

more, because we need/I want more.” The second gift focused on the goals and objectives of a Torah home, one in which Torah observance and studying Torah in tandem with spiritual ascendancy reigns paramount. Such a home is a united home, one in which harmony and respect are dominant, because husband and wife are not out merely to satisfy themselves or keep up with the neighbors. They are interested in building a sanctuary for Hashem.

Perhaps we may apply homiletic license to expand on the above. Even when a couple’s goals and objectives are Torah/spirituality-oriented, it is critical that they both are on the same page. For a young man to forgo a life of affluence and instead devote himself to full-time Torah study is a privilege. Those who consider it a sacrifice rarely achieve distinction, because Torah study is a way of life – not a sacrifice. It is how Jews are supposed to live.

The problem arises when two young people decide that they want greater meaning in life than a spacious home, luxurious furniture, fancy cars, etc. They want enduring value which they can transmit to the next generation – and all was going well, until “Mrs.” became enamored with her neighbor’s home etc. “Why do we have to have a boring *Yom Tov* with your parents – when we could be with Mickey Mouse in Orlando? Why must you always be learning? Our neighbors are also observant, and ‘Mr.’ spends so much ‘quality’ time with their children. All you do is learn with our kids. What will they remember about their father? You are no fun.” [This can also go the other way, when the husband falls prey to the allure of wealth, thereby “encouraging” his wife to alter her focus on life.] I am sure that the reader knows where I am heading. The two *tzemidim*, bracelets, were connected in order to teach that both parents must be on the same page; otherwise, it can lead to a *beka*, a split, whereby the new focus in their home is not Torah, but the religion based upon opulence.

*Horav Ovadia Yosef, zl*, was the revered *Sephardic Gaon* who restored the crown of *Sephardic Jewry* in our time. Together with his *Rabbanit*, they raised an enviable family - all dedicated to Torah dissemination of the highest calibre. Such a family does not just happen. It is not that one must be poor to grow in Torah; it is just that while one may be materially comfortable, it should not be the focus of his life. At the age of 22, when *Rav Ovadia’s* name circulated on the list of *shadchanim*, it was obvious that a *ben Torah* of his calibre would certainly spend his life absorbed in Torah pursuits. To find a young woman who would not only appreciate his uncommon greatness, but would share his life’s goals would be extremely difficult. For him, looking for a *shidduch* was like mining for a diamond. His *Rabbanit’s* name, by the way, was Margalit, gem.

Growing up in the home of a distinguished *Chacham*, *Rabbanit* Margalit Fattal-Yosef understood quite well the significance of leading a Torah life. Nonetheless, her friends (and

friends play a critical role) were not into the learning scene. A talented and charming girl, they felt she could do better. The *chosson* could not promise her much in the way of material sustenance. He would learn and learn; eventually, he would take a position as a *Rav* or *Rosh Yeshiva* – not enough to compare with the homes of her friends. Finally, after a long talk in private, the *kallah* emerged from her meeting with her *chosson* and said, “Yes, he is for me.” What did he promise her that convinced her to acquiesce to his lifestyle? “He promised to share his merits with me,” she said. In other words, the spiritual wealth accrued by *Rabbanit* Yosef far outdistanced anything that her friends could ever dream of having.

### Va’ani Tefillah

**תמת שרה בקרית ארבע – ברכ עלינו... את השנה הזאת  
ha’zos. Bless upon us... this year.**

While a person’s prosperity is decided on an annual basis (hence, we ask Hashem to bless the year), we pray for prosperity on a daily basis. Our allotment can be withheld due to sins on our part. Hashem reviews our behavior during the course of the year. For instance, if on *Rosh Hashanah* it had been decided that we should be blessed with good fortune, and, during the course of the year, we prove ourselves unworthy of such a fortuitous blessing – it might be reversed. Hashem grants us funds for a purpose. Obviously, our family takes precedence, but, prior to living luxuriously and sustaining ourselves to the point of gluttony, we should think of others who are in need – who would suffice with just the simple things in life. Furthermore, the *Baal Shem Tov* teaches that, on a daily basis, Hashem decides the amount of pleasure and satisfaction each of us will derive from our present possessions. This is certainly a reason to pray. Just because we have, does not mean that we will keep it, and, even if we keep it, if we do not pray, we might not enjoy it. All too often we take things for granted. We must not fail to acknowledge that everything that we have is a gift – a special gift – for a special purpose.

