

“It is this calling of motherhood which Jewish law values as women’s greatest achievement, so much so that it guarantees them equal status with men. In her home, the mother is the Priestess. There is no other feat which can compare to motherhood, whether in public life, administrative service, or even the devotion of scholarly pursuits.”

Rav Carelbach, *Shlita*, fondly remembers the Friday night “parade” around the *Shabbos* table. It was led by the *Rav* (Rav Yosef) with all nine children following him, singing the precious melodies of *Sholom Aleichem*. When they reached *Aishes Chayil*, with their mother sitting in an armchair, the *Rav* and all of the children stood in a semi-circle around her, resoundingly serenading the presiding queen of the *Shabbos* home, with the grand finale of *Sefer Mishlei*, just as the *melech chacham*, wise king, did for his mother.

In conclusion, he wrote: “No other civilization, no other culture or religion, can compare in assigning such a measure of dignity and high regard as the Torah and *Talmud* do for the Jewish woman.”

Veritably, we often forget the true essence of the Jewish mother. It has gotten so bad that women forget the function of Jewish motherhood. The following story, which has often been retold in *chassidic* Circles, is very telling. It might raise some eyebrows, but will certainly generate discussion (hopefully positive).

**Horav David Biederman, zl**, was one of the *tzaddikim*, righteous leaders, of the *Yishuv Hayashan*, old Jewish settlement, in Yerushalayim. A scion of rabbinic and *chassidic* lineage, his only concern in life was whether he was living up to Hashem’s expectations of him. While today traveling from Yerushalayim to *Kever Rachel* is a quick jaunt, a century ago it was considered an arduous day-long journey by mule. After *davening* at the *k’vasikin*, sunrise, *minyan*, he set out on the trip. During the entire journey his mind was focused on organizing his prayers, careful not to forget what he wanted to say. After all, it was not every day that he had an opportunity to visit the “Momma Rachel.”

When he finally arrived, he realized that he was not alone. A woman, a mother with a collection of young children, had arrived prior to him and was making herself at home in the monument’s domed chamber. She had already spread out a blanket on the floor and had laid her youngest child down to sleep, as she was busy preparing dinner for her family.

Rav David was shocked. Did this woman have no regard for the sacredness of this site? Was she clueless concerning where she was? How could she involve herself in mundane matters in such a holy place? He could not contain himself, so he asked her in a less-than-amicable manner what she was doing.

The weary mother looked up from her seat on the floor and replied softly, “I would think that our Momma Rachel would be pleased that we are eating and resting here.”

Rav David suddenly felt faint and uneasy. This simple woman, in all innocence, had just shattered his understanding of

what *Kever Rachel* represents. He had been coming here for decades to pour out his heart in prayer, but this unlearned woman possessed a greater, more profound perception of the holiness of Rachel’s tomb. What had he been doing here all these years? He now understood that Momma Rachel was the mother who weeps and prays for her children. Her desire is only that they should have some relief, some solace, some comfort in life, some peace of mind, so that they are able to serve Hashem better.

Rav David continued making the trek to *Kever Rachel* on a regular basis, but now he made sure to bring along a meal which he would share with all the others who had come to entreat our “Mother Rachel” to intercede for them and their families and bring their prayers to the Heavenly Throne.

How often we forget our priorities in life. We have professions, occupations, vocations, whatever name one wants to call it, but motherhood, with its concomitant responsibilities, precedes it all. By the way – this also applies to fatherhood.

### Va’ani Tefillah

**ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולבנתה... ויקם אברהם מעל פני מוחו**  
**Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her.**  
**Avraham rose up from the presence of the dead.**  
**(23:2,3)**

Does the term *kadosh*, holy, apply to those who divorce themselves from pleasure, such as gentile ascetics whose lifestyle demands extremist behavior? Gentile clergy do not marry. Does that grant them holiness status? In his commentary to *Parashas Kedoshim*, the **Chasam Sofer** writes that the extremist behavior of gentile ascetics is condemned, while the moderate behavior of our pious men is admired and lauded as holy. The gentile ascetics feel that our mundane world is despicable, and all human endeavor is nothing more than an exercise in futility. Our holy Jews understand that the world is an opportunity for growth. Hashem created the world for a reason, and it is up to each of us to sanctify our activities in this world and use the world and its varied opportunities to serve Hashem. By sanctifying the mundane, we are carrying out Hashem’s Divine Plan. By divorcing ourselves from the world, he is undermining and casting aspersion on Hashem’s creation.

