



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Chayei Sarah 5783

### There Will Always Be Giants

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered October 27, 1956)

**T**his past summer, the N.Y. Times carried a series of articles by one of its astute columnists entitled "The Age of the Giants." The author, in an attempt to explain the dynamics of the present American political set-up, maintains that our age is what it is primarily because it no longer has with it the giants, the great men of genius or near-genius, who used to lead its affairs. For instance, on the international scene we no longer have such people like Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill, or De Gaulle who, whether we liked and agreed with them or not, were true giants. Science has lost its Plank and its Einstein. The one-time Rockefeller and Fords who built financial empires from scratch are not to be found. Philosophy has lost its Whitehead and Dewey and James. Few if any of these great spirits remain, and the active control of the affairs of our age, in all fields, has fallen into the hands of lesser men. The Age of Giants has come to an end.

In hearing this estimate of the secular, gentile world, it occurs to us that the same is true to such a large extent of the Jewish world. In the 1920s we still had with us in the Land of the Living all the illustrious leaders of European Jewry, too numerous to mention by name. Even America had its great ones, such as R. Jacob Joseph of New York. Then, in that decade, the great Chofetz Chaim died. The next two decades saw the murder not only of millions of ordinary Jews, but thousands of Giants of Judaism and Jewry. This past year there died in Israel one of the last of the great Giants - the Chazon Ish z"tz"l. Alas, the Age of Giants for us Jews seems to have come to a close.

Indeed, such an estimate seems to be an open invitation to pessimism and despair. With the Gedolim, the Jewish Giants, gone, what can one expect of us ordinary Jews? As the Talmudic eulogizer put it centuries ago, *im ba'arazim naflah shalhevess, mah yaasu ezovei ha'kir*, if the giant cedar trees have been devoured by the flames, what shall

the wall-flowers do? Can there be a bright future for our people under such conditions? Can Torah survive this disappearance of its giants?

I ask this more than just as a rhetorical question. It is more than an invitation to a pep talk. Psychologically speaking, it is a most crucial question. First, because many of our own people sometimes express such discouragement - sometimes it flies into the face of facts that are just contrary to it. Second, because the non-Jewish world, or sections of it, would like to believe that. That historian Toynbee, about whom we've heard so much, delights in calling us "fossils" - dead remains of a once-living people - and predicts our disappearance from the face of the earth. And third and most important, because people generally are not willing to give their lives for a lost cause, whether it is right or wrong. Everyone wants to be on the winning side. Just look at the present political campaign: each party claims to be "in league with the future" and "the party of the future." It is therefore important for us to try to peer behind the curtain of Time and take a glimpse of the future so as to ascertain whether we are or are not "in league with the future." What does the future hold for an age which has witnessed the end of the giants?

The Torah, as amplified by the Tradition, gives us both the problem and its solution, all in one verse of today's Sidra. We are told first that Abraham had died - it was a rich, happy, and full life that had come to an end in dignity and in ripe old age. Abraham has died. His sons Isaac and Ishmael bury him. And here the Torah, it would almost seem, holds its breath for two sentences and describes the incidental details of where and how he came to his eternal rest. But then the stark realization must come - *vayehi achrei mos Avraham* - And it was after Abraham's death! The funeral was over, the Shiva was done - and the world was now faced with the dark and brutal and hard fact: the Giant

of Giants was no more! The man who had by the force of his spirit stormed the heavens and wrested from them the secret of One G-d; the man who had engaged that G-d in debate for the sake of the miserable sinners of Sodom; the man who was ready to sacrifice his beloved son for his principles; the man who changed the face of the earth and brought thousands upon thousands to this new belief in G-d, who transfigured his whole society and all who lived in it - he was dead, and you had to face it and accept it and live up to the fact. The Age of Giants had come to an abrupt and tragic end.

Had we lived at that time, we would have been engulfed by a sudden deluge of pessimism, which would have overwhelmed us in succeeding waves of despair with each awakening realization that Abraham is no more. We would have stood by his bier and heard the *gdolei ha'umos*, the chiefs of all the peoples of that day, proclaim *oy lo l'olam she'avad manhigo, oy lah l'sfinah she'avdah kabarnitah* - woe to the world that has lost its leader, woe to the ship that has lost its captain. And into those pagan expressions of grief we probably would have read a feeling of delight: the unredeemed, pagan world could now go about its business as usual without an Abraham to summon it to greater destinies, to challenge its conscience...

Indeed, our Rabbis commenting on the word *achrei*, in *vayehi achrei mot Avraham*, tell us that upon his death, *chazar ha'olam la'achorav*, the world retrogressed, it went backwards, and the *be'eirov*, the wells which Abraham had dug, *sassmum Plishtim*, the Philistines had choked off and closed down. Abraham was a giant; for the people of his day he opened the wellsprings of holiness, the source of kindness and generosity, the untapped reservoirs of human goodness. Now the little Philistines had come in to fill the vacuum - so they filled the wells, stopping the flow of G-dliness and goodness that Abraham had initiated.

A black, well-nigh desperate situation indeed had developed with the passing of the Giant Abraham. Surely his son Isaac was a saintly person - he had, after all, willingly submitted to the sacrifice at the Akeda as a man of 37. He was saintly, all-good. But he was not the powerhouse, the dynamo of G-dliness that Abraham was. In our sacred history Isaac, despite his holiness, is overshadowed both by his father and his son. He had a brother Ishmael to contend with, and then a son Esau. He was blind - having lost his sight at the Akedah where he beheld the heavenly vision. And now - now he was left on his own. *vayehi achrei mot Avraham* - the Giant had died.

What now?

But the Torah doesn't stop there. True, Abraham was dead, and an era of greatness had come to an end. But in the very same breath, we hear the words: *Vayvarech Elokim es Yitzchak bno*, G-d blessed Isaac his son! - there is blessedness G-d bestows even upon those who are not Giants! There is a sacred and world-shaking responsibility on all men, especially when the Giants aren't here to assume the burden for us! There is a blessing to be developed and handed on to generations to come! Isaac, G-d must have told him, until now you lived in Abraham's shadow and could rely upon him, now yours is the duty of guardian, the blessing, of transmitting the teachings of Abraham to your society and your children! Now you must come into your own! Continue the heritage of Abraham, the tradition of your father, and you will prepare the ground for future Giants who will spring from your lines, for Jacob and Moseses and Isaiahs and Ezras and Akivas and Rambams! Without your rising to the challenge they will never come into being. You are an indispensable link in the chain, for you can be a forefather of a people who will receive Torah! G-d will never allow the seed of Abraham to be destroyed, nor will He allow them to forget his Torah! And it is precisely when there are no Giants that every single Jew and Jewess must put his shoulder to the wheel of destiny!

