

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 237

Chayei Sarah | Faith Shines Brightest in the Darkness



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת חיי שרה | אנגלית

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Parshat Chayei Sarah

The Woman of Valor

A couple once appeared before the rabbinical court of Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu and asked for a divorce.

"What happened?" the Rabbi inquired.

The husband answered, "My wife threw a dirty plate at me."

The wife, in tears, related:

"At the beginning of our marriage, my husband would recite the Eshet Chayil hymn on Friday night, but after a while, he stopped.

When I asked him why, he explained that I am not an Eshet Chayil and, therefore, he cannot lie and continue reciting it. This past Shabbat, I felt I was about to explode, and so I hurled a plate at him in angst."

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu's brow furrowed, and after thinking for a moment, he asked

them to return the next day to continue the hearing.

The following day, when they arrived, the Rabbi asked to speak with the husband privately and said to him: "Surely you know that King Solomon—who was married to several women—composed that psalm of Eshet Chayil. Tell me, do you know about whom he composed it?"

"No, I do not," the husband replied.

The Rabbi told him that King Solomon composed it about his mother, Batsheva, and therefore suggested that he again sing Eshet Chayil on Friday night, intending the words Eshet Chayil to refer to his own mother, to which the husband consented.

Afterward, the Rabbi turned to the wife and informed her that he had spoken with her husband and that he had agreed to resume reciting it.

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Stealthy Bribe

Two weeks later, Rabbi Eliyahu again noticed the husband at the entrance to the rabbinical court.

The husband approached him and said, "Ever since I began to once again say Eshet Chayil, my wife greets me with a shining face, and I truly feel that she is an Eshet Chayil. May I now have her in mind when I recite it?"

The Rabbi replied, "Why, of course you can! Intend its recital to be for her—and for your mother as well."¹

This story prompts reflection: why, indeed, did the custom arise to recite Eshet Chayil on Friday night?²

Before we resolve this matter, let us bring another story.

The Stealthy Bribe

Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky once recounted ('Vehigadeta, Bereshit, p. 287):

A new governor once arrived in the city of Brisk, Lithuania.

Wellsprings of Wisdom

1. 'Avihem shel Yisrael,' Part 3, p. 25.

2. In a talk delivered by Rabbi Shlomo Levinstein, he said the following ('UMatok HaOr,' Shemot vol. 2, p. 347):

"One must know that it is impossible to merit to behold the Divine Presence or a bond with the Holy One, blessed be He, without domestic harmony (shalom bayit).

Our Sages hinted at this in the opening of Tractate Kiddushin (2a): "A woman is betrothed through money, a document, or intimacy."

The words "Money, a document, intimacy" (יִסְדָּף שֶׁטֶר בִּיאָה) have the numerical value of 687—exactly the

same value as the sum of the seven exalted divine Names that govern all of the worlds:

(ע"ב, ס"ג, מ"ה, ב"ן, קס"א, קמ"ג, קנ"א) numerically 72, 63, 45, 52, 161, 143, 151.

This hints that only one who behaves humanely toward his wife will merit the presence of the Shechinah.

This behavior is expressed in three forms:

"Money" alludes to providing one's spouse with pocket money; "a document" refers to written notes of appreciation; "intimacy" means being present and available at home when one is needed."

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Stealthy Bribe

One of his first acts was to decree that the municipal Talmud Torah, the local traditional Jewish school, be closed within thirty days.

He lacked no pretexts: the classrooms were small, cramped, and overcrowded; the teachers were untrained; there was no playground—it was sheer cruelty to children to send them to such facilities.

The community activists understood what was required of them and visited his office to ascertain how much it would cost to settle the matter.

To their surprise, at their mention of a financial arrangement, his mustache bristled, he rose to his full height and declared sternly: "If I so much as sense an attempt at bribery, you will find yourselves behind bars. I do not intend to renege upon my order; in twenty-nine days the institution's gates will be locked shut!"

Bewildered, they went to the home of the city's Rabbi, Rabbi Chaim of Brisk. It was an

intractable predicament: they were ruled by a spiteful and adversarial governor who could not be bribed—what should be done?

He listened and dismissed their concerns, saying, "Leave this to me. Only please tell me: how much were you prepared to offer as a bribe?"

"One thousand rubles," they answered.

"Agreed," he responded.

Puzzled but satisfied, they departed promptly.

The Rabbi sent word to the governor that he wished to speak with him. The governor replied that he would be pleased to meet him, and an appointment was set for the next day at ten o'clock in the morning.

It was a scorching summer morning when the governor's servant announced, "The Jewish rabbi has arrived."

"Let him in," said the governor.

The governor stood to greet the Rabbi—and was stunned. The

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Stealthy Bribe

Rabbi entered wearing a warm fur hat and a fur winter coat, and he withdrew a fur-lined gloved hand to shake the governor's outstretched hand and placed his umbrella in the corner of the room.

He removed his fur coat together with a thick woolen scarf, took off his heavy hat, and remained with a velvet skullcap; streams of perspiration ran down his face.

The governor was dumbfounded and asked gently, "Is that the formal dress of rabbis?"

"No," the Rabbi exclaimed. "To walk in the hot summer in such garb would very well be to make oneself into a laughing-stock."

Words failed the governor.

The Rabbi smiled: "I understand your surprise, yet I shall reveal a secret to Your Excellency.

