

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH • 27 CHESHVAN 5781 NOVEMBER 14, 2020 • VOL 28 NO. 4

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Practice Makes Perfect

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

Apparently, it takes at least 10,000 hours of practice to master an artisanal skill. That's a serious amount of time, and sometimes before you clock up those 10,000 hours, you may be tempted to think that you've got it down. I well remember putting a lot less than 10 hours into learning Chuck Berry's classic intro to Johnny B. Goode, in a pastiche version I wrote called "Yankie Levine" for the Ohr Somayach Simchat Beit HaShoeva the year before last (when masks were something that only surgeons wore).

Despite what I considered to be adequate practice, on the performance night I found that my fingers had not yet learned the notes that my brain thought they had, and under the pressure of performance, well, let's say, Chuck was rockin' and a'rolling in his grave.

On the other hand (*l'havdil*), this Rosh Hashana I got up to *daven* Pesukei d'Zimra in Ohr Somayach, (my privilege for more years than I can remember). I was feeling a little 'under-the-weather,' nothing terrible,

but suffering from yet-undiagnosed COVID-19. Nevertheless, I got 'up to bat,' and thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman's relentless drumming the *nusach* into my head (and years of practice), I adequately completed my task.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe once remarked that being a Jew means being “a professional human being”. To be professional at anything – especially being a human being – takes a lifetime of dedicated practice.

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

Why didn't the Torah just write, "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred and twenty-seven years"? Sarah never stopped growing. She never stopped practicing to be a professional human being – not at seven years, not at twenty, not at a hundred and not even on the day she left the world. That is what made her the mother of the Jewish People.

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Eruvin 100-105

### A Morality Trip to the Zoo

Rabbi Yochanan said, “Even if the Torah (which teaches us morality, integrity and positive character traits) had not been given to us, we would have been able to learn many important basic elements of proper human behavior and character traits from the behavior of animals.”

Hashem created a world possessing a vast multitude of life forms aside from humans, many of which comprise the animal kingdom. Animals not only serve to fill the world with beauty, wonder and utility, but also to help instill in mankind a variety of positive life lessons – if we observe animals in the correct way. Presumably, any animal lover or pet owner is well aware of the positivity of being near to animals. In particular, the love one has for a pet will also hopefully help one express love and care for his fellow humans as well.

Rabbi Yochanan mentions on our *daf* specific examples of positive character traits and behavior that may be learned from specific animals. For example, from the cat we could learn the elementary rules of cleanliness and respect for other people's sensitivities. This lesson is expressed in the fact that a cat does not relieve itself in the presence of people and also makes an effort to cover its bodily waste. Another example is the lioness, which shows us self-control.

From the ant we could learn the importance of group cohesion and respect for one another's property. The Midrash speaks of an ant that was carrying a grain of wheat in its mouth for winter – and dropped it. Ant after ant came along to sniff the grain, and each sniffer left the grain of wheat in its place. They realized that the wheat already had an owner, and therefore left it there until the owner returned to retrieve it.

Other examples are noted as lessons we could learn from animals. These include: decency from a mule and fidelity from a dove, which mates for life. If you might ask: What causes these and other animals to behave in these particular ways? The commentaries explain that, unlike mankind, animals do not possess the moral compass or intellectual capacity for exhibiting such praiseworthy “human” forms of behavior. Rather, Hashem wanted us to learn certain behavioral patterns, and He therefore created certain animals with instincts to act in a way that communicates important positive lessons to human onlookers.

Our *gemara* cites a verse indicating how Hashem teaches us wisdom for living by means of the animal world. “He teaches us through the animals of the earth and makes us wiser through the birds of heaven.” (*Iyov 35:11*) Hashem teaches us the path of correct behavior and character traits by His instilling in animals and birds a special nature to serve as an educational path for mankind.

Elsewhere in *Shas* we find four reasons why Hashem created all of the animals before He created mankind (*Sanhedrin 38a*). In addition to those reasons, I once heard an additional reason, one that is in the theme of our discussion in this article. Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, *zatzal*, explains that each animal possesses a special trait that mankind can learn from. There are many other examples of these positive traits besides those listed by Rabbi Yochanan in our *sugya*. Mankind was created only after the animals, he explains, because a person

contains within him all of the good qualities of all of the animals. Our Sages taught this concept in a Midrash: “The Holy One... created the entire world, the heavens and the earth, the upper and lower worlds. Everything that He created in the world, He created within mankind.” (*Avot d’Rabbi Natan 31:3*) When a person loses track of his unique moral role in the order of the Creation, turning to arrogance – he is reminded that all of animal life preceded him, even the lowly mosquito.