That is what the *brachah* was - the ability of lesser men to make good where before only Giants had succeeded. Only the pagan chieftains were able to say that this world is lost and the ship is sunk. Only the Philistines stop off the wells. But the Isaacs gird their loins and go on with their holy work. For the Isaacs don't look at this moment alone and form judgments - they look at the whole expanse of Jewish history, and realize that where there were giants before, there will be giants later - provided that in the interim those who are not giants continue in their gigantic efforts at the being loyal sons of Torah. No wonder then that when the verse concludes *vayeishev Yitzchak im be'eir lachay ro'i...* that the Aramaic translator in the Targum (Yerushalmi) writes... *v'yassiv Yitzchak samich l'bira d'isgali aloy ykar chay v'kayam, d'chami v'lo mis'chami...* near the well where the glory of G-d sees, but is not seen. Few if any could have predicted then that out of this grieving Isaac would come a Holy Nation and Kingdom of Priests. Few could have seen the glory of G-d that accompanied Isaac through a blessing. But G-d sees. G-d's perspective is limitless. Torah shall never be forgotten. The blessing will never die. There will be giants - a people of giants.

No, the Jewish people will not come to grief, *chalilah*, and the tradition of Torah will be kept alive. But this is the teaching of today's Sidra: when the Giants are not here to look after these treasures of our people, it is up to us ordinary people - who are, after all, not ordinary at all but Bnei Melachim - to keep it up.

A recent article in a popular magazine states that one need not be a genius to "go places," that if the person of the average IQ would use his brain-power to the fullest possible extent, he could learn and remember more than the greatest genius in the annals of human history!

Certainly, then, the end of the Age of Giants should not spell despair for us. If we are living in a time of crisis, as we surely are, let us not take a dim view of things. The giants are gone, and the world is in turmoil - crisis. But out of crisis can emerge greatness as well as destruction. In the Chinese idioform script, the word "crisis" is composed of two figures, one representing "danger" and the other "opportunity." If we will be lax and weak of heart, it may be a sign of danger. If we are strong and ready to summon up our greatest efforts for the sake of Torah and Israel, it will be opportunity. For then it will mean that each of us will rise to the demands of greatness and each of us will become a giant in miniature.

The last 10-20 years in America has proven that. Without those great and towering spirits, the Abrahams of modern times, we have advanced steadily by doing our duties, imposed upon us by G-d and Torah. Orthodoxy today is far stronger than it was a decade and a half ago, and

## "I Will"

Dr. Erica Brown

Once tasked a group of leaders to come up with a six-word mission statement in the spirit of Ernest Hemingway's famous six-word short story. A person in the back of the room shared, in six words, a life lesson he carried with him from his father: "Always do the right thing. Period." These six simple words continue to give him moral clarity. Rebecca, in this week's sedra, has her own two words of clarity: "I will."

Rebecca had a moment when a complex decision suddenly became abundantly clear. Eliezer, Abraham's servant was tasked with finding Isaac a wife. He traveled to relatives of the family and devised a test of kindness. This, above all other qualities, was essential for a member of Abraham and Sarah's household. Rebecca's kindness, we

with signs for increasing influence in the future. We must not judge Torah's success by the scene of the moment. We must look at things from a perspective - it is better than it was, and it shall be better yet later. That is the point of view of G-d - *dchami vlo mis'chami* - the ability to see properly.

Maurice Samuel, in his latest book "*The Professor and the Fossil*," has a passage I believe worth quoting: ...As the modern world opens, Jewry and Judaism are still very much on the scene. A fascinating historical drama is revealed. The auctioneer is Time, the Buyer Oblivion. The peoples come up on the block, one after the other, the hammer is lifted, the established formula is intoned: "Going! Going! Gone!" But there is one people appears again; again and again it has looked like a sale; but the third word has never been pronounced over it.

And certainly we may add: that third word never will be pronounced over it. For *vayvarech Elokim es Yitzchak Bno*, for we are a people of the blessing. Our greatness lies in the ability of Yitzchaks to replace Abrahams, or ordinary Jews to hold fast and firm when the Giants have gone, so that Giants may arise in the future.

Let us carry on that blessing with courage and unimpeded. Let us dwell at the side of *Be'er Lachay Ro'i*, at the well of Jewish life and learning which is Torah, so that although we may not always catch a glimpse of the glory of G-d and the Divine plan for our generations, we will always be visible to Him who is the *Shomer Yisrael*, the guardian of Israel. May He watch over us and bestow the blessing upon us.

Read more at [www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage](http://www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage).

are told, took the form of watering Eliezer's many camels. Camels consume great amounts of water; the offer to provide them with water was a sure sign that Eliezer had identified Isaac's future soulmate. Later, Rebecca rode one of those camels to meet Isaac. She was kind to the camels, and one of those camels, it seems, reciprocated. Rebecca was so taken with Isaac upon first sight that she actually fell off her camel!

But enough about camels. Focusing on Eliezer's camels minimizes other important and overlooked details in this romantic story. Rebecca's kindness was evident before this famous gesture. When Eliezer encountered her at the well, he asked for a little water for himself. Then she gave him water. Then she watered his camels. Then Eliezer checked

if Rebecca was a relative of Abraham's. Then he asked if there was room in her father's house for guests. With each request, Eliezer asked more of Rebecca. This, too, may have been part of Eliezer's test.

Rebecca's reply was full of self-assurance: "I am (*anokhi*) the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.' And she went on, 'There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night'" (Gen. 24:24-25). Rebecca invited Eliezer to join her family of her own accord. She did not wait for her father's permission. It is this that Eliezer noticed immediately. He suddenly bowed and thanked God for making his job so easy: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not withheld His steadfast faithfulness from my master. For I have been guided on my errand by the Lord to the house of my master's kinsmen" (Gen. 24:28).

Later, after negotiating with the family, Eliezer wanted to take Rebecca back to his people. The group sought out Rebecca's opinion, and with that same confidence and clarity she displayed earlier, Rebecca responded. "'Will you go with this man?' and she said, 'I will'" (Gen. 24:58).