I had a very righteous grandmother, may she rest in peace.

She appeared to me in a dream and warned me that today, torrential rain would fall, and it would be bitterly cold.

Since I had to leave my house, I did not wish to take any chances, and so I dressed accordingly."

The governor glanced at the azure sky visible through the open windows, and his eyebrows arched in skepticism.

The Rabbi conceded: "I understand Your Excellency. I, too, would be skeptical. Yet you did not know my grandmother—a truly saintly woman, may she rest in peace."

The governor struggled to suppress the twitch of a smile that distorted his lips, but the Rabbi was adamant: "If Your Excellency does not believe me, very well then. I am prepared to wager that today, before sunset, the sky will cloud over, and a fierce rain will fall—one thousand rubles of mine against ten rubles of yours."

The governor shrugged and approached the window. He leaned out—there was not the faintest hint of a cloud; a hot, dry wind struck his face.

"Agreed," he declared. It was admittedly strange: everyone had

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Stealthy Bribe

praised the local Rabbi as extremely astute. Who could know for sure ?

“Now,” said the Rabbi, “I must discuss with you the real reason for which I came.”

“If you have come to speak about the Talmud Torah, there is nothing to discuss. The decision is final—you have twenty-eight days left to vacate the premises.”

The Rabbi sighed: “I anticipated that reply, yet it is my duty to plead and argue for the proper education of our children in the way of the Torah.”

He rose, wrapped his scarf, donned his coat, put on the gloves and his fur hat, and took up the umbrella. His heavy boots clacked on the floorboards, which caused the governor to chuckle.

The governor spent the rest of the day at his window, looking up at the sky until myriads of stars glittered in the cloudless sky.

The righteous grandmother had evidently led the Rabbi astray—proof that even the shrewdest of men can act foolishly.

The next day, at ten in the morning, the servant announced ceremoniously, “The Jewish rabbi has arrived again.”

The governor rose to meet him, and behold—the Rabbi wore a light silk robe and a visor cap, with neither scarf nor gloves, no boots, and no fur coat to be seen.

“Well,” he greeted him, “did your grandmother disappoint?”

“It happens,” the Rabbi shrugged philosophically.

“In any case, I took no risk; had you known her, you would have understood me. I have come to pay the wager.”

“Heaven forbid,” protested the governor. “That was not a serious bet at all.”

The Rabbi answered politely, “Had Your Excellency lost, you would have surely sent me the ten rubles. However, I lost, and I must pay.”

What was right was right. The Rabbi counted out one thousand rubles, and the governor silently tucked them into his pocket.

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Unique Life of Sarah

"Next time you have such a dream, take the heavy coat in your hand; you don't need to wear it all day," he advised.

"A person must indeed learn from life's events," the Rabbi agreed.

"I wish to part from you with but one request: please leave the Talmud Torah in peace," and upon those words, he departed.

The governor sat in astonishment, fingering the bundle of banknotes in his pocket gingerly.

Those who remarked that the Rabbi was fantastically clever were evidently correct; he had succeeded

in cleverly and inconspicuously bribing the governor.

Ultimately, the Talmud Torah did, in fact, remain open.

This tale illustrates how we must learn not only to give but also how and in what manner to give.

Additionally, this story provokes the question: "What indeed overcame the governor that he reneged from his resolute determination to close the Talmud Torah?"

Before we answer this question as well, let us begin and study our weekly Torah portion—'Chayei Sarah.'

The Unique Life of Sarah

Our weekly Torah portion opens by noting the number of years that our matriarch Sarah lived in this world, as it states: "And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years—these were the years of the life of Sarah" (Genesis 23:1).

Toward the end of the Parshah, the Torah records the years of her

husband, our patriarch Abraham, as it states: "And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived—one hundred years and seventy years and five years" (ibid. 25:7).

When one contemplates these two verses, one notices a difference: with Sarah, the verse concludes with the words "the

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Unique Life of Sarah

years of the life of Sarah," whereas with Abraham, this phrase is not stated at all.

Our sages expounded upon this verse and taught from here (Rashi on the verse): "The years of the life of Sarah"—comes to teach that "all of her years were equally good."

This, however, begs the question: was this not the case with Abraham's life as well?

The commentators further ask: why did Sarah not live 175 years like her husband Abraham? Why was there a discrepancy of

forty-eight years between them (for 175 less 127 equals 48)?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger explained as follows:³ It is well known that only when Abraham was forty-eight years old did he merit to recognize his Creator genuinely, whereas his wife, our matriarch Sarah, merited to have that awareness from the moment of her birth.

Now, the true essence of life and the measure of one's days is the degree of knowledge one attains of the Creator, and thus, it turns out that they both 'lived' for the same number of years.⁴

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

3. 'Derushei V'Chidushei Rabbi Akiva Eiger on the Torah (Genesis 23:1).

4. This also clarifies a puzzling question.

We find at the end of Parshat Noach: "Terach lived seventy years and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran" (Genesis 11:26)—Abraham was the firstborn, Nahor the middle son, and Haran the youngest.

The following verse then states that Haran bore two daughters, Milkah and Yiskah (Sarah's other name), who was the younger one.

But then the Torah goes on to say:

"And Abram and Nahor took themselves wives—the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah" (ibid. 11:29).