In Memory of  
our beloved parents, grandparents,  
and great grandparents

**Rabbi Justin Hofmann**

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נפטר כ"ה חשוון תש"ע

and

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צפורה בת החבר אברהם יוסף שמחה הכהן ע"ה  
נפטרה י"ג כסלו תשע"ג

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## Parashas Chayei Sarah

תשע"ה

פרשת חיי שרה

ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע

**Sarah died in Kiryas Arba. (23:2)**

*Rashi* expounds on the juxtaposition of the sudden passing of Sarah *Imeinu* upon the *Akeidah*, Binding of Yitzchak. Apparently, *Satan* came and informed Sarah of Avraham *Avinu’s* intention to slaughter Yitzchak. *U’kimaat shelo nishchat*. “And before he could have been slaughtered,” she died. Sarah heard that Yitzchak was about to be slaughtered, and she died. Why does *Rashi* emphasize the fact that she died before he was slaughtered? It is obvious what happened. *Rashi* could have simply said that the very news that her son was on the way to his death, to be slaughtered by his father, was too much for her to handle. Why does he add that her passing occurred before the slaughtering?

*Horav Moshe Cordovero*, the *Ramak, zl*, explains that Sarah heard that Yitzchak had been slaughtered – but, in fact, he had not. Had Yitzchak actually been slaughtered, had Avraham followed through with the command, then Sarah would have been granted strength from Heaven to withstand the emotional and physical toll caused by this tragic news. It is only because she believed that it had already taken place, although, in fact, it had not, that she did not have the Heavenly-fortitude to handle the sudden pressure, that she died. Hashem decrees – and He gives us the power to handle the decree. A person receives only what he can handle – no more. This is why we see some people confront the most mind-numbing circumstances, emerging from them to lead productive lives, while others, under similar circumstances, would have snapped. One was given Heavenly strength to withstand the challenge; the other was not. Hashem does not give us what we are unable to handle. If He gives us a challenge, then we can handle it.

*Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita*, relates the story of a *chassid* who was erroneously told that one of his close relatives had suddenly passed from the world. Overwhelmed with shock and pain, the man fainted. He was revived, and, a few moments later, when he reminded himself of the tragic news, he fainted again. This went on a number of times. The *chassidim* ran to their *Rebbe* to ask what to do for their friend.

The *Rebbe* came, walked over to the *chassid* and whispered in his ear, “It is not true. The news that your relative died was in error. He is very much alive!” When the *chassid* heard the wonderful news, his color returned and he sat up – calm and relaxed, as if nothing had happened. An hour went by,

and the *Rebbe’s* words were confirmed. His relative was very much alive. Word spread, as the *chassidim* extolled the virtue and Divine Inspiration with which their *Rebbe* had been endowed.

When the *Rebbe* heard the accolades, he smiled: “It had nothing to do with me. It took no supernatural powers to know that a mistake had occurred. The *pasuk* says: *Baruch she’amar v’hayah ha’olam... Baruch gozeir u’mekayeim*. ‘Blessed is He Who spoke and the world came into being... Blessed is He Who decrees and fulfills.’ When Hashem issues a decree against a person – *gozeir – u’mekayeim*, He gives the person the strength to withstand the effects of the decree. Hashem is *mekayeim*, sustains/maintains the person. When I saw the *chassid* unable to withstand the effects of the news, I knew that there had to be an error. He was not the beneficiary of added fortitude, because there had been no decree.”

ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע... ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה

**Sarah died in Kiryas Arba... and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah. (23:2)**

*Rashi* explains the juxtaposition of the passing of Sarah *Imeinu* upon the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, because it was as a result of the *Akeidah* that her “sudden” passing came about. The *Satan* told her that Avraham *Avinu* was about to slaughter her one and only child, Yitzchak *Avinu*, and she died from the shock. Before we continue, it must be made clear that Sarah *Imeinu* died when she was supposed to die. Hashem creates the circumstances. With our limited minds, we unfortunately only see what occurs: an elderly woman succumbs to the news that her son is being slaughtered. It may appear to be that, but any intelligent, believing Jew with a modicum of intelligence understands that what appears before our eyes and essential reality do not always coincide.