Rashi explains Rebecca's assertion; she would go of her own accord even if her family did not consent. Rebecca knew her own mind. Rashi's grandson, Rabbi Samuel ben Meir adds that it was common courtesy to ask the bride if she wanted to spend her engagement period with her family or go to her new family. In saying "I will," Rebecca was confirming her desire to make her future happen rather than waiting for it. Rebecca looked forward. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, whose yartzheit was this week, advises us to always do the right thing. Period. "Don't wait for the world to get better. Take the initiative yourself. The world is waiting for you" (*Covenant and Conversation* - "The World is Waiting for You"). When you have lucidity on the course of action before you, don't wait another minute. And Rebecca didn't.

In these two scenes, Rebecca took charge of her destiny. It is only in Genesis 25, when her pregnancy proved painful and mysterious, that she questioned her existence. When twins struggled in her womb, she said, "If so, why do I (*anokhi*) exist? (Gen. 25: 22). So, she marched up to God with her characteristic curiosity and directness, and God answered her. There is an authenticity to Rebecca because of her I-awareness that is both profound and disarming.

Rebecca's strong sense of self was suddenly altered

by her pregnancy. The first Biblical character who acknowledged a personal identity had to negotiate, with twins in her belly, the transformation within from one to three. Children shifted her from an 'I' to a 'we;' it is a joyful transition but one that can also be untethering. Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, in her book *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious*, contends that Rebecca "... was the first biblical character to speak the word *anokhi* as a term of identity... With total assurance she had initiated the construction of the human subject as *anokhi*... What has eroded her confident subjectivity?"

In their article "Managing Yourself: Stop Holding Yourself Back," Anne Morriss, Robin J. Ely, and Frances X. Frei speak to the personal identity of leaders. Those who construct a false identity for the public may find themselves tottering: a "common impediment to leadership is being overly distracted by your image—that ideal self you've created in your mind. Sticking to the script that goes along with that image takes a lot of energy, leaving little left over for the real work of leadership" (*Harvard Business Review*, Jan.-Feb. 2011). Maintaining an inauthentic identity has genuine psychic costs: "Once you've crafted your persona and determined not to veer from it, your effectiveness often suffers. The need to be seen as intelligent can inhibit learning and risk taking, for instance. The need to be seen as likable can keep you from asking tough questions or challenging existing norms. The need to be seen as decisive can cause you to shut down critical feedback loops."

These authors argue that the difference between image and impact, between looking powerful and empowering others, forces a terrible choice "between impersonating a leader and being one." Rebecca offers us a model of authenticity. She impersonated no one. She was determined to help, determined to chart her future, and determined to understand why she suffered. All of this came out of her I-awareness. God honored this in her by responding to her directness. God made her the mother of not one nation but two.

Reading about Rebecca's fierce courage prompts us to ask our own identity questions. In leadership and in life, when has betraying who you are led to loss and shame? When has honoring and articulating who you are helped you have greater impact?

## Team Work

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

After the episode of Avrohom's purchase of a burial place for Soroh, most of the rest of the parsha deals with finding a wife for Yitzchok. First, the Torah records Avrohom's instructions to his servant Eliezer on how and where to find Yitzchok a wife, and then it records the actual mission, and Yitzchok's marriage to Rivkoh. This entire section is preceded by the verse (Bereishis 24:1), "Avrohom was old, well on in years, and God blessed Avrohom with everything." Many explanations have been given to this verse, with particular emphasis on the meaning of the word 'bakol', or everything. On a peshat level, emphasizing the plain meaning of the text, Ramban says that God blessed Avrohom with wealth, possessions, honor, children, in short, everything a man could want. Realizing that he was approaching the end of his life, he wanted to pass what he had on to the next generation. Therefore, he arranged for his son to get married.

Ramban then goes on to cite a midrash, which brings various opinions about the meaning of the word 'bakol'. According to one opinion, it means that Avrohom had a daughter, whose name was 'bakol'. Ramban says that it cannot be that the great teachers of the midrash merely wanted to teach us the name of Avrohom's daughter. He therefore says that there is a deeper teaching in this comment, and goes on to present what that teaching is. He says that 'bakol' is the eighth of the thirteen *midos*, or traits, of God, and it was a trait which with Avrohom was blessed. My teacher, Rav Aharon Soloveichik, zt"l, explained this to refer to the trait of 'rav emes', or an abundance of truth, which, depending on where you start the count, is the eighth of the thirteen attributes of rachamim, or mercy, that he told to Moshe after the sin of the eigel, or golden calf, as mentioned in parshas Ki Sisa. The meaning of this trait is that God has invested an abundance of truth, or meaning, into everything that He has created in the universe. The Torah is thus telling us, according to this opinion in the midrash, that there is a feminine trait, called 'bakol', or everything, that consists in the ability to see meaning, or truth, in everything in life, even the seemingly small, trivial things. Rav Aharon said that this is a uniquely feminine trait and it explains why Chazal said that if a person has a daughter first, it is a good sign for sons. This does not mean, as commonly thought, that if a person has a daughter first, it is a good sign that he will then have

sons. Rather, it means that if a girl is born first, it is a good sign for the sons that will follow, because their older sister will teach them this important trait. This understanding of the Ramban is very inspiring, but it does not explain why we need to know this as an introduction to Avrohom's decision to find a wife for Yitzchok. I would therefore like to suggest a different explanation of the Ramban, which will also explain the connection between God's blessing to Avrohom and with Avrohom's arrangement for Yitzchok's marriage, as well as the death and burial of Soroh which is recorded in the previous verses, which describe the death and burial of Soroh.