We must ask: Why did Abraham, the eldest brother of Haran, marry the younger daughter of Haran, Sarai (or Yiskah), while Nahor, the younger brother, married Milkah, the older daughter?

Rather, as we explain above, from birth, Sarah possessed true awareness of the Creator, and Abraham ignored all peripheral considerations (her youth) and instead cleaved to her sanctity.

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Beginnings of Abraham and Sarah

Let us expand further upon the greatness of our matriarch, Sarah, quoting Rabbi Yaakov Yules:⁵

The 'Megaleh Amukot' (Vaetchanan, path 94) wrote that the name "Sarah" is an acronym for Shloshah Reglei HaMerkavah—"the three legs of the Divine Chariot."

By the same token, it is known that the three legs of the Chariot are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, our matriarch Sarah weighed against them and encompassed them.

This is alluded to in the Torah:

When the angels came to Abraham, it is written, "And they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' and he said, 'Behold, in the tent'" (Genesis 18:9).

Over the word "elav" ("to him"), there are three dots—one on each of the four letters except for the

lamed—and the dots on the letters aleph, yod, vav are the initials of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

Therefore, they asked Abraham, "Where is Sarah your wife?" being that he, too, was spiritually included within her (and Abraham himself likewise included the three patriarchs, having the mystical character and attribute that is included in all of the others).

It is thus clear why it is said concerning Sarah that "all her years were equal for the good":

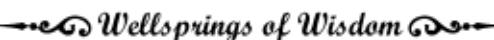
Her stature was unparalleled, and her entire life, from its very beginning, was one seamless unit of recognizing and knowing G-d.

This is one explanation, yet there lies here an even deeper gem, which we shall share below, but first, let us briefly review the life of our matriarch, Sarah.

The Beginnings of Abraham and Sarah

At the end of Parshat Noach, the birth of our matriarch Sarah is mentioned, who was,

in fact, called following her birth "Sarai" and also "Yiskah," both names noting and referring



5. 'Kohélet Ya'akov' (entry "Sarah," section 7).

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Beginnings of Abraham and Sarah

to the magnitude of her stature:

“Sarai”—on account of the power of rulership and leadership within her;⁶

“Yiskah”—because she foresaw (sochah) through the divine presence.

It is written, "And Sarai was barren; she had been with no child" (Genesis 11:30); the words "she had been with no child" are seemingly redundant, for if she was barren, she obviously had no child.

Rather, our sages explain (Yevamot 64b) that our matriarch Sarah was incurably barren, even lacking a womb. She even exhibited external signs of her condition; when Abraham first met her, he discerned those signs and understood that by the laws of nature, she could not possibly bear children.

Nevertheless, he married her because he was certain that by virtue of her righteousness, the

Holy One, blessed be He, would perform miracles for them.

To quote ‘Iggra D’Kallah’ (Megaleh Amukot, Lech Lecha):

“Abraham trusted in her righteousness in the merit of which she would surely merit to have children; she merited prophecy on account of her righteousness—surely G-d would perform a miracle for her.”

After their wedding, Abraham, at the age of twenty-five, and Sarah, at the age of fifteen, began their joint mission of illuminating the world with the sovereignty of the Al-mighty.

The two of them faced an entire world that was saturated with mockery and scorn, hatred and rejection of all things holy and G-dly; as they walked the streets, people would derisively call toward them, "Go away; we do not want to see you," yet Abraham and Sarah did not yield.

...*~* Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*...

6. The Gemara explains (Berachot 13a): "Sarai is one and the same as Sarah—only that at first she was

queen (Sarai) to her own nation; ultimately she became queen (Sarah) to the entire world."

With a shining countenance, loving speech, and a great degree of supernal pleasantness, they melted estrangement, pulverized mountains of hatred, and banished any trace of dread and fear.

From their pure hearts, they spun and wove thick, gleaming cords of love and kindness; no one could resist them; the hearts of the people were drawn after their love like a moth to the flame, like an infant to its mother's embrace.

Every day, more and more benches were added to Abraham's study hall; myriads sheltered in the shade of his wisdom and absorbed his burning faith and lofty teachings.

Reports soon reached Nimrod: "There is a young leader who is sweeping along with his faith, tens of thousands of your subjects."

Nimrod trembled—if this was the case with Abraham at such a young age, what was yet to be when he would grow older and sporting a white beard, a radiant face, and glistening eyes?

The whole world would surely follow him!

Without hesitation, Nimrod issued a death sentence against Abraham; a troop of soldiers arrived at Abraham's house, clapped irons cuffs upon his wrists, and dragged him to the dread prison in Nimrod's Fortress.

Sarah remained alone at home, realizing that this could be the last time she saw her husband. It was only by open divine intervention that G-d saved her husband, and he returned home safe and sound.⁷

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

7. It is indeed wondrous that in spite of all persecutions, Abraham and Sarah attained such lofty and awe-inspiring spiritual levels.

Rabbi Tzvi Yechezkel Michelsohn once recounted:

In my youth, I studied at the yeshiva of Rabbi Zeev Nachum of Biala, and I heard from him that on one occasion, he was privileged to sit in the presence of his master, the Chiddushei HaRim of Gur.