In Memory of  
our beloved parents, grandparents,  
and great grandparents:  
**Rabbi Justin Hofmann**  
**הרב יקותיאל בן יוסף ז"ל**  
**נפטר כ"ה חשוון תש"ע**  
and  
**Sofie Hofmann**  
**צפורה בת החבר אברהם יוסף שמחה הכהן ע"ה**  
**נפטרה י"ג כסלו תשע"ג**  
From the Elzas, Greenfeld and Levine families

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## Parashas Chayei Sarah

תשע"ז

פרשת חיי שרה

### TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

**ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולבנתה... ויקם אברהם מעל פני מוחו**  
**Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her.**  
**Avraham rose up from the presence of the dead.**  
**(23:2,3)**

Surely, at the first formal funeral mentioned in the Torah, the Father of our nation must have delivered a profound eulogy for our nation’s first Matriarch. The first Jewish couple had been through so much. Having been married for decades without a child must have had a powerful effect on their relationship. Yet, the *pasuk* simply states that he came to eulogize, followed by the phrase, “rose up from the presence of the dead.” Should he not have said something more personal? The **Tiferes Shlomo** quotes the *Midrash* which explains that, as Avraham Avinu was about to eulogize Sarah, the *Malach HaMaves*, Angel of Death, appeared and attempted to put questions in Avraham’s mind: “How is it possible that such a righteous woman died suddenly, following such an epic sacrifice as the *Akeidah*?” “Had Avraham not agreed to the *Akeidah*, perhaps Sarah would still be alive.” Avraham felt the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, creeping up on him, attempting to convince him that the *Akeidah* had been wrong. Surely, it must have left doubts in his mind. When Avraham sensed what might be the result of a long drawn-out eulogy, he opted to switch the subject and concern himself with purchasing a tract of land for Sarah’s burial.

The **Tiferes Shlomo** suggests that this idea is alluded to in the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 3:1), *Vayistor Moshe panav ki yarei meihabit el haElokim*, “Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to gaze towards G-d.” When Moshe *Rabbeinu* gazed at the burning thorn bush, he reminded himself that this represented *Klal Yisrael’s* travail. He saw the effects of Hashem’s *Middas HaDin*, Attribute of Strict Justice, which began to spur questions in his mind. He immediately looked away, fearing that he might give into *taanos*, be overwhelmed by complaints.

During, and following World War II, there were many Jews to whom adversity was no stranger. They had all suffered immeasurably. They knew quite well that, when the *Middas HaDin* prevails, it brings with it *hester Panim*, concealment of the Divine Presence. They understood that this is a perfect scenario for the *yetzer hora* to use his machinations to turn people away from Hashem. They took comfort in the words of the **Tiferes Shlomo** that “now” was not a time to delve into what

was occurring; now was not a time to raise questions. Now was a time to look away and accept. This is the only way that we can survive the spiritual impediments that might result from confronting such adversity.

**הוא ישלח מלאכו לפניך ולקחת אשה לבני משם**  
**He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. (24:7)**

Avraham Avinu was a *nasi*, Prince, in the land; therefore, he was highly respected. The most distinguished persons of that era were guests at his home. His wealth was unparalleled. He had one son (with his wife Sarah) who was his sole heir, both materially and spiritually. He could have had any young woman as a wife for Yitzchak. Nonetheless, he made every arrangement, by sending his trusted servant to seek out the right woman. Avraham prayed incessantly that Yitzchak would find the right wife. Why? The *shadchan* must have been standing by his door with a list of names that would be the envy of everyone. The **Chasam Sofer** derives from here that: “The primary *avodas Hashem* (the best way to be assured of one’s proper ability to serve Hashem) and the greatest source of increased success in *Olam Haze* (matters pertaining to this world, i.e. material) are dependent on one’s wife; something of which anyone with a modicum of common sense and intelligence is aware (author’s translation).” Indeed, we see that even after the *shidduch* between Yitzchak and Rivkah was made, Lavan and his mother did everything to prevent its realization. This is why Eliezer sought to culminate the match and leave post-haste.