One of the things that Ramban says in explaining the trait of 'bakol', is that it corresponds to the concept of Knesses Yisroel. He says that this refers to the collective character of the Jewish people. Although the Ramban does not mention this, in kabbalah, this middah corresponds to the sephirah of 'malchus,' which is feminine, and, therefore, is referred to in the midrash as a daughter. Thus, Avrohom was connected to the development of the collective character of the Jewish people. This is actually the deeper meaning of Ramban's principle, taken from another midrash, that the actions of the patriarchs are a sign for the children. The acts of the patriarchs, according to the Ramban, helped form the collective character of the Jewish people. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt"l, in an essay included in his recently published *Abraham's Journey*, says that the patriarchs and matriarchs were teams, and worked together in forming the Jewish nation. That is why, after Soroh's death, we do not find anything recorded of Avrohom's life besides the episode of Yitzchok's marriage, and Avrohom's subsequent marriage to Keturah. Once Soroh died, the team of Avrohom and Soroh was no longer active, and Avrohom was no longer contributing to the further development of the collective character of the Jewish nation. Perhaps, then, the Torah is telling us, when it mentions the blessing of 'bakol' after the death and burial of Soroh and immediately before the arrangement for Yitzchok's marriage, Avrohom realized that with Soroh's death, it was now necessary, in order to continue the work of shaping the collective nature of the Jewish people, for Yitzchok to get married and thereby form a new team to implement the middah of 'bakol', just as Soroh and he had done while she was alive.

## Living Al Kiddush Hashem

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given at Gruss Kollel on November 24, 2016)

**T**he Mishna in Avos says: *be-asara nisyonos nisanesh Avraham Avinu, ve-omad bekulom*. The gadlus of Avraham Avinu was in the fact that he passed ten nisyonos. There is a machlokes Rishonim about how to count them. Rashi in Avos says that the last of the ten was the Akeida. And this seems to be the pashut pshat—Akeidas Yitzchak is the greatest nissayon anyone might ever have. And Avraham passed it with flying colors. Rabbeinu Yona, however, in his periush of Pirkei Avos, has a different count of the asara nisyonos. He says that the Akeida was the ninth nissayon. And the tenth is described at the beginning of Parshas Chayei Sarah. When Avraham wanted to bury Sarah, he had trouble coming to an agreement with the local Hittim for the place he wanted. He had to enter into protracted negotiations, and still he kept calm and did not complain. He managed to have bitachon and spoke properly to them. And that was the tenth nissayon. The Ba'alei Mussar ask: Why do you need another nissayon of protracted real estate negotiations after the Akeida? So he had to have an eight-sentence conversation to get what he wanted! And Avraham, being one of the wealthiest people in the world, had to pay 400 shekels—equivalent to \$400,000 today, perhaps. Why is this considered an act on a higher madreiga than Akeidas Yitzchak? So the Ba'alei Mussar explain: Akeidas Yitzchak was certainly a much, much harder ordeal. But sometimes it's easy to be a big hero in the middle of a battle, because you know it's a big battle. You know that Hashem is looking at you. It's easy because you know it's something special. Akeidas Yitzchak was special and unique. Hashem told Avraham, I am going to ask you to do something special, and Avraham knew that the entire world was riding on this—something that Hashem had been preparing him for his entire life. However, in Parshas Chayei Sara, Avraham

is just trying to buy a plot of land. He is involved in regular business negotiations. He is in a very traumatic time of his life—his wife just died. And it's not supposed to be a nissayon. Hashem did not tell him to do anything grand, and there is nothing impressive about this. He is just buying a little piece of land to bury his wife. There is no pomp and circumstance. It's just a challenge of regular life. And Ba'alei Mussar say that as hard as Akeidas Yitzchak is, you know it's special, so you are mechazek yourself. However, the challenges of regular life are difficult because you don't know something special is going on. You don't think Hashem is looking at you right now and waiting to see what you will do at this moment. Sometimes it's harder to do the right thing in regular life than at the moment of supreme sacrifice. And that's why the highest nissayon for Avraham was just to keep his middos, to be calm, polite, and not complain. The challenges of regular life can be harder than Akeidas Yitzchak. And it's true. The Ba'alei Mussar point out that if someone would come to you and say: If you were living at the time of the Inquisition, would you give up your life for kiddush Hashem? It's a hard nissayon. However, it would be easy for us to say: This is a big moment. I am giving my life for Kiddush Hashem. However, to be mekadesh Hashem in your regular life, when you are on the Subway or in the Caf, there is sometimes an even greater nissayon because you don't have that inspiration. You don't have that extra excitement—it's only regular life.

Im yirtze Hashem, none of us will ever be called upon to die al kiddush Hashem. However, every day we have the challenge of living al pi kiddush Hashem, and with that, we can really reach the heights of what we can achieve in life and come closer to the madreiga of Avraham Avinu. Shabbat Shalom.

## Has Judaism Become Too Easy?

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

**A** few years ago, an Orthodox woman penned a New York Times article advocating the virtues of Shabbat observance to a general, non-Jewish public. The author portrayed Shabbat as a twenty-four-

hour oasis of serenity within our noisy and boisterous modern world. Shabbat provided down time to reconnect with our inner self, our families, and our community. Unplugging from a wired and hyper-stimulated culture,

it preserves our sanity and our emotional well-being. Portraying Shabbat as a solution to the maladies of modernity, allowed even a non-Jewish audience to appreciate its beauty.

Though the author was portraying Shabbat experience, she could just as easily have been describing many other aspects of religion. Thankfully, religion and religious practice have become easier and more comfortable than in the past. On a practical level, it has never been easier to practice religion but, even more significantly, we have framed religion as an experience which benefits us and improves our lives. We embrace religion because it delivers meaning and purpose to our lives and because it imbues us with values and vision. We endorse religion and pitch it to others because we it crafts the best version of ourselves.

There is a different way to view religion. When Avraham dispatches his servant to secure a wife for Yitzchak, he requests an oath from his servant to faithfully execute the mission. To convey his seriousness Avraham places his servant's hand upon his leg near the area of his brit milah. At the brittle age of ninety-nine Avraham had submitted to an extremely painful surgery without the benefits of anesthesia. By placing his servant's hand close to his scar, Avraham associates the oath and the mission with his painful suffering.

His milah was painful, but it was also transformative and foundational to his identity. Anchoring the oath to this arduous experience lent gravitas to the oath and urgency to the mission.

A parallel scene unfolded thousands of years later involving Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest Talmudic scholars. Born into ignorance, he spent the first forty years of his life as an illiterate peasant. One day he passed a waterway and witnessed the rushing water sculpting surrounding stones. Surprised that soft water could mold solid stone, he extrapolated that Torah study and religious observance, which are each extremely demanding, would powerfully forge his identity. Rabbi Akiva didn't flinch in the face of religious challenge, but embraced it, knowing that the impact of an experience is always directly related to the degree of difficulty and hardship. The more we strain and struggle in religion the more deeply it shapes our identity.