Parshat Chayei Sarah - The Beginnings of Abraham and Sarah

Thereafter, the Torah relates:
"And Terach took Abram, his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of

Abram, his son, and they went forth from Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan; and they came as far as Charan and settled there" (Genesis 11:31).⁸

~*Wellsprings of Wisdom*~

The Chiddushei HaRim greatly praised Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz—the author of Urim V'Tummin and Kereti U'Peleti—with great and awesome accolades for his genius, holiness, and purity, describing him in terms fit for a Tannaic sage and an angelic seraph.

He extolled at length his mastery of all of the wisdom of the world, the seven sciences, and so forth.

After the lavish praise, he concluded by saying:

"Nevertheless, persecutions can impede a man and harm him greatly.

Had Rabbi Yonatan not suffered the many persecutions that he encountered throughout his life, he would have reached extraordinarily, unimaginably exalted heights" ('HaRebbe R' Bunim MiPeshischa, p. 179).

8. Rabbi Shlomo Levinstein related ('U'Matok HaOr'—High Holy Days, p. 246):

Rabbi Baruch Ber Leibowitz, the famed and illustrious rosh yeshivah of Kamenitz, was forced to flee Lithuania during the First World War.

At that time, his father depended financially on him; owing to his advanced age, his father could not look after himself and relied entirely on his son—Rabbi Baruch Ber, who supplied everything his father required.

When they set out on their wanderings, Rabbi Baruch Ber handed all of his money to his father and told him, "When I need funds, I'll ask you."

Why did he do that? To give his father the pleasant and respected feeling that the father was supporting his son, not vice versa—that the son was the one maintaining the father's needs.

We similarly find this behavior in the Torah where it states, "And Terach took Abram, his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of Abram, his son, and they went forth from Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan; and they came as far as Charan and settled there" (Genesis 11:31).

Rashi comments: "And they went forth"—Terach and Abram went out together with Lot and Sarai.

Parshat Chayei Sarah - Spiritual Battles Along the Way

There, in Charan, Abraham became a king, and the deep admiration and reverence for his luminous persona began to spread.

Not before long, G-d revealed Himself to Abraham and commanded him: "Leave everything —leave your honor

and social standing, leave your family and friends, take your feet and set out on the road."

Abraham and Sarah, once again, left everything behind and embarked on the journey to the unknown.

Spiritual Battles Along the Way

During the journey, their food was depleted, and their money was likewise exhausted, yet G-d did not abandon our forefather Abraham, and whenever Abraham lacked anything, the Al-mighty sent someone who would lend him whatever he needed.⁹

At long last, after a lengthy period of wandering, Abraham

and Sarah arrived at the land intended by G-d—the land of Canaan—where an unexpected development awaited them: a famine, and they had no choice but to descend to the land of Egypt, as the Torah states: "There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

We must observe:

The verse begins in the singular—"And Terach took"—but ends in the plural—"and they went forth." Seemingly, it ought to have said, "and he went forth."

Rather, the Torah wishes to negate a possible mistaken notion that because Terach was an idol-worshipper, Abraham did not honor his father, and perhaps he even treated him with disdain.

The Torah, therefore, teaches: "And Terach took"—Abraham honored his father Terach and allowed him to feel that he, Terach, was the one leading and 'taking' him and his whole family, although Terach was actually being led after Abraham.

9. When Abraham later returned from Egypt with great wealth, he repaid all of his debts (Rashi, Genesis 13:3).

Parshat Chayei Sarah - Spiritual Battles Along the Way

famine was severe in the land”
(Genesis 12:10).

Yet even the way there was difficult: “And it came to pass, as he drew near to come to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife,” (ibid. 12:11) and as the Midrash explains, he told her—“I fear that they will kill me on your account, and therefore the best course of action is that you enter a trunk and hide there.”

Ultimately, however, the Egyptians discovered the hiding place, and Sarai was taken to the palace of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

The courtiers knocked at the door of Pharaoh’s salon and said, “Your Majesty, we found her inside a trunk and have brought her to you.”

Sarai found favor in the eyes of Pharaoh, who was greatly impure and defiled, and he attempted to persuade her to marry him.

The holy Zohar teaches (Chayei Sarah 122b) that in his generation, the wicked Pharaoh served as a 'chariot' and resting

place for the impure 'primordial serpent' and that the same power of persuasion possessed by the serpent was possessed by the wicked Pharaoh.

With all of the power at his disposal, he tried to ensnare Sarah, and the test was hard and terrible—it was a trial that sapped all of her strength and frayed her nerves; Pharaoh’s impurity delivered debilitating waves of wayward thoughts her way, thoughts that encircled Sarah and attempted to penetrate her mind: “Why do you insist on remaining with Abraham?—he is a destitute wanderer lacking bread and bereft of everything, it is in your best interests to marry Pharaoh and become queen.”

The holy Zohar discloses that this trial was of the same intensity as that faced by Eve, the wife of Adam, and our matriarch Sarah withstood the test heroically and did not surrender the slightest.

As a result of Sarah withstanding the test, she merited to receive into her hand the

Parshat Chayei Sarah - Victory and Coronation of Abraham

sword of the Al-mighty, which is the letters Yud-Vav (whose numerical value is 16).¹⁰

As the Magen Avraham writes (Orach Chaim, 473:29), the custom on the Seder night is to spill from the wine sixteen times (when mentioning the ten plagues), corresponding to the sword of the Holy One, blessed be He, which is called Yud-Vav-Hei-Chaf (יה-וי).

