

קולנו



שמע

SHEMA KOLEINU: DIVREI TORAH FROM THE REBBEIM, TALMIDIM, AND FACULTY OF MTA

Parshas Chayei Sarah

פרשת חיי שרה

The Canaani Shidduch Crisis

Naftali Frankel ('24)

Immediately following the burial of Sarah, the Torah dedicates much of this week's *parsha* to the quest to find a wife for Yitzchak. In introducing these events, the *passuk* says, "ViAvraham zakein ba bayamim VaHashem beirach es Avraham bakol." (*Bereishis* 24:1). While the simple understanding of this is that Hashem blessed Avraham with wealth, honor, old age, and children, as is explained by many *meforshim*, there is a *Gemara* that discusses a different possibility. Amidst a discussion regarding whether it is meritorious or not to have a daughter, the *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 16b) quotes a disagreement among *tannaim* concerning the meaning of the word "*bakol*" in the aforementioned *passuk*. One such opinion, that of Rabbi Meir, states that "*bakol*" teaches us that the *bracha* Avraham received was that he did not have a daughter. The Ramban explains that this was indeed a blessing, as had Avraham had a daughter, he would have been forced to marry her off to one of the accursed *canaani* men. This concept is echoed in the events that follow, as Avraham, prior to sending Eliezer to Charan, forces him to swear that he will not choose a local *canaani* woman as Yitzchak's potential spouse. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the reasoning for this oath was that the *canaanim* were cursed due to the sins of their ancestors in the days of Noach, and it would not be befitting for Yitzchak to marry into such a nation. In order to better understand the principles behind this idea, it is necessary to examine the circumstances of the curse on Canaan, as well as the values by which Avraham and Sarah stood.

Looking back a few weeks to *Parshas Noach*, the Torah mentions the incident in which Noach became drunk and embarrassed himself, leading to the unspeakable acts performed by his son Cham and, based on explanations quoted by Rashi and others, Cham's son Canaan. While the *amoraim* differ in regard to the actual sin that took place and which of the two committed it, it is nonetheless clear that both Cham and Canaan were involved in this disgusting lack of *tznius*. It is because of this failure to

In This Edition:

The <i>Canaani Shidduch</i> Crisis Naftali Frankel ('24)	1
Always do More Noam Sheffey ('25)	2
One Word Frenzy Yehuda Tannenbaum ('26)	2
A Short Vort Elisha Cohen ('24)	3
The Value of Time and Money Asher Cooper ('27)	4
Yahrzeits & Insights: This Week in Jewish History	4
<i>Neshamah</i> and <i>Guf</i> Dovid Winston ('24)	5

protect the tznius of Noach that Cham's descendants, the canaanim, were cursed.

While Cham and his descendants served as the perpetrators of obscenity and vulgarity, it was Shem's descendants, Avraham and Sarah, who would emulate Shem's actions and become the models of proper *tznius*. Possibly the most famous example of this is found in the context of Avraham and Sarah's descent to Mitzrayim, when Avraham suddenly became apprehensive about Sarah's beauty. Rashi explains that due to the tremendous level of modesty between Avraham and Sarah, it was not until this point, when Avraham noticed Sarah's reflection in the water, that he had discovered her immense beauty. While this is certainly a well-known example of the *tznius* of Avraham and Sarah, it is merely one such instance. Another occasion on which we are told of Sarah's modesty is in relation to the *malachim's* visit to Avraham. Prior to informing Avraham that Sarah will give birth to a son, the *malachim* inquire regarding Sarah's whereabouts, to which Avraham responds that she is in the tent. The *Gemara* in *Bava Metzia* (87a) teaches that the purpose of this *passuk* is to inform us of Sarah's adherence to *tznius*, as she remained in the tent while the guests were present.

As we are now able to acknowledge the denigration with which the *canaanim* treated the same values that Avraham and Sarah held in such high regard, it should become even clearer why it was not becoming of Yitzchak to marry a *canaani* woman. As Yitzchak was the offspring of Avraham and Sarah, it was imperative that he not become involved with those whose identity was determined by their disregard of *tznius*, the very value with which Yitzchak was surely raised. Finally, as *Chayei Sarah* discusses the end of each of Avraham and Sarah's lives, it is only fitting that Yitzchak should marry someone with whom he'd share the very values that he is trying to relay from his parents to the future generations.