Avraham and Rabbi Akiva didn't view religion as beneficial or enjoyable, but as challenging and demanding. As my revered teacher, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein formulated "religion demands having shoulders strong enough to bear the weight of religion without being

crushed by it". Religion is meant to be pleasant and agreeable, but also to be heavy and burdensome. It is crucial to delicately calibrate between these opposing perspectives of religion. Too easy, and religion becomes superficial and doesn't touch our souls. Too heavy and religion suffocates life and crushes our spirit.

How did we get to the point that we predominately view religion as easy and beneficial, rather than as a strenuous challenge to serve a higher being? How did religion become soft, less heavy, and, by extension, less transformative?

### **A world of comfort**

Firstly, religion has been adapted to our modern world of convenience. Science, technology, and capitalism have all improved our living conditions, vastly upgrading our quality of life. Life used to be difficult, but it has become significantly more comfortable and enjoyable. Without adapting our attitude about religion, it may have become completely severed from our reality. By altering our perspective and even our religious language we preserved its relevance, but we also emulsified religion, smoothing out its rough edges and eliminating any prickly thorns. This transformation of religion may have been necessary to update it to our new world of comfort, but, like every adaptation, it carried steep and unforeseen costs.

Shabbat observance is a perfect example of how religion has become more "silky", based on the general improvements in our quality of life.

Previous generations endured austere shabbat experiences with limited physical pleasure. Their Shabbat home environment was cold and dark, their food was cold, and their mobility was limited. Due to electricity, modern heating, shabbat clocks, and ubiquitous eiruv, our shabbat experience has become luxurious, with almost no drop off from our general weekday routine. Shabbat is a perfect microcosm for how religious practice has become more comfortable, matching the staggering improvements in our quality of life.

The improvements to Shabbat are obviously positive and necessary developments, but they threaten the spiritual flavor and tone of Shabbat. Shabbat is more than just family time and more than just a day to relax, play board games and reconnect over coffee. It is a day to shutdown and recall creation, Exodus and Jewish covenant. Without actual shutdown it is difficult to latch on to those large and seminal ideas.

## Moving from the Holocaust

Additionally, there is a historical element behind this shift in how we frame religion. Two major Jewish historical events of the 20th century contributed to this reconfiguration of religion. The post-Holocaust world was a gloomy world of death and darkness. In the aftermath of this apocalypse, Hashem appeared very distant and very imposing. Many were left with lingering questions about a God who could allow mass genocide against His chosen people. Many who couldn't relate to this frightening God left religion entirely. For those who remained, religious life felt heavy and imposing. The popular Yiddish phrase "shver zu zein a yid" or "it is difficult to be a Jew" captured the pervasive mood impression that religion was overbearing. Judaism was in dire need of an attitudinal overhaul.

Gradually, a younger and more religiously confident generation, which hadn't suffered the agony of the Holocaust began to define Hashem in more welcoming and cheery terms. He was no longer seen as austere and forbidding, but as user-friendly and loving. The emotional core of religion shifted from fear and trembling to joy and celebration. Hashem became less intimidating, less demanding, and more accommodating and helpful. Hashem went from being our Father in heaven to being our Grandfather in heaven. No one is afraid of their grandfather.

This shift was absolutely necessary to restore faith and rebuild religious experience in the wake of the

Holocaust, but it created a lopsided view of Hashem and an imbalanced attitude toward religion. Religion has become a platform of opportunity rather than a regimen of expectation and duty.

## The sun shines in Israel

Our return to the modern state of Israel has also reworked our image of Hashem. The tables of history have turned and, for the first time in thousands of years, we sense that Hashem is smiling upon us rather than hiding from us. Living through euphoric miracles we can't help but feel that we are partnering with Hashem in crafting modern history. This sense of partnership has bred optimism, lending a cheery confidence to religion. Eighty years after the Holocaust and seventy-five years into statehood, religion is broadcast in a very different frequency. The sun has risen above Jewish history and its bright rays have made religion glow.

All these developments are fortunate and have fastened religion to our ever-changing world. These changes have made religion more vibrant, more joyful, and more popular than ever. However, we mustn't let the overall balance go awry. Judaism isn't just bagels and lox and lovely family gatherings. It is a stretch to reach heaven, a thrust to encounter the Other and journey beyond our world. In our efforts to affix religion to our new world we cannot ground it and eliminate its struggle, its power, or its glory.

## Don't Leave Home / Leave Home!

*Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner*

**O**n first read, the following story seems to be all about Yitzchak. Avraham charges his servant with finding a wife for Yitzchak from the Aramean branch of the family. The servant asks, "Maybe she will not agree to follow me to Canaan; shall I return your son to the land you left?" To which Avraham replies, "Guard yourself, lest you bring my son back there. Hashem, who took me from my father's house and my birthplace, who spoke to me and swore to me, 'I have given this land to your progeny,' He will send His agent before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. And if she does not wish to follow you, you will be freed from this oath [to find Yitzchak a wife]. Only do not bring my son back there." (Bereishit 24:38)

Why must Yitzchak remain in the land? Commentators offer at least three approaches, with a focus on Yitzchak's

welfare and mission.

1) **Eretz Yisrael:** Some suggest that Avraham insists because Eretz Yisrael is a wonderful land. (Abarbanel) This view is amplified in a midrash which notes that Avraham had offered Yitzchak as a sacrifice; leaving the sacred land would desecrate his sanctity. (Pesikta Zutrita Bereishit 24:6)

2) **Aram:** Rabbi Ephraim Luntschitz adds that moving to Aram could have a negative impact, beyond the loss of the holiness of Israel. Avraham sought Yitzchak's wife from Aram and intended for Yitzchak to live in Israel, to impose distance between him and the potential negative influence of his inlaws. (Kli Yakar to Bereishit 24:3) Similarly, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch contended that Hashem told Avraham to abandon his family and birthplace; the mission of "Lech lecha" continued for Yitzchak and

Yaakov. (Commentary to Bereishit 24:8; and see Malbim to Bereishit 24:6) Thus Avraham emphasized that Hashem drew him from his father's house and his birthplace.

3) **Future of the Jews:** Avraham quoted Hashem's promise, "I have given this land to your progeny." As Radak (Commentary to Bereishit 24:6) explains, Avraham had gained a hold in Eretz Yisrael, and Yitzchak was continuing to develop that presence. Leaving would mean abandoning the mission of establishing Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael.

