

# OHRNET

CHAYEI SARA, CHESHVAN 24, NOVEMBER 15, 2025

• VOL 33 NO. 6

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### *True Life Stories*

#### *“And these are the ‘lives’ of Sarah” (23:1)*

In *Parshat Chayei Sarah* the Torah turns our attention to the transition between generations. The *Parsha* begins with the passing of the righteous and proceeds to the establishment of the next stage of the covenantal mission. At first glance, the parsha’s opening seems paradoxical: “*And the life of Sarah was...*” followed immediately by an account of her passing. The Torah teaches us that true life is not measured by duration, but by connection to the eternal. A life bound to Hashem does not end; it merely changes form. What appears as an ending is, in truth, a revelation of what life always was — attachment to eternity.

Avraham rises from mourning and engages in the purchase of the Machpelah. This is the first acquisition of *Eretz Yisrael* recorded in Torah. It is remarkable that the first foothold in the Promised Land is not a palace, not a field of planting, not a place of commerce or governance — but a burial place. The connection to the Land of Israel is not anchored in transient success or human power, but in the eternal destiny of a people whose root lies beyond death. Machpelah becomes the gateway between worlds, a testimony that for those who attach themselves to Hashem, the boundary between this world and the next is not a barrier but a passage.

Avraham then turns to the future, sending his trusted servant to seek the continuation of the Divine mission through the next generation. The transition from one stage to the next is not natural; it is guided, intentional, bound to holiness. Destiny does not unfold by accident — it is sought, prayed for, and pursued with devotion. The Torah emphasizes that the journey is guided by *chesed* and Divine providence, reflecting that the covenant is carried not by force but by fidelity to Hashem’s will and kindness in the world.

There is a deep pattern here. First, the Torah instructs us how to confront the end of a life anchored in holiness; then it shows us how the future is built. Mourning and renewal; memory and continuity; loss and emergence. In the Torah view, these are not contradictions but parts of a single movement — the revelation that life under the covenant is not broken by mortality. What appears to be an end is the beginning of a new ascent.

Life means connection to the source of life. The moment the soul cleaves to the eternal, mortality no longer defines it. *Parshat Chayei Sarah* is not about departure — it is about permanence. The righteous do not cease; they endure. The mission does not falter; it deepens. The land is held, not politically, but spiritually. And the Jewish future is a product, not of nature, but of covenant.

May we merit to live lives whose every moment participates in eternity, and thereby merit to see the fullness of Hashem's promise revealed!

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Mevarchim HaChodesh  
Blessing the New Month (Part 2)

*“The greatest darkness comes just before dawn –  
but most people give up one minute before the light.”*

Ba'al Shem Tov

Mevarchim HaChodesh opens with a heartfelt prayer: **May it be Your Will, Hashem, our God and the God of our forefathers, that you inaugurate this month upon us for goodness and for blessing. May You grant us long life, a life of peace...**

Each Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh the *Shaliach Tzibur* and the congregation announce together that the following week will herald in a new month. *Mevarchim HaChodesh* is recited on Shabbat because so many of the community are present in Shul and that way everyone will be aware of which month is approaching and on which day, or days, Rosh Chodesh will occur. It is, in a sense, a technical issue – so that everyone be mindful and prepare accordingly for the upcoming Rosh Chodesh. Although the underlying reasons for *Mevarchim HaChodesh* are practical, the *Tefillot* themselves are beautiful and evocative, replete with all the blessings that a person could possibly desire. And, as such, they should be savored and recited with great anticipation.

Within our *Tefillah* we ask Hashem to grant us long life – *Chaim Aruchim*. The Ponvizher Rav questions why we ask for long life each month. After all, Jewish months are either twenty-nine or thirty days long. It does not seem as if one can really describe one single month as “*Chaim Aruchim*”. The Ponvizher Rav offers a characteristically thought-provoking and uplifting answer:

The definition of “*Chaim Aruchim*” is not necessarily the amount of time that a person lives in this world. “*Chaim Aruchim*” can also be measured according to what a person *achieves* in the time they spend here. True, the maximum Jewish month is thirty days, but there is no limit to the amount of spiritual reward that a person can achieve in the space of one month!

That is what we mean when we beseech Hashem for “*Chaim Aruchim*”: we are asking for success in filling the new month to overflowing with *mitzvot* and good deeds. With Torah and spiritual growth. With drawing closer to our Father in Heaven. By doing so, we truly transform the new month into a source of “*Chaim Aruchim*”.

