* also is related to “old.” We have a lot to discuss, so let’s cut straight to the chase.

In the Mishna’s stage-theory of the human life cycle (*Avot* 5:24), a person becomes a *zaken* at the age of sixty and reaches *seivah* at the age of seventy. Based on this, Rabbi Avraham Bedersi HaPenini (1230-1300) concludes that the term *seivah* applies to somebody at a more advanced age than does *zaken*. He bolsters this assertion by citing two Biblical verses which imply that one becomes a *zaken* before he reaches *seivah* (I Sam. 12:2 and Isa. 46:4). Interestingly, Rabbi Eliezer Reines writes in *Maftachot HaDamesek* that *seivah* is a contraction of the term *seva yamim* (“satisfied with days”), which refers to the age of seventy (see Rashi and Bartenuro to *Avot* there).

Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* cites a verse which places *yashish* after *seivah* (Iyov 15:11), leading him to conclude that *yashish* indicates a more advanced age than *seivah*. The next line in the above-mentioned Mishna says that when one reaches the age of ninety, he is “bent over.” Rabbi Bedersi suggests that perhaps *yashish* refers to this stage. Radak accounts for the etymology of *yashish* by explaining that such a person has “existed” (*yesh*) for a very long time. Interestingly, the word *yashish* appears only four times in the Bible, all in the Book of Iyov (12:12, 15:11, 29:8 and 32:6).

The Targum translates the Hebrew word *yashish* into its Aramaic equivalent *kashish*. The only etymological connection I could find between these two words is an unlikely idea proposed by Rabbi Mordechai Tzvi Herzka in *Divrei Chachamim*. He suggests that the letters ALEPH, YUD, and KUF can be interchangeable because in *gematria* they represent the first number in the ones, tens, and hundreds, respectively. Through this he explains that the YUD of *yashish* in Hebrew morphs into the KUF of *kashish* in Aramaic. [Rabbeinu Chananel (to *Bava Metzia*

109b) and Rabbi Nossan of Rome (*Sefer HaAruch*) write that the Aramaic word *kash* is derived from *kashish*, which means the same as *yashish*.]

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapira-Frankfurter (1743-1826) writes in his work *HaRekhasim LeVikah* that *zaken* refers to people/animals, while *yashan* refers to plants and other flora. He notes that although Iyov 14:8 refers to an old plant as a *zaken*, this is only a borrowed usage and does not reflect the word’s primary meaning.

The Targumim tend to translate the word *zaken* into either *kashish* or *sav* (with a SAMECH). The word *sav*, in turn, is related to the Hebrew word *seivah* (with a SIN). These two words form the basis of the Hebrew word *saba*, which means “old man” or “grandfather.”

To explain the basis for the word *atik* we must recall that the Hebrew language presumes a connection between time and space. That being said, the root AYIN-TAV-KUF in the Bible primarily refers to movement in terms of space. For example, when Avraham moved from one place to another (Gen. 12:8) or when his son Yitzchak did the same thing (Gen. 26:22), the verb used is to describe that movement is a derivative of this root (*vayaatek*). The word *atik* is also used to refer to babies who were “weaned” away from nursing (Isa. 28:9). In later usage, this root came to mean “copy” or “transcribe,” as though one took the information from one document and “moved” it to another.

*Atik* can also refer to something far “removed” in time, i.e. ancient. Daniel refers to G-d as *Atik Yomin* – “Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9-22). [I used to think that the English word *antique* is a corruption of *atik*, but Rabbi Shaul Goldman told me that linguists parse the word differently: *Anti-que* is comprised of the prefix *ant* (“front” or “before”) and *uque* or *okw* (“to see”) in the so-called Proto-Indo-European language.]