Always Do More

Noam Sheffey ('25)

In this week's *parsha*, we see Avraham send out his servant Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham lays out firm instructions for where he wants Eliezer to find Yitzchak's wife. Eliezer sets out with ten of Avraham's camels and heads to *Aram Naharaim* to find a wife for Yitzchak. When Eliezer arrives, he intentionally camps out near a well with his camels, hoping that one of the town's girls will come and offer him and his camels' water. Behold! *Rivka*

Imeinu comes to the well and does exactly what Eliezer wishes. The *Kedushas Levi* gives us an insight into Rivka's actions and what made them so special. Not only did Rivka go out of her way to give *Eliezer* water, but she also gave all the camels one big bucket to drink from. Rivka, instead of having to decide which camel she would give water to first, she constantly kept on filling up one big bucket with water. By allowing all these camels to drink at the same time *Rivka* taught us the importance of having compassion towards everyone. The *Gemara* in *Kesubos* (67b) tells a story that shows the extent of doing a little more to help others just like Rivka did. There was once a poor person who lived in a neighborhood, and every day an *Amora* named Mar Ukva along with his wife would anonymously leave four coins behind this person's door. One day the poor man started following Mar Ukva to see who was anonymously leaving money for him. Sensing that they were being followed, Mar Ukva and his wife hid in a stone furnace. Mar Ukva's feet started burning, but his wife didn't. He then proceeded to stop his burns by stepping on his wife's feet. Why did his feet get burned, but not his wife's? We know that Mar Ukva was giving coins every day, but what we didn't know was that his wife was also preparing food for the poor. His wife believed her above and beyond actions resulted in her feet not getting burned unlike her husband's. One could ponder out of all places why they chose a hot stone oven? The *Gemara* relates that a person should rather get thrown into a burning furnace than put another to shame. This means that while Mar Ukva's wife would prepare food directly for the poor, his donations would require people to go out and purchase their food, causing them some embarrassment. As the *Kedushas Levi* says, this story shows the power of compassion, and how doing a little more goes a long way. We can see from both Mar Ukva's wife and Rivka the importance of compassion and not looking to do simply what is required. We should always keep an eye out for how we can go above and beyond to help our brothers and sisters, especially in times of need.

One Word Frenzy

Yehuda Jannenbaum ('26)

The first *pasuk* of *perek chof daled* says "*vavraham zokein ba bayamim vaShem beirach es avraham bakol*"—"And Avraham was old, well-on in years, and Hashem blessed Avraham *bakol*." The question is, what exactly does "*bakol*" mean? According to the simple translation, it simply means "with all"—money, possessions, land, and many other things. The problem with this simple understanding of the

pasuk is that there was one thing that Avraham didn't have—the guarantee that his legacy would continue. As Rashi points out on this *pasuk*, “*Bakol oleh bgematria 'bein' umeiachar shehoyo lo bain hoyo tzorich lihasiyo ishak*”—“the numerical value of the word ‘*bakol*’ is equal to the value of ‘*bein*’ (son), and once he had a son, he had to take for him a wife.” According to the *Gur Aryeh* and the *Sifsei Chachamim*, the fact that Hashem blessed Avraham with material wealth was irrelevant to him as long as he did not have descendants to pass it down to. Understanding this, Rashi’s explanation of this *pasuk* makes even more sense. This *pasuk* is an introduction to the subsequent story of Eliezer’s journey to find a wife for Yitzchak.

The Ramban explains, similarly to Rashi, that Hashem had given Avraham everything, even children, but the one thing that he lacked was his primary son to have children of his own to inherit his status and honor. The Ramban then mentions a *gemara* in *Bava Basra* 16b that lists several explanations for what the word “*bakol*” means. Rabbi Elazar HaMoadi says that it refers to his wisdom, and that the kings of the east and west would come to consult Avraham, while Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says it refers to a special stone that hung around his neck. The most interesting part of this *gemara* is what precedes these *deios*. The *gemara* has a *machlokes* about whether Avraham had a daughter. According to Rabbi Meir, Avraham did not have a daughter, and one should understand the *pasuk* as referring to wealth. According to Rabbi Yehuda, he did have a daughter, and according to *Acheirim*, he had a daughter whose name was in fact

“*Bakol*.” If we assume that the *pasuk* is referring to the name of Avraham’s daughter then why would the *pasuk* say that Hashem blessed Avraham *bakol*, referring to his daughter? Further asks the *Ramban*, why would having a daughter be considered a *brocha*? If it was the case that he had a daughter, he would only be able to marry her off to the wicked *Cannanim*! This explains why Rabbi Meir holds it must be referring to material wealth.