Each and every person who guards and preserves his sanctity receives this spiritual sword, which possesses sixteen edges since sixteen covenants were sealed and are tied to the sanctity of the circumcision.

Sarah, having received the sword, did not wait a moment; she grasped in her hand the sword Yud-Vav and struck Pharaoh (יה-וי, smitten by Yud-Vav).

As Rashi writes in his commentary on this tale of the Torah (Genesis 12:17): “Because of Sarai”—at her word, she would say to the angel ‘strike’ (כה), and he would strike.

At the conclusion of the episode, Pharaoh, who had been soundly defeated, sent to call Abraham: “Herein is your wife—take her and go at once !” (Genesis 12:19).

The adventures did not cease.

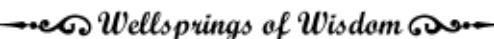
Victory and Coronation of Abraham

Lot separated from Abraham and went to settle in the Jordan Plain, and in the meantime, in distant Elam, King Kedarlaomer paced his palace livid, raging with anger at the kings of Lot's area.

The war that broke out was unavoidable, and among the

many captives that were captured, trudged along Lot, filthy and wounded, sore and forlorn.

The news reached the ears of his uncle—Abraham. Abraham approached his wife Sarah and said to her: “Have you heard what has happened? Dozens of divisions of



10. As the Chatam Sofer writes (‘Likkutim,’ Chayei Sarah).

Parshat Chayei Sarah - A Troubling Solution Named Hagar

soldiers, equipped with every kind of weapon, mounted upon mighty steeds and enormous elephants, have captured our nephew Lot.”

“So what do you intend to do?”

“I am taking my servant Eliezer with me and going out to release Lot.”

Sarah listened and agreed, and soon, the war had ended: Abraham liberated Lot, and Lot, now a free man, returned to Sodom.

Not many moments passed, and in front of Sarah's home, a magnificent carriage screeched to a halt; a man clad in armor

leaped from it, and bowing to Sarah, he drew from his satchel a rolled parchment missive, which read: "You are cordially invited to the coronation of Abraham as king of the region."

As the verse states: “To the Valley of Shaveh—which is the Valley of the King” (Genesis 14:17), upon which Rashi comments: “It was a valley where all of the nations equally chose to crown Abram over them as king under G-d and as their commander-in-chief.”

Sarah was now universally recognized as the queen that she was.

A Troubling Solution Named Hagar

Sixty years of marriage passed, and Sarah was now seventy-five.

In her extraordinary holiness, the divine secret was revealed to her:

Abraham's father and mother had been impure idol-worshippers, and a small kernel of their impurity had penetrated into Abraham's being; so long as that impurity had not been extracted from Abraham, they would not merit to have

children; only after the impurity was expelled would she bear a son.

An idea sprang up in Sarah's mind: among her many servants was Hagar the Egyptian, and because she too was sourced in the realm of impurity, she would succeed in drawing out and removing that impure kernel from Abraham.

Sarah turned to her husband Abraham and said to him: "Behold,

Parshat Chayei Sarah - Finally, a Son Born to Sarah!

now, the L-rd has restrained me from bearing—please take my maidservant; perhaps I shall be built up through her" (Genesis 16:2).

Abraham took Hagar as a wife,¹¹ and from that moment, Hagar began to treat Sarah with contempt and derision.

Sarah's plan had succeeded—Hagar drew out the minute degree of impurity that had been

found in Abraham and instead placed it into her son, whose name was Ishmael.

Sarah saw that the first part of her plan had succeeded and waited for the second part to take place—for a son to be born to her, but alas—long years had elapsed, she had already aged and withered, and she still had borne no son.

Finally, a Son Born to Sarah!

Thirteen years had passed since Ishmael's birth—thirteen additional years of painful barrenness.

Then, in one single fortuitous day, our forefather Abraham experienced an exalted and sublime revelation of the Divine, an encounter in which the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Abraham to change his wife Sarai's name.

"G-d said to Abraham: 'As for Sarai, your wife—you shall not call her name Sarai, for Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son from her'" (Genesis 17: 15–16).

Abraham returned home, his face glowing and radiant like precious stones and diamonds.

He called out to his wife: "The Al-mighty has ordered me to

Wellsprings of Wisdom

11. After the world was destroyed in the Flood, Noah and his three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—exited the ark, and from them, the world was rebuilt anew.

The Yalkut Shimoni states (Job, § 506): "Abraham married three women: Sarah, a descendant of Shem; Keturah, a descendant of Japheth; and Hagar, a descendant of Ham."

Parshat Chayei Sarah - Finally, a Son Born to Sarah!

change your name, and He said that a son will be born to us.”

Sarah’s heart sang to the living G-d.

A few days later, on the third day after Abraham’s circumcision—which G-d had commanded Abraham to do on that same occasion—several angels arrived at Abraham’s house and sat down to eat, and they asked Abraham, “Where is Sarah your wife?” (ibid. 18: 9).

Abraham answered, “Behold, she is in the tent.”

Sarah drew near to the entrance of the tent, and behind her stood Ishmael, listening as well.

One of the angels announced: “At this season, I will return, and behold—a son will be born to Sarah, your wife” (ibid. 18:10).

Ishmael heard, and a sinister smile spread across his lips: “Will such an elderly couple be able to have a child?”

Sarah saw Ishmael’s sly smile, and her heart filled with dread and alarm: “When the righteous

bless someone if at that very moment another person scoffs in disbelief, he has the power to nullify the blessing.”