Having said this, we address a question posed by *Horav Chaim Kanievesky, Shlita*. We have a rule that *shluchei mitzvah einan nizokin*, “Agents involved in the performance of a *mitzvah* will not be injured (during the course of their *mitzvah* observance).” The *Akeidah* was certainly one of the most seminal *mitzvos* given to man – one from which we derive reward and stands as an enduring merit until this very day. How is it possible that, after performing such an outstanding *mitzvah*, Avraham lost his beloved wife – as a result of that *mitzvah*?! What happened to *shluchei mitzvah*? Truthfully, as pointed out by *Rav Kanievesky*, this question applies in other cases as well.

A while ago a tragedy occurred in Petach Tikvah. A Jew asked his friend to help him with a flat tire. The second Jew was hit by a car and killed in the course of assisting his friend with an act of *chesed*, kindness. The question is reiterated: How does such a tragedy occur to a person whilst in the midst of carrying out a *mitzvah*? [I am certain that if the reader thinks back and introspects his/her own life, anomalies such as this have occurred – either personally or to others of which he is aware]. Rav Kanievsky explains that everything is decided on *Rosh Hashanah*. If, on *Rosh Hashanah*, it was decreed that a person should live out the following year without injury – and he is in the midst of performing a *mitzvah* – even one that involves danger – nothing will happen to him. He will emerge unscathed. If, however, the decree on *Rosh Hashanah* was for him to endure troubles, pain, even death, it is possible that these hardships – or even his eventual death – will occur during the execution of a *mitzvah*. What greater merit can there be than having one's death occur during his *mitzvah* performance?

Let me explain. Hashem decrees on *Rosh Hashanah* that “Reuven” should break his leg. Understandably, there are many ways that one can break a leg. It could happen while playing football, or some other sport; or, he can fall off the ladder and break his leg while he is putting up the *schach* on his *Succah*. Likewise, the decree which we all hope will never come, the *mi yamus*, “Who will die?” is passed, and a person is destined to leave this world during the following year. It can happen in a number of ways, but, if it takes place over a *Gemorah* or while carrying out a *mitzvah*, it is obviously more meritorious. So, how can one be injured or *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, die during the course of performing a *mitzvah*? It was decreed on *Rosh Hashanah* that in the coming year he would sustain an injury, or die – Hashem does him a favor and makes it happen in an “honorable,” meritorious manner.

We could cite a number of such instances in which holy, righteous individuals lost their lives in the most gruesome manner in the midst of performing a *mitzvah*. We have questions; we do not understand, but now we understand that what seems to be an anomaly which shakes the core faith of some, is, in fact, Hashem's way of carrying out an existing decree in a manner from which the injured party or the deceased derives the greatest honor and everlasting merit. A wonderful man who lived in Bnei Brak earned his livelihood by driving a bus. One day, he suddenly had a heart attack. Although he survived the event, he was, nonetheless, compelled to retire from his job. At first, he sat at home, until one day he decided he might as well make the most of his early retirement. He began attending classes given in his *shul*. He spent more time learning after *davening*, until the *shul* became his second home. He started giving out tea and cookies to the participants of the *shuirim*, classes, and, without being asked, he volunteered to become the *shul's shamash*, sexton. One morning, in middle of handing out a tray of cookies, he sustained a second, and final, heart-attack. His funeral cortege left from the *shul* which was so beloved to him. He was eulogized by a number of *rabbanim* as if he had been himself a leading *rosh yeshivah*. This was not the type of funeral tendered for the average Jew, but, because he merited to die in the *shul* in the midst of performing a *mitzvah*, he was accorded the honor reserved for Torah leaders.

### ויקם אברהם מעל פני מותו

#### Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead. (23:3)

In his *Tiferes Yehonasan, Horav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, zl*, explains this *pasuk* based upon an original idea that only those righteous who died through the medium of *missas neshikah*, kiss from Hashem – and not through the *Malach HaMaves*, Angel of Death – were allowed burial in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. Thus, when Avraham *Avinu* petitioned to have Sarah *Imeinu* buried in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*, he was certain that she was worthy of acceptance. *Chazal* describe the Angel of Death's manner of taking a person's life. “He stands over the head of the soon-to-be-deceased. In his hand is a sword; the tip of the blade of the sword has been dipped in a bitter solution. The sick person looks up, and the moment that he notices the *Satan* over him, he becomes frightened and opens his mouth (as if to scream). At that instance, *Satan* allows the bitter solution to enter the mouth of the sick person. This causes his death.”