Rabbi Shraga Feivel Frank (1843-1886) was only forty-three years old when he was taken from this world. And yet, Rabbi Frank was someone who lived a long and illustrious life according to the Ponvizher Rav’s definition of “*Chaim Aruchim*”. Rabbi Frank was a very close Talmid of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter and was also one of the wealthiest people in Lithuania. He owned one of the largest leather factories in Eastern Europe and had an extensive portfolio of apartments, most of which were rented out to poor Jewish families for much less than the going rate.

Every Rosh Chodesh, Rabbi Frank’s estate manager would do the rounds to collect the monthly rent. Unbeknownst to his manager, however, on the day *before* Rosh Chodesh Rabbi Frank would visit those who were so needy that they were not able to pay even the nominal rent that he charged them, and before he left he would surreptitiously slip under the tablecloth an envelope filled with enough money to cover the amount owed. When his manager came the next day to collect the rent, the family was able to pay on time in a dignified manner.

Indisputably, Rabbi Frank lived in this world for a comparatively short period of time. But equally indisputable is that his selflessness and concern for others ensured that each month that he lived was truly a month of “*Chaim Aruchim*”!

*To be continued...*

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions, POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. [info@ohr.edu](mailto:info@ohr.edu)

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

## Birkas Hamazon

The phrase “*You shall eat and be satisfied*” appears three times in *Sefer Devarim* (6:11, 8:10-12, and 11:15) and each time the Torah immediately warns against forgetting Hashem and straying from Him.

The message is clear: A person who is satisfied is in danger of becoming arrogant and throwing off the yoke of Heaven. He will attribute his success to his hard work and cunning plans, deny ever being dependent upon Hashem, and conclude that he can manage on his own. If he is a farmer, as were many of our ancestors, he will note that the bread grew from *his* land and as a result of *his* diligent farming all year long.

Since this is a common error, the Torah had to warn about it three times.

In one of those three times (8:10), the Torah advises us how to avoid this error: “...*And you shall bless Hashem, your God, for the good land that He gave you.*” The gift of *Eretz Yisrael* is something that even the most shallow-minded farmer cannot deny. We began as penniless slaves in Egypt, at a time when *Eretz Yisrael* was controlled by not one but thirty-one powerful kingdoms. The fact that growing produce involves work does not make it our own achievement. By blessing Hashem for the land every time we eat, we bring to heart that we are dependent upon Him, and this prevents us from making the dangerous error of thinking otherwise.

Additionally, the great pleasure a person experiences when he goes from being weak and hungry to being happy and satisfied makes him palpably aware of Hashem’s kindness. Eating is a most physical and sensual activity, and channeling this into a connection with Hashem penetrates to our core. This makes *Birkas Hamazon*, the blessing recited after eating bread, one of the most powerful means available to connect with Hashem.

The first Torah outreach activist, our patriarch Avraham, used this Mitzvah to bring people under Hashem’s wings. As is well-known, he would invite weary wayfarers and feed them royally. Even poor guests used to simple foods, who wouldn’t have been offended in the slightest had they been offered the same, were allowed to experience the finest delicacies that only a fabulously wealthy man like Avraham could provide (see *Avos D’Rabbi Nassan* II, ch. 14). After eating their fill, they naturally felt obliged to express their appreciation by paying their gracious host. But Avraham would say: “Did you eat from *my* food? You ate from the bounty of the God of the world! Thank, laud, and bless the one Who spoke and created the world!” (*Sotah* 10b).

The guests made the common error of thinking that they owed thanks solely to Avraham; Avraham helped them understand that everything ultimately comes from Hashem. He also made them keenly aware of the fact that Hashem created the world in order to bestow kindness. While many idolaters of Avraham's time attributed good to a good deity and bad to a bad deity, Avraham made it clear that everything is ultimately for the good, and there is only one God. He accomplished all this through *Birkas Hamazon*; and we have a similar opportunity to take a step closer to Hashem every time we eat.

The *Zohar* (*Vayakhel* 218a) emphasizes the importance of reciting Birkas Hamazon with joy, adding that one who does so merits that Hashem will bless him with a generous livelihood. In light of this, *Pele Yoetz* (*Simchah*) advises a person to eat tasty foods that make him happy so that he will recite Birkas Hamazon joyously. *Sefer Hachinuch* cites a similar tradition that whoever is careful regarding Birkas Hamazon merits that he will always have a sufficient and dignified means of livelihood. This is because Hashem wants us not only to enjoy His blessings, but also to perceive His kindness through them, so that we will merit further and greater blessings.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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Sarah, the 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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## Q & A

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### 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?

## 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.