Sarah closed her eyes, and sought advice and counsel—and it was revealed to her that if she herself would laugh too, she would cancel Ishmael’s laughter, and the blessing would stand and be fulfilled.

Whereupon, Sarah laughed a great and hearty laugh.

G-d appeared to Abraham and asked him, “Why then did Sarah laugh?” (ibid. 18:13)—her laughter would have been appropriate and even necessary had she received a blessing from another righteous human being; since, however, she had received the blessing for children from Me, it was not right for her to laugh—“G-d is not a man, that He should lie, nor a mortal, that He should relent” (Numbers 23: 19).

The angels soon rose and continued on their divine mission to overturn Sodom.

A bad name now attached itself to Lot, and people began to look askance at our

forefather Abraham: "What a wayward nephew he has."

Once again, for the umpteenth time, Abraham got up and relocated, as it is said: "And Abraham journeyed from there to the land of the Negev; he settled between Kadesh and Shur, and he sojourned in Gerar" (Genesis 20: 1)—Rashi explains this change of locale: "to distance himself from Lot, upon whom ill repute had been spread."

Abraham established his home and sat down to study the Torah in peace and quiet when suddenly there were heavy knocks at the door.

Before Abraham could reach it, the door burst open with a violent kick. A detachment of stony-faced soldiers entered the house and

ordered Sarah to climb into their carriage—by royal decree: "And Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah" (ibid. 20:2).

Once again, Sarah withstood a trial—and she returned home after divine intervention.

At last—after a long, wearying journey, only part of which we have detailed above—Sarah was privileged to cradle her firstborn son, the child for whom she had waited seventy-five years.

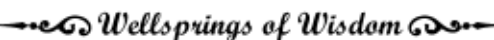
The joyous occasion was celebrated all around; all were happy in the royal couple's joy.

Yet even at this peak of joy and festivity, some had the audacity to speak negatively about Sarah,¹² yet, as she had done every time before, she endured that trial as well.

Selfless Dedication to Isaac's Education

Long, endless years of dreams and yearnings suddenly all at once became reality.

Sarah held her son Isaac in her arms and, in her mind's eye, wove the path



12. As Rashi comments (Genesis 25:19): "The scoffers of the generation

would say: 'Sarah conceived from Abimelech.'"

Parshat Chayei Sarah - Selfless Dedication to Isaac's Education

of his spiritual ascent and growth.

She invested her entire being into his education, illuminating his eyes with divine enlightenment, purity, and piety.

But at that same time, in that very same house, a wild growth was sprouting—a wayward tree—named Ishmael, and Ishmael made it his mission to corrupt Isaac.

As the Torah says: "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the

Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking" (Genesis 21: 9)—Rashi explains: "Mocking" refers to idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed.

Her heart was filled with terror—who knew what untold spiritual damage and harm he might cause.

Sarah approached Abraham with a plea that was, in truth, a command: "Drive out this maid and her son!" (ibid. 21:10).¹³

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

13. We bring an excerpt from a lecture delivered by Rabbi Shimshon David Pincus ('Peninei Rabbi Shimshon,' p. 32):

"The general role of the father is to build, whereas the role of the mother is to protect.

Consider what the Torah tells us about our holy matriarchs.

Our matriarch, Sarah, demanded of her husband Abraham: "Drive out this maid and her son" (Genesis 21:10)—Her task was to protect Isaac's sanctity.

That was also Rebecca's work: she constantly schemed how to protect Jacob from his brother Esau's evil designs.

When Esau came to receive the blessings from Isaac, she compelled Jacob to enter in his stead; afterward,

she ensured that he fled to Laban so Esau would not kill him, and she further voiced her concern to Isaac that Jacob not marry a Hittite woman. All of her efforts were protective by nature.

The same was true with Rachel and Leah: Jacob told them he had to flee their father Laban but feared they might be reluctant to harm their father.

Upon which they answered, "Are we not considered strangers to him?" (ibid. 31:15), they were chiefly concerned with raising their children in the environment that would be most suitable for them.

This is the mother's primary role—to shield the home, to ensure that no improper influences enter and that the children do not associate with spiritually harmful and corrupt companions.

Unwillingly, Abraham expelled the maid's son—Ishmael, together with his mother.

Abraham did indeed cast him out, but he did not free him from his classification of servitude; Ishmael remained designated a slave to the people of Israel.

To bring an excerpt from the holy Or HaChayim (Genesis 25: 6):

"Ishmael remains under Isaac's legal ownership; there will come a fearsome day for the All-powerful G-d when judgment will be rendered, and Ishmael will acknowledge that he is under the acquisition of his owner, Isaac."

Finally, when Sarah reached the age of one hundred twenty-seven, her husband Abraham was tested with the final and most difficult tenth trial—the binding of Isaac.

That trial proved to be too much for her; her soul departed and ascended to take shelter under the wings of her heavenly Father.

When Abraham returned from the binding, he discovered that his wife had passed away.

He soon began to busy himself with her burial, and beside her bier, he opened his mouth and delivered her heartfelt eulogy, a eulogy which opens our Torah portion.

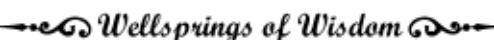
That eulogy, spoken by Abraham over Sarah, is recorded in an entire chapter found at the very end of Proverbs: "A woman of valor, who can find" (Proverbs 31: 10–31).