Having said this, Rav Eibeshutz posits that Avraham gazed upon Sarah's face and saw that, unlike other deceased, whose countenance appeared “washed out and green in color,” Sarah's countenance shined. This made him rationalize that Sarah died of *missas neshikah*. This is to be interpreted into the *pasuk*, “Avraham rose, “*mei al pnei meisu*, “from the presence/face of his dead.” Avraham saw from Sarah's face that she was worthy of gaining entrance into the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. He now approached *Bnei Cheis* for the “keys” to the holy site.

Why were only those who died through the medium of *neshikah* permitted in the Cave – and no others? The *Zohar Hakadosh*, quoted by *Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita*, relates the following: “When Avraham entered the Cave, prepared to bury Sarah, he was challenged by Adam and Chavah who refused him entrance. They said, “Through our sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of knowledge, we caused death on all mankind. Once Avraham and Sarah are buried here with us, we will be ashamed, because of all the wonderful deeds that the two of you have performed.” Avraham responded that he would intercede on their behalf that they not become embarrassed in the Heavenly realm.

When Avraham offered his assurance, Adam returned to his place of rest. Chavah, however, did not. After all (explains the *Chidah*), she instigated the original sin, unlike Sarah, who had performed countless acts of good deeds. When Avraham took upon himself to pray, especially on her behalf, she, too, returned to her place of rest.

How did Avraham assuage Adam and Chavah? They, too, could pray. What about his prayer was so unique? The *Chida* explains that Adam *HaRishon's chet*, sin, embodied within it all three cardinal sins: murder; adultery; and idol worship. First, he listened to the serpent, thus defying Hashem's command – idol worship. Second, the serpent cohabited with Chavah (*Shabbos* 146a). (This probably means that the relationship Adam and Chavah had with one another following the serpent's evil counsel was a form of adultery: Rav Friedman.) Third, as a result of the sin, death was decreed against humanity. There is no greater act of murder than that.

The *Avos*, Patriarchs, repaired the sin of eating of the

*Eitz HaDaas*. By reaching out to a world society attached to pagan worship, Avraham corrected the *avodah zarah*, idol worship, aspect of Adam's sin. By willingly accepting to have his life sacrificed on the *Akeidah*, Yitzchak *Avinu* repaired the *shefichas damim*, murder, aspect of the sin. Yaakov *Avinu's* sanctity in producing a *mitah sheleimah*, complete, perfect bed, whereby all twelve of his sons were righteous, was *mesakein*, corrected, the *gilui arayas*, adultery, aspect of the sin.

The *Chida* explains that Avraham calmed Adam by intimating to him that he should not be embarrassed over his sin; since the *Avos* were each a *gilgul nefesh*, transmigrative soul, of Adam, they took his place, thus collectively correcting his sin of eating of the *Eitz HaDaas*. This addressed Adam, but how did they soothe Sarah? To this, Avraham responded that he would address the issue. How? Rav Friedman suggests (based upon the *Arizal* who says, as the *Avos* were a *gilgul* of Adam, so, too, the *Imahos*, Matriarchs, were a *gilgul* of Chavah) that the *Imahos* repaired Chavah's sin, thus allowing for the four couples to repose together in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*.

In conclusion: A distinct relationship exists between the four couples that are buried in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. The first couple, Adam and Chavah, committed an indiscretion which embodied the three cardinal sins. The next three couples each repaired one of the three sins, expunging Adam and Chavah's guilt and shame. Thus, their burial together in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah* is the complete *tikun*, repair, of the sin of the *Eitz HaDaas*. Therefore, Avraham gazed upon Sarah's face to see whether she had died via *neshikah*, or had fallen victim to the powerful sword of the Angel of Death. When he saw that she had died through a kiss, it indicated that the Angel had no reign over her. His power is derived from Chavah's sin, which caused death. Sarah superseded the Angel of Death, because she had repaired Chavah's sin. She was now worthy of burial in the *Meorah*.

