

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

WASTED ON THE YOUNG

"...the years of the life of Sarah." (23:1)

Those of us who are old enough to have trouble recalling large areas of their youth will at least have no trouble remembering some standout moments of total irresponsibility. Like hitching a ride with a lunatic German motorcyclist careening his BMW 900 down the autobahn at 100 miles-an-hour through torrential rain in the dead of night. Or going for a walk by yourself in New York City and suddenly realizing that you're in the middle of Harlem.

"Youth is wasted on the young" runs the old adage. As our hair thins and our waistlines thicken, we try and shed the immaturity of youth and improve our characters, and our actions.

It comes out, then, that what we really can call our 'life' — our arriving at some kind of perfection in this world — happens pretty close to our departure from this

world. Viewed in this way, our 'lives' are even shorter than we thought, and even without the help of lunatic escapades and motorcycle madness.

All the above is true of the average person. However, there are those special people whose entire lives are focused and directed to their ultimate goal. Such were *"the years of the life of Sarah."* As Rashi says *"all of them were equal in their goodness."* None of them were wasted or misspent. And even though, of course, Sarah's stature grew in old age, this was the dividend of a holy life spend in doing *mitzvot* and good deeds, rather than the necessity to forsake the foolishness of youth — for *"all of them were equal in their goodness."*

• Source: Based on the Sfat Emet

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

(Some 140 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.

ISRAEL Forever

NEGOTIATIONS THEN AND NOW

The government of Israel is constantly being maligned by the Arabs and their sympathizers as stubbornly refusing to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority for a settlement to end the conflict which has become the most discussed issue in world affairs.

The truth, of course, is that the Palestinians are willing to negotiate only if all their outrageous demands are met. They may make a show of desiring a peaceful settlement but what they really want is to have the entire land.

In the negotiations between the Patriarch Avraham and

Ephron, which is recorded in this week's Torah portion, the Hittite prince starts off with a generous offer to give Avraham a burial plot for Sarah free of charge. But when Avraham insists on paying him, he is charged an exorbitant price, indicating that the original offer was nothing more than a show by a greedy landowner.

True negotiations today can only succeed if the other side can make peace with the fact that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish People forever.

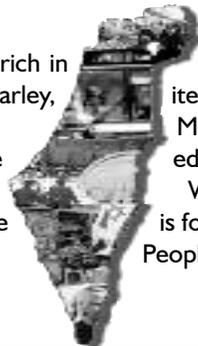
LOVE OF THE LAND

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

ERETZ CHITAH... U'DVASH – A LAND OF WHEAT... OF HONEY AND OIL

Eretz Yisrael is praised in the Torah as a land rich in seven varieties of grains and fruits: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.

Because of their connection with the land these items of food require a special blessing after they have been consumed, even if they grew outside Eretz Yisrael.



Our Talmudic Sages also saw in each of these seven items mentioned a hint to some halachic tradition which Moshe received at Mount Sinai but is not explicitly stated in the Torah.

We thus see in these "special seven" the triangle which is formed by the Torah of Israel, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

לע"נ

מרת יוטא רחל בת ר' יוסף חיים ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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!

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This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.

- When a donkey gives birth to more than one firstborn
- Receiving any benefit from firstborn of a donkey
- Qualifications needed for food matter to be susceptible to *tumah*
- When there is a doubt about the status of a firstborn
- What must be used for redemption of firstborn donkey
- If the firstborn donkey or the lamb designated for redemption dies
- If the owner refuses to redeem firstborn donkey
- Which firstborn of kosher animal is exempt from being given to the *kohen*
- Financial transactions between Jew and non-Jew
- Status of blemished animal designated as a sacrifice

MAP OF THE MESECHTA

Mesechta *Bechorot* is divided into nine *perakim* (chapters) which deal with four different subjects: The laws relating to redemption of the male firstborn of a donkey; laws relating to the male firstborn of a kosher animal; redemption of the male firstborn of a Jew; and the tithing of animals.

Although it would seem most proper to devote the first *perek* to the laws concerning the firstborn of kosher animals which have the sacred status of sacrificial eligibility, priority was given instead to the laws of redemption of firstborn donkeys.

One of the reasons given for this at the very outset of the second *perek* is that since the comparatively few laws relating to this subject are fully covered in only one *perek*, it was felt that it would be best to deal with them before devoting the *mesechta* to the bulk of laws which make up the rest of the *perakim*.

(The language of the *gemara* is that the entire remainder of the *mesechta* deals with the firstborn of kosher animals. In his commentary, Rabbi Shmuel Shtrashun (RaSHaSH) points out that only six of the remaining *perakim* deal with the firstborn of kosher animals while the last two are devoted to human firstborn and animal tithing.)

• *Bechorot* 13a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Although there is a mitzvah to behead an unredeemed firstborn male donkey, it is preferable to fulfill the mitzvah of redemption.”

• *Mishnah - Bechorot* 13a

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MATRIMONIAL MANEUVERS

From: Avigail

Dear Rabbi,

I have a sensitive question. My friend and I have both recently become kallahs. I was engaged shortly before her and have been planning on a particular wedding date. She told me recently that she has been planning her wedding for the same date. Since we have many of the same friends, this would really create a big problem. I feel like my plans take precedence since I was engaged first and have been planning longer. However, it seems that she has more compelling reasons to choose that date. What should I do? Should I stand on principle, or be considerate of what seems to be very important to her?