And in addition to learning positive character traits from animals, our Rabbis point out that there are other important lessons we are able to learn from the animal world. They can serve as a type of test for humanity, regarding how we treat living beings that are not our equals. Do we treat them with compassion? Do we think about their physical and emotional pain? These issues, and related ones, are discussed in detail in traditional Jewish sources. In fact, many of our mitzvahs deal with our relationship with the animal world.

● *Eruvin 100b*

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## WHAT'S IN A WORD

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### Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

#### Chayei Sarah: Boys and Girls (Part 1)

The Torah uses three different words to refer to Rebecca as a “girl”: *naarah* (Gen. 24:14; 24:16; 24:28; 24:55; 24:57), *betulah* (Gen. 24:16), and *almah* (Gen. 24:43). Of course, the most common Hebrew word for “girl” is *yaldah*. Each of these four words also has a masculine counterpart that means “boy” (*naar*, *bachur*, *elem*, and *yeled*). In this essay we will seek to understand the possible nuances expressed by these four sets of words, and show how they are not true synonyms.

Let’s begin with the terms *naar/naarah*. The Talmud (*Kesuvos 39a*) defines *naarah* as a girl from the age of twelve until six months after she has reached physical maturity. This would suggest that the term *naar* for a “boy” likewise refers specifically to a boy at the age of thirteen. Indeed, Rashi (to Gen. 25:27) explains that when the Torah refers to Jacob and Esau as *ne’arim*, this means that they were thirteen. This also explains why Ishmael was called a *naar* when the angels visited Abraham (see Rashi to Gen. 18:7) – at that time he was thirteen years old (see Gen. 17:25).

Nonetheless, it is quite difficult to define *naar/naarah* as belonging to a certain age bracket

because we find those words used in the Bible multiple times to refer to girls who were not twelve years old and boys who were not thirteen. Case in point: the Torah refers to Rebecca as a *naarah* when Eliezer chose her as Isaac’s wife, yet none of the commentators explain that she was twelve years old. According to *Seder Olam* (ch. 1), she was three years old when she married Isaac, which is too young to fit our definition of *naarah*; and according to *Sifrei* (to Deut. 33:21), she was fourteen years old, which is too old.

This problem is compounded when we survey the various males referred to as a *naar* in the Bible. We find baby Moses called a *naar* when he was three-months old (Ex. 2:6). Furthermore, Ishmael was called a *naar* when he was thirteen years old, but he is also called a *naar* three years later when he was already 16 years old (see Gen. 21:12; 21:17-20). Similarly, Joseph is called a *naar* when he was seventeen years old (Gen. 37:2), and was still called a *naar* when he was thirty years old (Gen. 41:12). We similarly find Joseph’s younger brother, Benjamin, called a *naar* at the age of thirty-one (Gen. 44:22, 44:33); King David’s son Absalom, at

the age of twenty-one (II Sam. 18:32); King Solomon's son Rehoboam, at the age of forty-one (II Chron. 13:7); and Moses' attendant Joshua, at the age of fifty-seven (Ex. 33:11).

Possibly, because of these questions, *Midrash Mishlei* (to Prov. 1:4) expands the age limit of the term *naar* to twenty, twenty-five, and even thirty years old. This resolves most of the difficulties we raised, but does not account for the cases of baby Moses, Rehoboam, and Joshua. Taken altogether, these passages suggest that the terms *naar/naarah* do not refer to a specific age group, but to something else.

When the Torah calls the seventeen-year old Joseph a *naar*, Rashi (to Gen. 37:2) comments that Joseph used to engage in seemingly immature childlike activities, like fixing his hair and tending to his eyes. Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (1455-1526) explains that the Torah did not mean to brand Joseph a *naar*, but to describe his behavior as *naar*-like. He doubles down on our assumption that *naar* refers to a boy specifically between the ages of thirteen, and thirteen-and-a-half, but adds that, depending on the context, the term *naar* can sometimes apply to a male outside of that age bracket if that person somehow resembles an actual *naar*.\*

For example, when baby Moses was called a *naar*, this either refers to the fact that Moses' voice sounded like the voice of an actual *naar*, or that his mother had enclosed him in the basket with a sort of mini-wedding canopy expected of an actual *naar* because she anticipated missing him getting married (see *Sotah* 12b).