Somewhat more mystically, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (Haameik Davar to Bereishit 24:6) contends that each generation of Avraham's family is linked with a stage of Jewish history. Avraham's experiences represented the Jews who wandered from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael. Yaakov's experiences represented Jews of exile. And in between them, Yitzchak represented the Jews of Eretz Yisrael. Since Hashem wanted us to remain in Israel forever (Vayikra 25:18), it was important that Yitzchak, our avatar, remain in Israel for his entire life.

Certainly, all of the above are important reasons why Yitzchak should remain in Eretz Yisrael. But surely Avraham's demand was also important for Rivkah. Rivkah

would carry Yaakov and Esav inside her; would understand the nature of both of her sons and the importance of the family mission; would perceive the need to undermine Esav at a critical moment and have Esav's trust to make that possible (see Rashi to Bereishit 27:15); would cajole Yaakov into the most unYaakov act of misleading his father and gaining his blessing; would appreciate the threat to Yaakov from Esav and persuade Yitzchak to send Yaakov away on the journey to Aram that Yitzchak never made himself.

The person who could do this would have to value the holiness of Eretz Yisrael. The person who could do this would have to understand the difference between Eretz Yisrael and Aram, and shun the latter. The person who could do this would have to commit to securing future generations of Jews in their mission in Eretz Yisrael. Yitzchak must remain in Israel, and Rivkah must choose to leave Aram and live in Israel. This was Rivkah's "Lech lecha" journey.

Rivkah's family hesitated to send her to Eretz Yisrael, but they asked her: "Will you go with this man?" Rivkah answered, "I will go." (Bereishit 24:58) She accepted the mission, leaving home. The rest is our history, and hers.

## Taking the First Step

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks *zt"l*, whose *yahrtzeit* is observed this week (20 Marcheshvan), observed<sup>1</sup> that Parshas Chayei-Sara contains "the most serene description of old age and dying anywhere in the Torah." He refers to the *pasuk's* description of Avraham's death: (ויגוע וימת אברהם בשיבה טובה זקן ושבע 25:8). Avraham is said to have died in advanced age, after having lived a long life, and שבע – content and satisfied. Similarly, the Torah earlier says about Avraham, ויה' ברכך את אברהם בכל – "Avraham was aged, advanced in years, and God blessed Avraham with everything" (24:1).

Sara, too, is described as having lived a blissful, blessed life. After telling us that Sara lived 127 years, the Torah repeats, שני חיי שרה – "these were the years of Sara's life" (23:1). Rashi comments that this extra phrase teaches that כולן שוין לטובה – all of Sara's days were "equally good."

How could Rashi make such a statement? Sara, together with Avraham, had to relocate and settle in a foreign land. They endured famine. Twice Sara was taken into the palace of a monarch. She endured many decades of infertility

until finally having a child. She had her maidservant marry her husband, which ended up causing difficult problems. Were all her years "equally good"?

And was Avraham truly שבע? Rabbi Sacks notes that Avraham was promised *Eretz Yisrael* seven times. Four times he was promised that he would produce a great nation. And yet, by the end of his life, his only holding in *Eretz Yisrael* was *Me'aras Ha'machpeila*, which he purchased for an exorbitant amount of money in order to bury his wife. And he had but one son who would continue his legacy and be heir to Hashem's blessing. How could Avraham be described as "content"?

Rabbi Sacks explains:

*If you ensure that your children will continue to live for what you have lived for, then you can have faith that they will continue your journey until eventually they reach the destination. Abraham did not need to see all the land in Jewish hands, nor did he need to see the Jewish people become numerous. He had taken the first step. He had begun the task, and he knew that his descendants would continue it.*

<sup>1</sup> <https://outorah.org/p/871/>.

He was able to die serenely because he had faith in God and faith that others would complete what he had begun. The same was surely true of Sarah.

To place your life in God's hands, to have faith that whatever happens to you happens for a reason, to know that you are part of a larger narrative, and to believe that others will continue what you began, is to achieve a satisfaction in life that cannot be destroyed by circumstance. Abraham and Sarah had that faith, and they were able to die with a sense of fulfillment.

Avraham and Sara were "content," and their lives were שוין לטובה, because they had taken the first step. People feel discontented because they expect to have everything, they feel entitled to everything, and they feel that without everything their lives are incomplete. Avraham and Sara set for themselves the goal not of completing the job, but rather doing whatever they can to advance the cause. And when this is the goal, then all of one's life can be said to have been לטובה.

Rabbi Sacks concludes:

*To be happy does not mean that you have everything you*

want or everything you were promised. It means, simply, to have done what you were called on to do, to have made a beginning, and then to have passed on the baton to the next generation. "The righteous, even in death, are regarded as though they were still alive" because the righteous leave a living trace in those who come after them.

That was enough for Abraham and Sarah, and it must be enough for us.

By taking the first step, and laying the groundwork for the next generation to continue our efforts, we can experience fulfillment and contentment regardless of our circumstances.

Rabbi Sacks cites the adage of the Chinese thinker Lao-Tzu, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." The Jewish equivalent of this teaching, Rabbi Sacks explained, is the Mishna's famous exhortation in *Pirkei Avos* (2:16), ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל, לא עליוך המלאכה לגמור, – "You are not obliged to complete the work, but neither are you free to refrain from doing it." Our job is to take the first step, to accomplish as much as we can, and if we do, then our lives can be described as שוין לטובה.

## Two Kinds of Chessed

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's sedra, Chayei Sarah, we learn of the death of Sarah Imeinu, Avraham's purchase of the Me'aras Ha'Machpela, and the burial of Sarah (Bereishis 23). After Sarah's passing, Avraham realizes he must marry-off his son, Yitzchak (Bereishis 24:1 w/ Rashi), who will continue in his parents ways. The first shidduch in our history is told to us, as Avraham's trusty servant (who the sages identify as Eliezer), returns to Avraham's land, birth place and family, and finds Rivka, who will become the second matriarch.

Rikva is a true woman of valor, whose very essence is defined by her gemillus chassadim. Not only does she give the servant to drink - a hot, weary, tired traveler (who she has never met before!) - but she draws sufficient water to give all of his camels to drink as well. When the servant sees that she is a ba'alas chessed, he gives her jewelry as gifts of betrothal. After obtaining permission - as well as a blessing - from her family, Rikva returns with the servant to marry Yitzchak (Bereishis 24).