Dear Avigail,

Assuming, as your question implies, that you have not finalized your plans and will incur no significant loss by changing the date, it seems you should defer to your friend's wishes. Ultimately, this will also be best for your peace of mind, enjoyment of your wedding, maintaining your friendship with her, and sparing your mutual acquaintances from a very awkward situation.

What better precedent can be offered than that of Rachel and Leah, where despite all of the precautions Jacob made to ensure that he marry Rachel, Lavan was still duplicitous enough to succeed in switching Leah in her stead. Anticipating this possibility, Jacob arranged with Rachel a special code by which they would be able to make sure that the proper union take place. Yet, to avoid embarrassment and pain to her sister, at the last moment, Rachel revealed the sign to Leah, thereby possibly forfeiting ever marrying Jacob herself. As it turned out, Jacob did marry her, and her great act of self-sacrifice was rewarded with the birth of two of the most central tribes in Israel, Joseph and Benjamin, as well as gaining her the unique title "Mother Rachel" with all

that implies.

In contradistinction, your case does not involve forfeiting your groom, your happiness or your friendship. If you can relatively easily change the date (and you're certainly entitled to schedule your wedding to be the earlier of the two if you'd like), that would also be the best for you. You won't be plagued by guilt over depriving your friend of the wedding date she's so intent on having, you'll be able to make your own plans with freedom and joy, you'll enjoy your own wedding knowing you'll have full attendance and participation of your friends, and your sacrifice will be admired by all, particularly your friend, who should certainly appreciate your consideration.

Your question reminds me of a story I once heard and seems particularly relevant to this situation. There is a particularly affordable wedding complex here in Jerusalem with two different halls, one being generally considered better than the other. A certain family inquired of the use of the better hall, but was told it was already taken for that date. The family nevertheless pressured the owner, since their daughter felt very strongly about getting the nicer hall. The owner could only suggest they appeal directly to the family who first reserved it. How great was their joy when they were told the other bride was willing to forgo her reservation and take the lesser of the halls instead.

As it turned out, around the same time, a certain wealthy family was planning an extravagant wedding in a luxurious hall for their own daughter. But, being sensitive and generous people, they decided to simultaneously pay for the wedding of a needy bride scheduled to be married on the same night as their daughter. They contacted the affordable hall, asking whether the lesser of the two was reserved for that night. Having just navigated the contest for the better hall, the owner couldn't believe his ears when someone now inquired specifically for lesser. How surprised, yet relieved, he was to hear that the forfeiting bride's hall would be paid for in full by "Serendipity".

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HELPING THE SICK

Question: I have heard that it is considered a very meritorious act to visit the sick. My experience in doing this has taught me how much such visits achieve in cheering up the patient. What is the right thing to do for the sick person in addition to just being there?

Answer: Just being there, say our Talmudic Sages, can have a healing effect, as the visitor removes one sixtieth of the illness in some mystical way. But there is certainly more that you can do. One of the main objectives of *bikur cholim*, as visiting the sick is known, is to discover what his medical needs are and to help provide them. This is certainly true when the visit is in a home, but even in a hospital there may be a need to alert a doctor or nurse to the special needs of the patient or to help him on or off his bed. The psychological and emotional support provided by just keeping him company also has an impact on his recovery. The visitor

could also offer to run urgent errands that the patient has been unable to attend to, such as paying bills.

One often overlooked opportunity to help the sick person when visiting him is to pray to Heaven for his recovery. While it is possible to pray for him wherever you are there is a special dimension to doing so when you are in his company. First of all we have a tradition that the *Shechina* — the Divine Presence — is at the head of the sick person's bed. This allows us to be much closer to the objective of our prayers. There is also the consideration that when one actually sees the sick person in front of him he is inspired to a more sincere prayer.

Just remember that just saying "*Refuah Shleima*" ("Have a complete recovery") may be a nice parting remark but it is not a prayer. The proper text is to ask in any language that "Heaven send a *Refuah Shleima* to the patient together with all the other sick people of Israel."

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

"GIVE ME BACK MY SON!"

This outcry from Leah Aks came as she saw a woman approaching her on the deck of the ship "Carpathian" carrying an infant. Both of these women were among the 750 survivors of the "Titanic" shipwreck in April 1912, which claimed the lives of 1,500 people. They had been picked up from lifeboats to which women and children had been given first access.

One male passenger on that ill-fated ship had become so incensed by the crew refusing him entry to the lifeboats that he seized Leah's baby and threw it overboard, yelling "Women and children first, eh?"

A despondent Leah had to be forced into a lifeboat when her turn came. She had virtually given up on ever seeing her Efraim Fishel again and now that she finally saw him she

encountered resistance from the woman holding him and insisting that it was her child. The commotion arising from their argument brought the captain of the ship aboard. He summoned them to his quarters and listened to the impassioned stories of two women who had been separated from their babies.

Then came an inspiration to Leah. "I can prove that I'm right," she cried. "Since I'm Jewish, if the baby is mine it would be circumcised."

Leah got the baby back and came to the United States with him. A Jewish baby was thus saved both in body and soul and went on to be blessed with many children and grandchildren.

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