In the case of Joseph, his immature behavior was enough of a reason for the Torah to brand him a *naar*, even as he was older than the age usually denoted by that term. Furthermore, Mizrachi explains that Rehoboam was called a *naar* as a forty-one year old because he was immature and had weak leadership skills, as if he were a young boy. When Joseph was again called a *naar* at the age of thirty (Gen. 41:12), this did not actually reflect anything immature about Joseph's behavior. Rather, as Rashi explains, the Pharaoh's butler

called Joseph a *naar* in order to disparage him and imply that Joseph was not worthy of the greatness that awaited him.

Turning to the cases of Benjamin and Absalom, Rabbi Mizrachi explains why they were called *naar* at more advanced ages than that term suggests. Vis-à-vis their fathers, they are always going to be considered a "boy," even when they are in their twenties and thirties.

Finally, Rabbi Mizrachi explains that Joshua was called a *naar* in his late fifties because that verse was said in the context of his serving Moses, and anybody who functions as a servant in the service of others can be called a *naar*, regardless of their actual age (see also Radak to Joshua 6:23, who makes this point). Although Rabbi Mizrachi does not mention this, the Torah also calls Isaac a *naar* at the age of thirty-seven (Gen. 22:5) and Ishmael a *naar* (Gen. 22:3) at the age of fifty-one. We can account for both examples by explaining that they were both attending to Abraham, and essentially just following his lead, as a child might follow his father.

With this information in hand, we can now begin to consider why the Torah might refer to Rebecca as both a *naarah* and an *almah*. Ibn Ezra (to Song of Songs 1:3) explains that the word *almah* denotes a girl who is younger than a *naarah*. Accordingly, we may explain that Rebecca's physical age was that of an *almah* – younger than a *naarah* – but her emotional/intellectual maturity and/or her spiritual stature was on par with that of an older *naarah*. For this reason, both of those terms are appropriate in describing Rebecca. (This understanding works best if Rebecca was three years old when she was chosen as Isaac's mate.)

According to many commentators, the words *elem* and *almah* are related to the Hebrew words *eilum* and *ne'elam*, which mean "hidden." Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 13:15) explains the connection by noting that *elem* refers to a "young *naar*" who has not matured/developed yet, such that his potential remains "hidden" and "unrealized." *Peirush HaRokeach* points out that throughout the story of David and Jonathan's

secret pact, the lad who served as their go-between is called a *naar* (see I Sam. 20:142), but in one instance he is referred to as an *elem* (I Sam. 20:22), in allusion to their need to keep the agreement “hidden” from Jonathan’s father, King Saul.

Based on this link, the commentators offer various ways of understanding the word *almah* as differing from the word *naarah*. For example, *Peirush HaRokeach* explains that the term *almah* refers to a girl who is less “outgoing” than the term *naarah* would indicate. Accordingly, Rebecca may have already reached the age of *naarah* and perhaps even advanced beyond that technical stage of development (if she was fourteen), yet she was still an *almah* because she was “hidden” from other people. *Peirush HaRokeach* adds that the term *almah* teaches us that Rebecca was such an innocent and sheltered damsel that she had never even been propositioned before, something apparently uncommon for a girl of her age at that time and place.

Rabbeinu Efrayim ben Shimshon (to Gen. 24:43) explains that the term *almah* said about Rebecca, and the word *elem* said about King David (I Sam. 17:56), imply a person who “hides” their words, which is typically a sign of someone wise. Thus, *naarah* might describe Rebecca’s physical age, while *almah* speaks more about her intelligence.

Rabbi Shimon Dov Ber Analak of Siedlce (1848-1907) explains that the two terms in question refer to two qualities characteristic of people in the age of adolescence. The word *naar* relates to the young adult’s tenacious industriousness, which gives them the resolve to “shake off” (*l’na’er*) anything that might get in their way and impede their ambitions. The term *elem*, on the other hand, does not refer to the adolescent’s tenacity, but to their sheer power and strength. This meaning of *elem* in the sense of “energetic” is related to the word *alim* (with an ALEPH), which is the standard Targum rendering of *ometz/amitz* (“strong” or “resilient”).