**Shlomo Hamelech** says (*Koheles* 7:28), “One man in a thousand I have found, but one woman among them I have not found.” The *Midrash* comments: It is a natural occurrence to see a thousand students begin their educational journey with *mikrah*, *Chumash*. One hundred of those budding scholars continue on to the next level – *Mishnah*. Of those, ten go on to studying *Talmud*, with only one succeeding as a *moreh horaah*, *Halachic* adjudicator. This is what the *pasuk* is teaching: One (so to speak) “makes it” of the original thousand students; one goes all the way to become an accomplished Torah scholar.

The **Ksav Sofer** (in the preface to his novellae) asks: What is the relationship between the beginning of the *pasuk* (the one in a thousand who succeeds in Torah scholarship) and its end? (“A woman among them I have not found.”) He explains that the Torah is giving a reason that, among one thousand who

enter *mikrah*, only one succeeds in becoming successfully erudite: It is because one *ishah k'sheirah*, righteous woman – who is willing to support her husband, allowing him to learn Torah diligently, without the mundane responsibilities that detract from his studies – is not found. A woman whose willingness to settle for less (materially), so that her husband could spend more time learning, is uncommon. It is the wife, the *eishas chayil*, that must often determine the success of her husband – and the future direction of her family.

### אי לא תנך האשה אחר

#### Perhaps the woman will not follow me? (24:39)

*Rashi* explains that Eliezer had a daughter whom he would have liked to see married to Yitzchak *Avinu*. Thus, he had a vested interest in the success or failure of his mission. Failure meant that Yitzchak might become his son-in-law. This could create pressure on even the most objective mind. The commentators wonder why, specifically at this point, when the *shidduch* has been successfully concluded, that *Rashi* mentions Eliezer's personal *negios*, vested interests, rather than doing so earlier, when Avraham *Avinu* had originally sent him on the mission. The accepted explanation rendered by the *Rishonim* is that Eliezer was well aware that, being from Canaan, he was considered an *arur*, cursed, and an *arur* cannot marry with Avraham *Avinu's* seed, who is a *baruch*, blessed. It was after Lavan referred to Eliezer as a *baruch*, that Eliezer felt that he could possibly enter into matrimony with Avraham.

The **Kotzker Rebbe, zl**, offers a powerful insight. As long as Eliezer had a vested interest, he did not realize that his decision was impaired by his personal agenda. We are blinded by our special concerns to the point that we believe that we are acting in good faith, all the while unaware that everything we do is impugned by our personal stake in the matter. Eliezer was influenced by his own interests, thus unable to discern that he would have been quite pleased if Rivkah's family would have refused the match. Only later did he sense his misgivings, because he was no longer *nogea b'davar*, no longer had a vested interest in the outcome.

### מד' יצא הדבר

#### The matter stemmed from Hashem! (24:50)

Anyone who has ever been involved in the area of *shidduchim*, matchmaking, is acutely aware of the value and verity of this *pasuk*. Hashem is the Divine matchmaker – end of subject. While at times we have difficulty finding rhyme or reason to explain some marriages, Hashem does, and that is all that really counts. Indeed, the Divine Providence manifest in *shidduchim* is so acute and lucid that one must be myopic to ignore it. There is a classic story, which occurred concerning the **Rashash** (*Horav Shmuel Shtarshon, zl*, noted commentator *to Talmud Bavli*), which underscores this idea.

The *Rashash* conducted a *gmach*, free-loan fund. He once lent a man one hundred ruble to be paid back in three months. At the designated time, the borrower entered the *bais hamedrash* where *Rav Shmuel* had his “office” (he learned all day in the *bais hamedrash*) and announced that he was repaying the loan. He placed the 100 ruble note on the *Gemorah* from which *Rav Shmuel* was learning, and he left. *Rav Shmuel* was so engrossed in his studies that he did not even notice the man's coming or going. When he concluded his learning, he closed the *Gemorah* and returned it to the bookcase.

Every couple of months, *Rav Shmuel* would go over his books to see if people had been timely in their payments. He noticed that the borrower had not paid his loan. (He had paid it, but it had not been entered in the book.) *Rav Shmuel* asserted that he remembered nothing of the transaction, and, since this was *gemach*, communal funds, they would have to go to a *din Torah*, litigate their claims before a rabbinical court.

As is common fare among people, once a rumor starts, it develops a life of its own and explodes into full-scale slander. No one would believe the borrower against the word of *Rav Shmuel*, who was a world-renowned scholar. People distanced themselves from him; his son, who studied in the *yeshivah* in Vilna, was forced to leave the city out of shame.