Another possibly-related word is *vatik*. It is found in the Talmud in the form of *talmid vatik*, which is a veteran disciple or experienced student. The famous poem *Yedid Nefesh*, ascribed to Rabbi Elazar Azikri (1533-1600), refers to G-d as *Vatik*, which one might connect with Him being called *Atik*. More famously, those men who rise early to pray at the earliest possible time are called *vatikin*. In all of these cases one might be tempted to say that *vatik* refers to being old, or at least an “old-timer.” However, there is a more plausible explanation: Ernest Klein writes in his etymological dictionary that the Hebrew word *vatik* is related to the Arabic word *wathuqa* (“firm, solid”), as one achieves seniority and distinction by acting dependably and reliably. Accordingly, *vatik* actually refers to

dependability/seniority in a specific position and not to a specific age.

A popular folk etymology connects the Hebrew word *vatikin* to the home of the Papacy and the Holy See – the Vatican. That city-state in Rome is said to be related to *vatikin* because its leaders also claim to be dependable and reliable. Nonetheless, serious linguists reject this etymology and explain that Vatican is actually derived from the Latin words *vates* (“soothsayer” or “prophet”) and *cano* (“sing” or “chant”), and refers to that site previously housing a pagan oracle before it became the center of Christianity.

*For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rclein@ohr.edu](mailto:rclein@ohr.edu)*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**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 gallons!) 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

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## YIDDLE RIDDLE

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Last week we asked:

The names of two sets of grandfathers/grandsons are mentioned in the weekday *Shemoneh Esrei*.

*Who are they?*

*Answer:*

1. Avraham and Yaakov – in the first *beracha*, and
2. Adam and Enosh – in the fourth *beracha* (*Ata Chonen...*)

While one can easily see the names in the first *beracha*, it is perhaps more difficult to find in the fourth. This is because the prayer does not actually refer to the people Adam and Enosh. Rather, these are two synonyms for “human beings.” The Malbim explains that *Enosh* refers to Man in his basic state, while *Adam* is Man at a higher spiritual level.

By the way, Mike Marmor of Thornhill in Canada not only answered this riddle but also threw in a third pair: Oved and David Hamelech. “David is mentioned in several places. Oved is mentioned in *velamalshinim* phonetically only: *'v'chol harish'a k'rega t'oved*.' This concealment is characteristic of the lineage of the Mashiach.” Thank you!

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

## *Marriage and Love*

**L**ove and marriage, the lyrics teach, *go together like a horse and carriage*. If the implication is that love is the horse and marriage is the carriage, Judaism will disagree.

The vast majority of this week's Torah portion concerns itself with the story of Yitzhak and Rivka's courtship and marriage. When Rivka returns with Avraham's servant Eliezer, Yitzhak marries her, and for the first time, the Torah describes *love* between a man and wife: *Yitzhak brought [Rivka] into the tent of Sarah, his mother. He married Rivka, she became his wife, and he loved her, and only then was Yitzhak comforted for his mother.*

Notice how the marriage *precedes* the love. First, he brings her into his mother's tent, then he marries her, then she *becomes* his wife, and only *then* does he love her. This marriage of the first Jewish son describes the model formation of a Jewish marriage, built on foundations of reason, judgment and emotional compatibility – and not on the basis of passion or sensuality.

For centuries the Jewish way has been for parents and relatives to consider whether the two young people are suited to each other – based on their character, commitments, life visions, goals, temperaments. If the

couple indeed finds those sparks of connection, their *love* forms after they marry, and that love increases as they come to know each other. The more Rivka *came to be his wife*, the more Yitzhak loved her.

When blind “love” – driven by ungrounded physical or emotional passion – is the starting point of commitment in marriage, often, each step deeper into the relationship brings with it new disillusionment.

Not so in the Jewish marriage, where love is the *culmination*, not the beginning of the relationship. *[Yitzhak] married Rivka, she became his wife, and he loved her.* Marriage is only the beginning.

The next words, writes Rav Hirsch, “have remained and will remain unsurpassed in beauty and glory” until the end of time: *and then [Yitzhak] was comforted for his mother.* A forty-year old man, inconsolable over the death of his aged mother, finds consolation in his wife! With Sarah's death, the nurturing feminine spirit – the spirit that guides and molds and supports and cares – departed from the home. It is this spirit that is the connection that man truly seeks when he goes out in search of “love.” His tent has been filled again, and so has his heart.

■ *Source: Commentary, Genesis 24:67*

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