*Chizkuni* (to Gen. 24:44) contends that the words *naarah* and *almah* mean the exact same thing, but

that *naarah* is a Hebrew word while *almah* is Aramaic. He explains that in the story at hand, the narrator first refers to the young lass as a *naarah* (in Genesis 24:16) because the Torah is written in Hebrew. Afterwards, in Eliezer’s dialogue with the girl’s family, Eliezer refers to her as an *almah* (to Gen. 24:43) because he thought that Rebecca’s family understood only Aramaic (because they lived in Harran, which is in Aram, where Aramaic was spoken). Nonetheless, *Chizkuni* points out that Rebecca’s family did actually speak Hebrew, because when the question of her leaving with Eliezer arose, her brother and mother referred to her as a *naarah* (Gen. 24:57).

Another female in the Bible referred to as an *almah* was Moses’ sister Miriam, who watched over her younger brother as he was put into the Nile and was saved by the Pharaoh’s daughter (Ex. 2:8). In this case, she was six years old at the time (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:13). It seems that this age is too young to fit the technical definition of *almah* (*yaldah* is more appropriate), as the Talmud (*Sotah* 12b) felt the need to seek out exegetical explanations for the use of this appellation. The Talmud explains that Miriam was called an *almah* in this context because she “hid” the fact that she was Moses’ sister, or because she acted with the “strength” and “vigor” expected of an older young lady.

In next week’s essay we will expand on the idea that the term *naar/naarah* is related to the concept of “revealing,” which contrasts very nicely with what we wrote above that *elem/almah* is connected to the idea of “hiding.” We will also discuss the words *yeled/yaldah* and *betulah/bachur*.

*To be continued...*

**\*NOTE:** See also Rashi (to *Ketuvot* 44b), who explains that when the word *naarah* is spelled deficiently (i.e. sans the letter HEY as the ultimate letter), it could also include a girl younger than the age of twelve. However, when *naarah* appears in the plene form with the letter HEY at the end, it serves to *exclude* a girl younger than twelve.

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# Q & A

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## CHAYEI SARAH

### 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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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## Hand-Washing Upon Rising

*“Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding washing the hands.”*

**B**lessings usually begin with a standard formula: Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe.... Rabbi Shimon Schwab, in his seminal work titled *Iyun Tefillah*, proposes a novel and insightful understanding to the classic and timeless opening words of the blessings. Rabbi Schwab suggests that, in addition to the simple understanding of the first word, “blessed” can also be understood to mean “increase.” The Hebrew word “*baruch*” is derived from the word “*ribui*,” which means “more.” “*Baruch Atah Hashem... Melech HaOlam*” can now be understood as a declaration that G-d’s grandeur in the world should be increased. This means that the introductory words to a blessing are a form of a prayer that G-d’s Majesty should be recognized and accepted by more and more people in the world.

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding washing the hands.”

The function of washing our hands in the morning (as well as before any other spiritual undertaking) is the onset of preparing ourselves spiritually for the forthcoming day. In the same way that we must physically prepare ourselves for each day, so too must we begin the process of preparing to include a clearly

discernable spiritual dimension throughout our daily lives. This is why we wash our hands at the beginning of the day. To emphasize that although there is a mundane nature to our daily life, we are nevertheless embarking on something that transcends the physical.

But why is this being done through the medium of washing our hands? Our hands symbolize our physical actions. Hashem has elevated the Jewish People to the status of His chosen nation. This means that every physical act we do in this world can be uplifted and turned into a corresponding spiritual deed. Therefore, the words of the blessing that we recite can be read as G-d commanding us to uplift our hands (see Isaiah 63:9 for the context of the word “*netilah*” as meaning to raise up).

Interestingly enough, the authorities in Jewish Law write that even if an abundance of water was used to wash one’s hands and there is therefore absolutely no concern that any part of the hand might not have come into contact with the water, it is nevertheless *always* correct to raise one’s hands immediately after washing them while they are still wet. It as if Hashem is exhorting us to raise ourselves above our physical existence and to emboss a spiritual hallmark on all that we do, through our actions here in this physical world.

*Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet  
on The Morning Blessings  
by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer  
[www.ohr.edu/morning-blessings](http://www.ohr.edu/morning-blessings)*

# THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 3 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

## Shemini Atzeret or Simchat Torah?

Another interesting calendar quirk that distinguishes between Eretz Yisrael and *Chutz La'aretz* is that as Simchat Torah is on Shemini Atzeret in Eretz Yisrael, and this year it fell out on Shabbat, at Mincha the Torah reading of the upcoming *Parshat Bereishet* was read. This is an occurrence that is impossible in *Chutz La'aretz*. Since it was still Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah only started that evening, this meant that the Torah cycle had not yet concluded in *Chutz La'aretz*. Therefore, at that Shabbat Mincha Torah reading, the next *parshah* in the on-deck circle, *V'Zot HaBracha*, was read.

There was another potential distinction between Eretz Yisrael and *Chutz La'aretz* this year. In Eretz Yisrael, as Simchat Torah is Shemini Atzeret, it was observed on Shabbat this year, as opposed to *Chutz La'aretz*, where Shemini Atzeret was Shabbat, and Simchat Torah was on Sunday. Classically, on Simchat Torah, aside from certain halachic dispensations such as dancing and clapping, due to the tremendous *simcha* of the mitzvah engendered by the day, there have also been certain "*minhagim*" (or, more accurately, liberties taken) that have been tolerated over the generations in the name of "*simcha*," ostensibly due to the Rabbinic nature of the Yom Tov. These include children burning down succahs and setting off firecrackers! Although there is no lack of admonishment in halachic literature discouraging such extreme forms of "merriment," extra vigilance is needed. However, this year in Eretz Yisrael many of these "*minhagim*" did not apply at all since Simchat Torah was on Shabbat, and, as opposed to a regular Yom Tov, transfer of a flame is strictly prohibited.

## What to Use for *Kiddush*

A flip side of this: perhaps this year, the common *minhag* in Yeshivas to make *Kiddush* on *Mezonot* (as the '*Seudah*') on Simchat Torah Night as per the *Chazon Ish* may not have equally applied as it was Shabbat, since the *Leil Shabbos Kiddush* is mandated *m'Deorayta*, as opposed to *Leil Yom Tov Kiddush*, which is *d'Rabbanan*. Hence, many more were careful to make this *Kiddush* specifically with a full *Hamotzi Seudah*.

This issue is basically a dispute between the Magen Avraham and the Vilna Gaon as to whether or not the requirement of *Kiddush* being made *B'makom Seudah* can be fulfilled with *Mezonot* or if a full bread *seudah* (*Hamotzi*) is mandated. Although "*Minhag Yisrael*" is to be lenient, due to the strength of the opposition several Acharonim, including Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor and the *Chazon Ish*, maintained that when the *Kiddush* is mandated *m'Deorayta* (such as the Friday night *Kiddush*) it is preferable to be strict and make *Kiddush* only with *Hamotzi*, whereas when the *Kiddush* is *m'Derabbanan* (such as Shabbat Day *Kiddush* or *Leil Yom Tov Kiddush*) one may be lenient. Hence, many Yeshivas, following the *Chazon Ish*'s precedent based on this approach, generally speaking do make *Kiddush* on *Simchat Torah* night on *Mezonot*, since the *Kiddush* on *Yom Tov*, even at night, is also *d'Rabbanan*. But this year, as in Eretz Yisrael *Simchat Torah* was on Shabbat, the night *Yom Tov Kiddush* is *Deorayta*, and so, perhaps, the general *Kiddush* custom changed.

## Haftarat Miketz

This year, as the eight-day holiday of Chanuka will start on a Friday, it will end on a Friday as well, right before Miketz. This affords us a rare opportunity to read Miketz's actual haftarah, as the vast majority of the time it is Shabbat Chanuka, which pre-empts it for one of the special Shabbat Chanuka haftaras. This haftarah, last publicly read twenty years ago back in 5761, discusses the wisdom of Shlomo HaMelech, featuring the famous story of his ordering to cut the baby in half in order to determine its real mother. This is actually the second rarest haftarah that Ashkenazim read, just 24 times over the Tur's entire 247-year cycle.

*To be continued...*

*Written l'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha l'yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad.*

*This author wishes to acknowledge Rabbi Shea Linder's excellent article on this topic.*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**S**arah, 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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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Living Through The Days

**A**vraham ages – he is *zaken*, and the Torah records he had *come through the days*, and that G-d blessed him *in everything*. From this summary of Avraham’s life in his old age, we learn a great deal about how to live.