A few months later, *Rav Shmuel* had occasion to open that same *Gemorah* that he had earlier used and in which he had placed the one hundred ruble note. He immediately summoned the borrower, who was by now a broken person. He had lost everything: friends, livelihood, stature, but, worst of all, his son, who was forced to leave town out of shame. *Rav Shmuel* asked, “How can I make it up to you?” “The *Rav* cannot,” the borrower replied. “I have lost it all. Once my son left town, it was all over. I have nothing left.”

The *Rashash* told the man, “Call your son. I would like to speak with him, because I want him to become my son-in-law.” (*Rashash* had raised an orphaned girl as his own child.) One can only begin to imagine the overwhelming joy that permeated that wedding. Here was clear evidence of *Mei'Hashem yatza ha'davar*. Clearly, it was Heavenly destined that this boy should marry this girl. It was up to Hashem to manipulate events in such a manner that these young people should come together in marriage. Clearly, had Hashem not intervened, this young man would never have married the *Rashash's* daughter.

At times, it takes “patience” for Hashem's plan to manifest itself. A *chasid* of the **Lev Simchah, zl**, asked the *Rebbe* (through one of his *gabbaim*, aides), about a certain *shidduch*, match, for his daughter (this is the prevalent custom among *chassidim*, especially *Gur*. (The family will not go further unless the *Rebbe* responds affirmatively.) The *Lev Simchah* did not respond affirmatively (nor did he say, “No”), which left the petitioner to use his common sense. The average *chasid* will not go further unless the answer is positive. Undeterred, the petitioner asked a *mekubal*, a holy scholar who was steeped in studying *kabbalah*, for his opinion concerning the *shidduch*. The *mekubal's* answer was “Yes.” The petitioner was now in a serious quandary. What should he do?

The *chasid* went to the **Pnei Menachem, zl** (the *Lev Simchah's* brother and next *Rebbe*), “I went to the *Rebbe*,” he began. “He did not give me a clear answer. I left him in a quandary concerning what I should do. I spoke to a *mekubal* who told me to go forward with the *shidduch*. What should I do?”

The *Pnei Menachem* replied, “You should know that a *mekubal* has powerful insight, but he only sees what is good now. He is unable to see if this *shidduch* will be good in twenty years or through the next generation (what type of children and grandchildren will descend from them). The *Rebbe* (and all *Rebbes*) have the ability to see generations later, even what is best for each *neshamah*, based upon its previous *gilgul* (transmigratory soul, earlier “version” of himself).

The *Pnei Menachem* continued, “A *chasid* once came to my father, the **Imrei Emes, zl**, and petitioned him for a blessing which would provide him with monetary wealth. The

*Rebbe* demurred. The man returned a number of times, until the *Imrei Emes* asserted and blessed him with wealth. The blessing came true, and the man became very wealthy.

This *chasid* had one son, a brilliant, talented, pleasant looking boy, who was a budding Torah scholar. He would be a “top catch” when the time for him to marry came around. Shortly before he reached marriageable age, he was in a tragic accident, which cost him his leg. He was, sadly, no longer at the top of the *shadchanim's* list. The father's demands for a suitable wife for his son were no longer “demanding.” In the end, he married a lovely girl, who happened to be the tailor's daughter.

Shortly before the wedding, the man went in to speak with the *Imrei Emes* and ask for a *brachah* for the young couple. The *Rebbe* said to the father, “It was Heavenly ordained that your son should wed this girl. Years ago, it would have been quite a suitable *shidduch* for you, since you were not affluent, and neither was the tailor. When you besieged me time and again to grant you a blessing for wealth, however, this *shidduch*, which Heaven had decided was best for your son, became below your dignity, in light of your newly acquired financial status. As a result, your son had to undergo a painful experience which left him an amputee. Now you are open to accepting the *shidduch* that was meant for your son from the very beginning. Now you understand that one does not “push” Hashem. If the Almighty is not forthcoming with His blessing, He has a good reason for it.

### ויבאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו... וינחם יצחק אחרי אמו And Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother... and thus was Yitzchak consoled after his mother. (24:67)

*Rashi* teaches that the arrival of Rivkah *Imeinu* in the tent of her late mother-in-law, Sarah *Imeinu*, reestablished the practices of the first Matriarch, to the point that Yitzchak *Avinu* was finally consoled over his mother's passing. The spiritual void left by Sarah's demise seemed to be filled with the presence of Rivkah. *Rashi* focuses on three miracles that were regular occurrences in Sarah's home. First, *Ner daluk mei'erev Shabbos l'erev Shabbos*, the candle which she lit on *erev Shabbos* (to usher in the *Shabbos*) did not burn out. It remained lit the entire week. Second, *Brachah metzuyah b'issah*, there was a special *brachah* to be found in her dough. Third, *Anan kashur al ha'ohel*, a cloud (signifying the Divine Presence) hung over her tent. When Sarah died, these three blessings ceased, only to resume once Rivkah entered the tent, indicating that Rivkah was a worthy successor to her mother-in-law.

This is a beautiful and inspirational *Chazal* which demonstrates the elevated spiritual plateau upon which our first two Matriarchs stood. With the maxim, *maase avos siman la'banim*, “The deeds of the fathers serve as a portent for their children,” on our mind, we wonder how we, as descendants of these women, are to act, and what we may learn from their actions that we can apply to our lives.

**Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl**, takes a practical approach toward both understanding these blessings and how to apply the positive lessons to our lives. The *Shabbos* candle that remains lit all week is the first lesson for developing the proper Jewish home. The *Shabbos* candle represents the source of light which illuminates the Jewish home, the guiding light by which it views life. The father is the one who imbues the sons and daughters with the Torah/*halachah* perspective of Jewish life. The father choreographs the day-to-day survival,

both at home and in the world. The spiritual/moral/ethical challenges of the work-week are dealt with through the lens of *halachah*, as taught by the *rosh ha'mishpachah*, head of the family – the father. Knowing what to do, and doing it, are often separated by the bridge of motivation, based on emotion, positive interest and sensitivity. The children may know what to do, but unless their mother inculcates them with the proper emotion, love and desire to serve Hashem, the *halachah* will fall on “dry” lifeless, unfeeling, unenthusiastic children, so that it will soon dissipate. This is where the mother comes in, represented by her illuminating the home with the light of *Shabbos*, holiness, spirit of life, pleasant and positive feeling to serve the Almighty. The mother is the one who brings her children's tender *neshamos*, souls, close to Hashem.

How do we measure a mother's success in imbuing her children with the light that illuminates their *neshamos*? *Mei'erev Shabbos l'erev Shabbos*: if the power of her inspiration endures throughout the week; if the children remember the light of *Shabbos* during their mundane weekly activities, then we know that their mother has achieved success in her work.

The mother's influence is tested during other junctures in the family's life experience: when they are faced with economic hardship; when food is scarce, and the father finds supporting his family increasingly difficult. It is then that the mother must rally her children by infusing blessing and positivity into the family's food. A strong mother is able to take a simple meal, without luxuries, and transform it into a lavish banquet. It all depends on her attitude. Her love, her constant smile, and her enthusiasm for life bring blessing into her “dough.” *Brachah metzuyah b'issah*; “Blessing is to be found in her dough.” She manages the mundane meals in such a manner that the family does not sense that it is lacking anything.

*Anun kashur al ha'Ohel*; her home is ensconced in a cloud of *tznius*, privacy, modesty, refinement, moral decency. Her home is a palace. Although her door is open to assist those in need, she takes great care concerning what type of individual passes through her threshold. She offers friendship, kindness, assistance – but not at the expense of her family's spiritual/moral development. Her home is a veritable *Mishkan*, a Sanctuary, where *kedushah*, holiness, reigns and where the *Shechinah*, Divine Providence, may rest.

Sarah *Imeinu* exemplified these traits, which were manifest in her home. When she passed from this world, a void was felt, until it was filled with the appearance of Rivkah.

Members of today's decadent society see the Jewish mother through the lens of their own self-loathing. They have been shameless in stereotyping the Jewish mother as overbearing, nervous and guilt inducing. In reading *Horav Shlomo Carlebach's* biography of his father, **Horav Yosef Carlebach, zl**, I came across an essay which he (*Rav* of Hamburg prior to World War II, and the most prominent Orthodox Rabbi in Germany at the time) wrote. I take the liberty of excerpting a few ideas from his essay: “The mother's virtuous influence within the home achieves, as our prophets teach us, a central role in all that occurs and is regarded as a factor of fundamental significance.

“Outwardly, religious activity, including community service and synagogue worship, as well as predominance in the study halls, is the domain of man. The ultimate bearers, however, of all religious energy and all Jewish activity, although somewhat shrouded in a mystic fog, are not the men, but the women, the mothers.