The *Zohar HaKadosh (Lech Lecha* 81) writes: “When a *neshamah*, soul, departs from this world, it ‘stops’ by the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*, which is the gateway to *Gan Eden*. The *Avos* and *Imahos*, together with Adam and Chavah, receive the *neshamah*. If it is worthy, they welcome it and open the ‘doors’ to *Gan Eden*. Otherwise, if it is unworthy, the *neshamah* is sent away.” Rav Friedman explains that the onus of guilt of Adam's sin rests on every *neshamah* that is created. Therefore, his violation of the commandment not to eat of the *Eitz HaDaas* has repercussions throughout time, to the tune that each of us, every Jew, must atone for his personal guilt. While it is true that the four couples repaired the sin, they only repaired the *shoresh*, root, of the sin, but each individual Jew has his/her own obligation to atone the sin (which embodies the three cardinal sins), so that he/she can enter into *Gan Eden*. In other words, each one of us – exclusive of our responsibility to maintain an observant lifestyle, committed to Hashem and His Torah – must also see to it that nary a taint of the three cardinal sins can be attributed to us. Our Patriarchs and Matriarchs paved the way to *Gan Eden* for us. Are we able to follow along the path which they forged?

### ויקח האישה נזם זהב בקע משקלו ושני צמידים על ידיה עשרה זהב משקלם

#### The man took a gold nose ring, its weight was a beka and two bracelets on her arms, ten gold shekels was their weight. (24:22)

The gifts which Eliezer gave Rivkah *Imeinu* were not ordinary jewelry. They symbolized something important, a message to her concerning the destiny of her future progeny. The *beka* is a half-*shekel*, which symbolized the amount that every Jew was mandated to contribute annually towards the *Bais Hamikdash*. The two bracelets symbolized the two Tablets of Law, and the ten-*shekel* weight alluded to the Ten Commandments. The *machatzis hashkekel*, half-*shekel*, contributed by all Jews, is certainly an important *mitzvah*, but is it on par with the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandment? Why did Eliezer use the half-*shekel* as the gift that would send a message to Rivkah?

The *Kli Yakar* asks a more striking question: The implied message of two gifts seems to contradict one another. *Beka* is a half-*shekel*, with the term *beka* meaning “to split” (a *shekel* in half). Thus, the first gift implies a whole object that is split in half. The second gift, the bracelet that were *tzemidim*, connected together as one, implies two separate objects that became unified. The two gifts essentially imply lessons that are paradoxical to one another.

The *Kli Yakar* explains that Eliezer sought to impart to Rivkah the Torah's outlook on Jewish life as it would be lived in her future home with Yitzchak, who was to be the next Patriarch. On the one hand, eschew material bounty; one can never satisfy his “urge for monetary indemnification.” Whatever one amasses, it is never enough. *Mi she yeish lo manah, rotzeh masaim*, “He who has one hundred (coins) (immediately) wants two hundred.” *Ein adam yotzei min ha'olam v'chatzi taavaso b'yado*, “A person does not leave this world and half of his desire in his hands.” No matter how much a person amasses, it is only half. He wants more. The pursuit of material bounty, the drive to achieve affluence is never-ending, never satisfying and has the potential to create a *beka*, split, between friends – regardless of how long and how strong their bond has been.

Conversely, the pursuit of spiritual accomplishment, the desire to increase and achieve in one spiritual cache, brings people close, creating an enduring bond by uniting individuals to achieve a common goal. I think that it all breaks down to one's focus. Spirituality is not a personal thing. It is a *Klal Yisrael* achievement. Affluence, however, is personal. Each person wants to have his share of the pie.

Thus, Eliezer was teaching Rivkah the kind of home she was entering – and the type of home she would be charged in establishing. It would be a home that would live for spiritual growth, not for the physical and material allure that takes a person captive and never releases him.

*Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita*, applies the *Kli Yakar's* exposition to explain why Eliezer gave Rivkah engagement gifts which presented contrasting messages. He taught her that material pursuit can ultimately divide people. It can destroy a home when husband and wife are not on the same page, or when the wife drives the husband to “do more – earn