A *zaken* is one who has acquired wisdom through his vast experience. This is contrasted with the word for youth – *na’ar* – which, in the verb form, means to shake off. A youth still shakes off impressions and does not absorb them permanently. He does not learn *from* life, but seeks to shape his world out for himself. While this allows for the idealism of openness to new experiences, it comes with the serious handicap of not absorbing the lessons and consequences of his and others’ prior experiences.

The Torah’s word for elderly – *zaken* – is phonetically related to the root *sachan/sakan*, whose various senses denote the basic concept of being sensitive to absorb external impressions. A *sochein* is an attendant, and one who cares for an ill person and looks out for harmful influences that might affect his charge. In doing so, the attendant *absorbs* the influences himself as he protects the other.

*Sakanah*, danger, also denotes the perception and absorption of external stimuli, and leads to a change in behavior as a result.

Indeed, our Sages relate that *zaken* is an acronym for “*Zeh KaNah*” – he who has *acquired* wisdom (*Kiddushin* 32b), or, alternatively, he who has *acquired* both this world and the world to come (*Ber. Rabbah* 59:6). To Jewish wisdom, a *zaken* is one who, in his life on earth, has conquered both worlds, this one for the next, by absorbing the impact of his life experience and impressing the stamp of G-dliness on his earthly life.

Thus, the description of Avraham as coming “through his days” is understood by our Sages to mean that he had lived his days *doubly*. This means that, although he lived out his days as earthly days, he really lived them as spiritual days. He lived “through” them, as they were a passageway leading him directly to the life of the world to come. (*Ber. Rabbah* 59:6). He was not overcome by his days, but, rather, each one was a milestone for him, an opportunity for him to absorb his experiences – on his way to eternity.

- Sources: Commentary, *Ber. 24:1*

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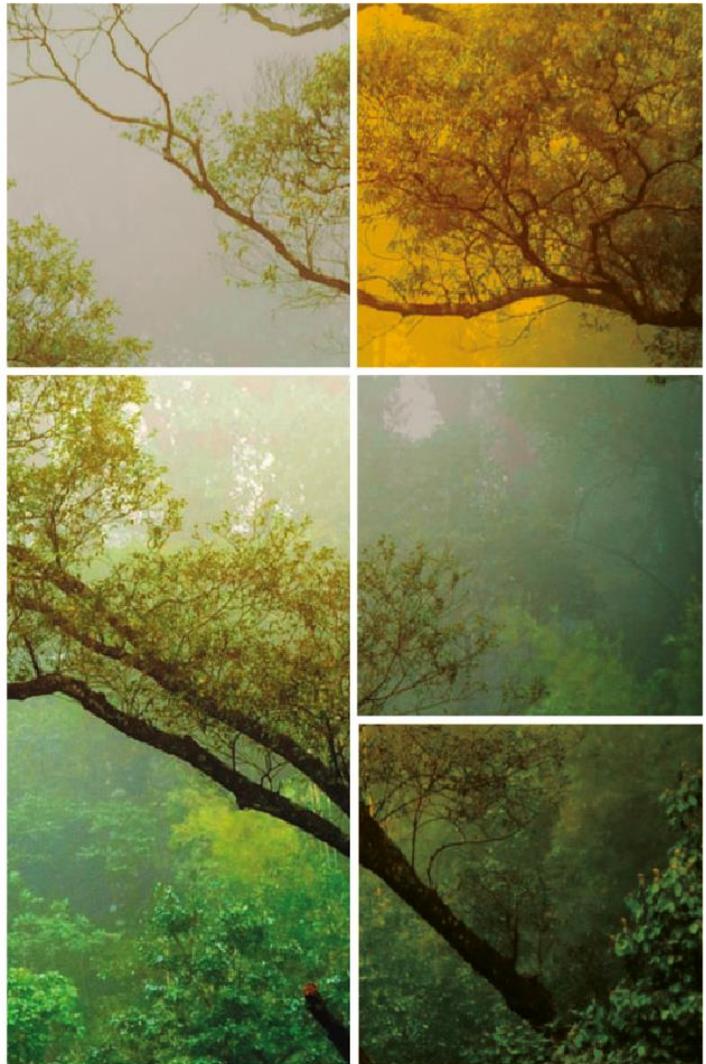
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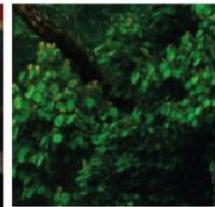
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