This passage was said, extolling the many virtues of our holy and illustrious matriarch Sarah.

Here, we must return to the first verse of our Torah portion:

"And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years—these were the years of the life of Sarah" (Genesis 23:1).

Rashi comments: "The years of the life of Sarah"—"all were equal for the good."



Chief among the tools in her arsenal is modesty, a commandment specifically

intended to safeguard the Jewish people from any harm.

Parshat Chayei Sarah - A Secure and Serene Life ?

After all that we have so far learned of the many travails and trials and tribulations throughout Sarah's life, we must ask:

Was this indeed so ? ! How were all of her years 'equal for the good' ?

Before answering this essential question, let us preface with the following important point.

A Secure and Serene Life ?

Our world is often turbulent, filled with difficulties and challenges, expectations and disappointments. Our physical reality may often cause a person to feel as though they are a ship caught in a storm at sea, and as human nature is, to seek something that will confer a sense of safety and security—yet when we pause, take stock, and shift our perspective, we often discover that life is not as harsh or unmanageable as it first appears.

The following is an excerpt from a talk delivered by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (AleI Shur, vol. 2, p. 575):

“Man lives, ostensibly, in a secure world.

A person from childhood and on has their needs more or less taken care of for them.

One's path of education is prearranged for him, and his livelihood later on is generally secure and, with a bit of effort—obtainable.

Physicians who attend to one's health are plentiful; the economic, political, and security situation of most countries are properly overseen through judges, the police, and social services who ensure proper social relations.

We are not safe from any and all mishaps, yet we have many and varied means with which to defend ourselves, and if any mishaps shall occur—G-d forbid—there are various forms of insurance that ease the suffering and the financial toll that they cause.

Only before the great disasters does humanity stand powerless: revolutions, wars,

natural catastrophes, and, above all, death itself.

Apart from these, a person generally feels himself to be fairly secure within the natural order of life into which he is born, and this sense gives him the strength and resolve to build a serene and dependable life.

We must know, however, that this feeling is fundamentally mistaken—it is an error that arises from a material vision, an eye of flesh accustomed to attribute every event solely to the visible causes; from this derives the error of assigning every occurrence to a logical and physical source.

A person who lacks proper and true faith and who views the world through a material lens attributes

all of the world's events to be brought about by corporeal causes.

This error leads to the erroneous conclusion that the wiser one becomes, and the stronger he will be, the better his arrangements will be and the higher his standing in society.

But this is an error—a painful error.

The Torah warns a person not to think that his strength, might, and power will pave the way to pleasure, happiness, and joy in this world.

Only one bound by faith and trust in the Creator of the universe possesses truly solid ground on which to stand; only such a person truly feels happiness and joy.”¹⁴

Wellsprings of Wisdom

14. In truth, a person must withdraw from his total and blind trust in the world's natural processes and know instead that everything is governed under the meticulous supervision of the Creator.

All of the ordinary, natural arrangements of the world—the builder who successfully builds, the watchman who vigilantly guards, and of those talented ones who

succeed—are not the ultimate deciders and do not represent the true reality.

The reality is that the Holy One, blessed be He, is the One Who acts; it is solely to Him that we must look and for His kindness that we must hope.

He is the Creator and the Life-Giver, the Overseer and the Ruler—there is none beside Him.

The Secret of True Bliss

In truth, the approach that is antithetical to the Torah can be summed up in a single verse: “And you will say in your heart, ‘My own strength and the power of my hand have produced for me this valor’” (Deuteronomy 8:17).

In ‘Orchot Tzaddikim’ (The Gate of Joy), the author expounds at length on this matter, explaining in detail that the lack of belief and understanding that G-d is truly in control of all occurrences and events is the root cause of all of the turbulent and negative emotions that sweep over a person—anger and sadness, bitterness and depression.

Moreover, when the haughty sense surfaces in a person’s heart that “my strength and the power of my hand” is the source of one’s power, a person is convinced that all of reality depends solely upon him.

Therefore, when one sees that things do not go as he wishes, he begins to complain and rail against the Creator—“Why is He doing this to me?”

At times, when one perceives that events do not happen according to his desires, he falls into despair and loses hope, thinking to himself: “I succeed at nothing; I have no strength to do anything.”

This is precisely what happened with the city’s governor in the story we began with earlier.

Upon assuming office, he trusted in his own power and declared determinedly: “I will close the Talmud Torah, and I will refuse to accept bribes. I will be the one to succeed in doing so.”

Yet after Rabbi Chaim of Brisk cleverly approached him and he discovered the ground slipping beneath his feet, all of his “strength and the power of his hand” vanished.

Conversely, when a person refines this feeling and truly knows that his entire being and existence—his life and all that he possesses—depend solely upon G-d—the One who spoke and the world came into being—he is then filled with authentic and constant

joy, and his entire life becomes a single fabric and source of happiness and gladness.

To quote the 'Orchot Tzaddikim' (ibid.):

"The soul's splendor is to adorn itself with the splendor of joy—that it rejoice in G-d, and let the radiance of its awe from Him shine forth to manifest and display the preciousness of its glory; let the illumination of its yearning to its Creator in loving desire, in a craving for the supreme delight, to crown itself with the diadem of the pure, refined thoughts, be desired and accepted lovingly.