וויצחק בא מבוא באר לחי ראי והוא יושב בארץ הנגב - *Now Yitzchak was on his way, coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i, and he dwelt in the land of the south;*

וערב וישא עיניו וירא והנה גמלים באים - *And Yitzchak went out to pray [the afternoon mincha prayer] in the field towards evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were approaching;* ותשא רבקה את עיניה ותרא את יצחק ותפל - *And Rivka lifted her eyes, and saw Yitzchak, and she fell from upon the camel (24:62-64).*

What is the meaning of Yitzchak's return, at this particular moment, from Be'er Lachai Ro'i? Why had he gone there in the first place, and what was the purpose of his journey? Rashi (quoting Medrash Bereishis Rabbah) tells us: מבוא באר לחי רואי. שקהלף להביא הגר לאברהם אביו - *that he (Yitzchak) went to bring Hagar to Avraham his father, so that he (Avraham) should marry her.*

And in fact, once Yitzchak marries Rivka (24:67), the very next pasuk tells us: ויסף אברהם ויקח אשה ושמה קטורה - *and Avraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah (25:1).* Who was Keturah? Rashi teaches that she was Hagar.

The sequence here is incredible. Yitzchak is aware that his father's servant has gone to bring him a wife. He knows that soon he will marry and leave the home of his father. In the aftermath of his own mother's passing, Yitzchak

has the foresight to realize that his father Avraham will be alone. So before his own kallah is brought to him, he goes to bring Hagar back to his father.

Ha'Rav Yaakov Bender shlita writes, "When we learn Chumash with Rashi, we gain both Torah and yiras Shomayim, and in every teaching, there are lessons as to how to live life properly..."

"In speaking with almanos and yesomos (widows and orphans) the hashkafic questions are not easy, the 'why's' and 'how come's', but much more difficult is when it comes to speaking to children whose parents wish to remarry. Make no mistake, it is very difficult for a child to have a strange person in the house, and no child feels like welcoming new 'siblings'. I always try to make them understand the other side of the story. These children will eventually get married and leave the house, building a family of their own, but their mothers might remain alone for many, many years, and now have the chance to remarry someone suitable.

"It calls for real sensitivity, concern and self-sacrifice. It is never an easy conversation, but the words of Rashi speak to us loud and clear, and can be a tremendous source of chizuk for all. Rashi on this passage describes the awe that fell over Rivka Imeinu when she first beheld Yitzchak, the man of pure yiras Shomayim. 'She fell from upon the camel.' What was Yitzchak involved in at this time that was so holy and pure? Yes, he set out to pray the afternoon Mincha prayer, but right before that? He was returning from Be'er Lachai Roi to bring Hagar for his father, so that Avraham should marry her.

"We talk a lot about the gemillus chessed of Rivka, the necessary middah for a mother of Klal Yisrael. But Rashi is teaching us not to overlook the selflessness of Yitzchak Avinu! He was going to build his own home, but what about his father, who would now be alone? These were

Yitzchak's hachanos (preparations) for his own wedding - taking care of his father and bringing back Hagar.

"And this should guide us still. Sometimes, a child has to realize that his parent is suffering, and it takes a special strength to help out. It is part of who we are, part of the way our nation was formed all the way at the very beginning" (Rav Yaakov Bender on Chumash, p.67-68).

Perhaps Rashi is teaching us something deeper as well. Rivka's chessed was altruistic, without boundaries, and absolutely selfless. For this reason alone, she was chosen to be our second matriarch. This kind of chessed is necessary for the survival of our nation.

But there is another kind of chessed that is just as important, yet sometimes less spoken about and less of a focus. Rivka did chessed for a stranger; Yitzchak did chessed for family. Rivka did chessed at the spring of water in town; Yitzchak did chessed in the home. Rivka did chessed for another; Yitzchak did chessed for his own.

Perhaps, Rashi is teaching us that while chessed for others is of absolute paramount importance for our national well being and destiny, we must not forget that chessed for those in our homes, for our families, for those closest to us, is just as important. We cannot be too busy with chessed for others that we neglect those in our home in need. Every dinner prepared and served, every bedtime story read, every load of laundry washed, every errand run for our family, every family meal when we sit down together, and every listening ear holds up our world.

Perhaps this is one reason why Yitzchak and Rivka's shidduch was the perfect match. Her actions in the sedra represent chessed outside the home, his represent chessed in the home, and together they merge to create the beautiful tapestry of gemillus chessed for which our nation is legendary.

## The Torah's Recipe for Finding a Proper Mate

*Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald*

One of the critical issues facing contemporary American Jewry today is the challenge finding proper mates for our young single people. In this week's parasha, Chayei Sarah, Abraham sends Eliezer, his Damascan servant, to Charan to find a suitable wife for Isaac. Eliezer, in effect, serves as the proverbial shadchan, the matchmaker.

Many people today consider matchmaking a primitive,

backward, and quite medieval practice. The truth is, that many of us, when faced with significant problems or challenges in life, whether financial, social or mechanical, frequently call-in experts for consultation. One of the only areas where there is reluctance to call an expert is matchmaking. And yet, utilizing a third party consultant to provide a young person with a more honest and objective opinion of a prospective mate has a certain compelling

logic.

This week's parasha is a primary source from which we learn much about the qualities that one should look for when seeking an appropriate mate.

Rebecca and Isaac really come from entirely different backgrounds. These profound differences are evident at their very first encounter. When Rebecca (Genesis 24:64), first beholds Isaac, as she is coming from Charan, she falls off her camel and covers her face with a veil. Clearly Rebecca feels quite unworthy of Isaac, because, after all, Isaac comes from a noble and esteemed background, the noble son of the great Abraham, whereas Rebecca, daughter of Betuel, comes from an ignoble background. Rebecca really doesn't feel that she measures up to Isaac. Perhaps that is why Isaac and Rebecca fail to communicate when they have differences regarding how to properly raise their twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Perhaps this huge gulf in their backgrounds explains why instead of talking to Isaac, Rebecca resorts to subterfuge.