Then it will rumble with the magnitude of joyous exultation toward its Beloved, the Uppermost Beloved, and bind itself in bonds of affection, seeking and probing after the most elevated virtues so as to shine in the Light of Life.

When it rises, excels, and frolics about in the knowledge of the holiness of its Fashioner, cleaving in great and devoted faith to its Creator—blessed be

He—it then unfolds in renewed gaiety and expands in its joy.

At that moment, it is sanctified with the sanctity of the Holy of Holies; it then finds favor and grace before the King of kings, and at that time, it is exalted, beautified, and glorified with the majestic splendor of His might; then the Most High sets it aside to declare its radiance, to usher it into the chambers of brilliance, and to bind it in the bundle of life.

May the Merciful One place us among His joyous servants."

These wonderful descriptions aptly describe the greatness of our matriarch Sarah: she merited a real and palpable faith, a feeling that—"He is your life" (Deuteronomy 30:20)—and throughout her days, she tangibly sensed and felt in her heart the reality of G-d.

For this reason, despite the many upheavals and travails that she invariably experienced, she nonetheless felt throughout that all of her years were, indeed, 'equal for the good.'

Parshat Chayei Sarah - Sabbath—The Mystery of Faith

Finally, let us discuss the meaning of the passage of

the ‘Woman of Valor’ a bit further.

Sabbath—The Mystery of Faith

The righteous Rabbi Shmuel, the Rebbe of Sochatshov, writes the following (‘Shem MiShmuel,’ Chayei Sarah, 5672) :

"The holy Zohar states that Abraham and Sarah allude to the soul and the body: the Divine intellect and illumination found in the Jewish people descend from Abraham our forefather, whereas all of the Jewish people's yearning for their Father in Heaven and the cleaving they feel originates from our matriarch, Sarah.

Thus, Abraham is the intellect and soul of Israel, and Sarah is the heart of Israel; whatever the Patriarchs achieved spiritually, they achieved not primarily for themselves alone but for their descendants after them—for the entirety of the house of Israel.

Thus, Abraham and Sarah correspond to the mind and the heart of all of Israel—Abraham,

the sanctity of the intellect; Sarah, the sanctity of the heart, exactly as they themselves embodied during their lifetime.

Corresponding to these two sanctities—intellect and heart—we recite in the Shema prayer: ‘Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, and attach our hearts to Your commandments.’

One cannot exist without the other—without the heart's yearning for G-d, there can be no sanctity of intellect and Divine illumination, and vice versa—yet, nonetheless, the beginning and foundation of the spiritual edifice of Abraham was his holy intellect, from which sanctity of heart consequently followed, whereas in Sarah the spiritual foundation was the service of the heart, from which sanctity of intellect and Divine illumination followed and emerged.

Therefore, we recite Eshet Chayil on Friday night, for the

Parshat Chayei Sarah - Summary and Practical Conclusions

Sabbath is a microcosm of the World to Come, within which there are none whatsoever of this world's vanities, troubles, or cravings—only longing, yearning, and thirst for the living G-d.

And to enable us to receive these sublime lights, we recite Eshet Chayil, which speaks and extolls the many virtues of Sarah; by her merit, we too ask that the sanctity of the heart and the life of the world to come be bestowed upon us."

Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. Our world is turbulent, filled with difficulties and challenges, expectations and disappointments.

Our physical reality may often cause a person to feel as though they are a ship caught in a storm at sea, and as human nature is, to seek something that will confer a sense of safety and security.

2. A person who lacks proper and true faith and who views the world through a material lens attributes all of the world's events to be brought about by corporeal causes.

This error leads to the erroneous conclusion that the wiser one becomes, and the stronger he will be, the better his arrangements will be and the

higher his standing in society.


3. The Torah, however, warns a person not to think that his strength and his might and power will pave the way to pleasure, happiness, and joy in this world.

Only one bound by faith and trust in the Creator of the universe possesses truly solid ground on which to stand; only such a person truly feels happiness and joy.


4. We must engrave deeply upon our hearts that the Holy One, blessed be He, rules the world—He who is One, unique, and indivisible; He has made, continues to make, and will make in the future all deeds, and everything is in His hand. He governs the world according to His will.

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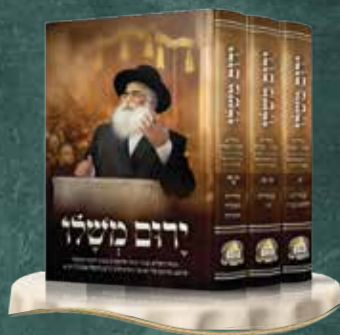


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Shabbat Times Chayei Sarah

24th of Cheshvan ,5786

City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	4:20 pm	5:21 pm	5:49 pm
Miami	5:14 pm	6:08 pm	6:44 pm
Los Angeles	4:32 pm	5:29 pm	6:02 pm
Montreal	4:07 pm	5:11 pm	5:36 pm
Toronto	4:35 pm	5:37 pm	6:04 pm
London	3:54 pm	5:05 pm	5:23 pm
Jerusalem	4:25 pm	5:15 pm	5:49 pm
Tel Aviv	4:21 pm	5:12 pm	5:45 pm
Haifa	4:19 pm	5:12 pm	5:45 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:23 pm	5:16 pm	5:49 pm

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