Once Rebecca and Isaac personally meet, the Torah states, Genesis 24:67, וַיְבִיאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ, *Isaac brings Rebecca to the tent of Sarah his mother*, וַיִּקַּח אֶת רֵבֶקָה, *and he takes, or betroths, Rebecca*, וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה, *and she becomes his wife*. וַיֶּאֱהָבָהּ, *and he loves her*. וַיִּנְחַם יִצְחָק אֶחָרֵי אִמּוֹ, *and Isaac is comforted for the loss of his mother*.

The order of this verse is confounding. First, Isaac marries Rebecca and she becomes his wife—only then, does he love her. Scripture is surely informing us that true, mature love, at least from the Jewish perspective, is something that develops after marriage, not before. It's not: "I saw him across the room, my blood began to boil, I knew I had to have him." That's ridiculous! Who knows what kind of lecher, endowed with a comely, handsome body, is standing across the room? But, if a matchmaker, or third objective party, properly evaluates the couple, and determines that they do indeed have compatible values and qualities, then it is quite likely that these two individuals can successfully meld together, and mature love will develop.

The idea of Isaac being, "comforted for the loss of his mother," (Genesis 24:67), is quite interesting as well. In fact, Rashi, citing the Midrash, Genesis Rabba 60:16, says: וַנְעִשִׂית דְּגִמַּת שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ, *Rebecca became similar to Sarah, Isaac's mother* קַיְמַת שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ, *as long as Sarah was alive*, וְהָיָה נֵר דְּלוּק מֵעֶרְבִי שָׁבֵת לְעֶרְבִי שָׁבֵת, *there was always a candle lit from one Shabbat to the next*, וַבְּרָכָה מְצוּיָה בְּעֶסָה, *and there was always a blessing in the dough* עַל הָאֵהָל, *and there*

*was always a cloud tied to the tent.* פָּסְקוּ, *and when Sara died, it ceased.* חָזְרוּ, *however, when Rebecca arrived, all these elements returned to the home.*

The imagery cited by Rashi is crucial—these descriptions are in fact metaphors of what mothers and wives bring to a marriage. "The candle is lit from one Shabbat to another Shabbat," implies that there is an emphasis on light and enlightenment—in effect, the importance of mothers (i.e., parents) emphasizing learning, especially Torah learning. In addition to the centrality of learning however, there is also an emphasis on Shabbat, underscoring the importance of having a day of sacred time for the family.

"A blessing in the dough," means that there is always sufficient material blessing in the home, implying that even though the material endowments may be meager, the woman is שְׂמֵחָה בְּחֵלְקָה—*always satisfied with her lot*, and able to teach her family to be satisfied with what they possess.

"There's a cloud tied to the tent," symbolizing that the Divine Presence is deeply rooted in that domicile, that there is a constant aura of spirituality present in the home.

One of the highly controversial Mishnayot (Mishnaic passages), that has been frequently criticized by some "enlightened" Jewish commentators, is a famous Mishnah that is found at the beginning of Tractate Shabbat (Chapter 2), known as בְּמָה מְדֻלְקִין. This Mishnah is recited as part of the Ashkenazic Friday evening prayer service as an addition to the welcoming of the Shabbat prayers.

The Mishna reads: "For three sins women die in childbirth: because they are not careful in נִידָה, *niddah*—the laws of family purity, חֵלָה, *challah*—taking dough from the bread that they bake, וּבִהְדִּלְקַת הַנֵּר, *because they fail to light Sabbath candles*."

At first blush, this statement in the Mishna appears to be quite outrageous. However, upon further examination, it is evident that this Mishna is intended to serve as a metaphor, and a vital educational metaphor at that. The message of the Mishna is loud and clear: Women lose their children or their lives, because they fail to provide proper examples for their children.

The Mishna argues that if parents fail to serve as proper models for their children, if they fail to demonstrate to their children family relationships based on sanctity and purity (laws of Niddah), if they do not evidence healthy relationships between husbands and wives—they may very well lose their children. If parents fail to show a giving quality, if they do not practice frequent and multiple acts

of charity—of giving challah, they may lose their children. If parents fail to light the Sabbath candles, if they fail to focus on, and nurture, their family’s spiritual needs, if every day is exactly the same, and there is no sacred family time, then they will likely lose their children.

The Mishna maintains that those parents who fail to transmit these three critical values, will lose their children—in a Jewish sense—their children will simply never be in a position to acquire those feelings that are necessary to maintain and transmit the legacy of Judaism.

These parents will also lose their children in an ethical and moral sense. Parents whose children are bereft of these values—of family love relationships, of feelings of charity, of spirituality and of Shabbat, will soon discover that their children have found other things to fill the void in their lives. And, this is precisely what we are taught in this week’s parasha.

When Eliezer was looking for the proper wife for Isaac at the well in Haran, scripture notes that Eliezer saw a woman (Genesis 24:17), וַיֵּרָץ הָעֶבֶד לְקִרְיָאֲתָהּ, *and the man, the servant, Eliezer, ran toward her.* וַיֹּאמֶר, *and he says to her:* הַגִּמְיָאִינִי גַּא מְעַט מֵיִם מִכַּדָּיִךְ, “*pour off a little water from your pitcher.*”

Rashi asks: Why did Eliezer run toward this particular woman? What did he see about her that made her so attractive? Rashi maintains, based on the Midrash, that Eliezer saw the well water coming toward her—that when Rebecca went down to the well to draw for her own needs, the water actually flew from the well and went directly into her pitcher. If that is the case, if Rebecca was a veritable ‘miracle worker,’ why did Eliezer have to put her through the test, by saying that if she gives water to my camels, only then he will know that she is an unusually kind person, and appropriate for Isaac?

The Rabbi’s offer a remarkable and insightful explanation. The fact that a woman may appear to be a miracle worker, the fact that water comes running up toward her, that the well empties directly into her pitcher, is simply not sufficient reason to choose a particular mate. Miracles do not determine who and what is appropriate—kindness determines, chessed determines. Samson Raphael Hirsch defines the word חֶסֶד, “*chessed*”—lovingkindness, as “love translated into action.” Without chessed, even bushelfulls of miracles would not have rendered Rebecca an appropriate mate for Isaac.

These are the rich and meaningful lessons to be gleaned from our scriptures. These are the lessons that must guide

us, especially in contemporary times. These are the lessons for us to heed in our own lives. They are not at all primitive. In fact, they are thoroughly enlightened, and, in many instances, light-years ahead of contemporary practices and understandings.