Let’s now try to understand the reasoning behind Rabbi Yehuda’s *pschat*. The *pasuk* says that he had everything that he desired, even a daughter, but not a wife for his son. So what does *Acheirim* come to add to the *pasuk* by explaining that her name was *Bakol*? The *Ramban* explains that we learn an important lesson about the nature of Hashem from this “name.” From *kol*, we learn that Hashem sustains the whole world. He learns this based on the *pasuk* in *Yeshayahu* (44:24) that says, “*Anochi Hashem oseh kol noteh shomayim Ivadi rokah ho’oretz*.”—“It is I, Hashem, Who made everything, Who alone stretched out the heavens and unaided spread out the earth. This is also the eighth of the thirteen attributes of mercy. The other part of the name *ba* can be understood as *bas*, which means that Hashem moves the whole world. Another way to explain *Ba(s)* is that it refers to Avraham because of his kindness and how he conducted himself. The *Ramban*’s explanations of all of these different meanings based on one simple word, as well as the opinion of Rashi, the *Gur Aryeh*, and the *Sifsei Chachamim*, truly highlights the depth of the Torah and how one can truly delve into the wellspring of Torah.

A Short Vort

Flisha Cohen ('24)

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַיָּמִים וַיהוָה בֵּרַךְ אֶת־אֲבְרָהָם בְּכֹל (בראשית כא:א)

“Avraham was now old, advanced in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything.” (Bereishis 21:1)

In *parshas Chayei Sarah* we read the words: “*Vahashem beirach es Avraham bakol*” The literal translation is “And Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything (24:1).” Many *meforshim* comment on what the word *bakol* means, interpreting it in a variety of ways. Some say it means that Avraham was blessed with a daughter named *Bakol*. Others disagree and interpret the word “*bakol*” in a spiritual sense referring to Avraham having everything in this world and the world to come. The *Ramban* says that it means Avraham was blessed with long days, riches, possessions, honor, and children, all a man needs to be happy. The *Ramban* says that the Torah mentions all of Avraham’s rewards to show that he is perfect in every detail, lacking nothing, besides for grandchildren. This reveals why he desired so much that his son get married. When someone devotes his life to Hashem, Hashem gives back both in this world and the next. This *middah kineged middah* system is exemplified in this *pasuk* as Avraham gave it his all and in return got it all. It is important for us to understand that if we learn, *daven*, and fulfill Hashem’s *mitzvos* we will be answered in our prayers, possibly even more than we initially anticipated.

The Value of Time of Money

Asher Cooper ('27)

This week's *sedrah*, *Parshas Chayei Sarah*, begins with Sarah's death, and her burial in the *Me'aras Hamachpeilah*. While these topics deservedly require much focus, and are the reason the *parsha* bears its name, it is worth noting that there remains much to learn from the actions and descriptions of Avraham that appear in this *parsha*.

One idea that we can learn from Avraham can be found in the *passuk* that immediately follows Sarah's burial, as the Torah writes, "ViAvraham zakein ba bayamim VaHashem beirach es Avraham bakol." - "Avraham was old, came along with the days, and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." (*Bereishis* 24:1). At first glance, the phrase, "Avraham was old, came along with the days," seems strangely worded and redundant, but, as explained by Rabbi Avraham Twerski, this is not the case. Instead, Rabbi Twerski said, the *passuk* is saying that Avraham "came along in his days," meaning that he never had any regrets. This is due to the fact that Avraham took advantage of every second that he had in this world, living each and every day to the fullest. It is because of this, Rabbi Twerski explains, that "Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." Furthermore, rather than Avraham actually being given everything by Hashem, we can instead understand that it was because Avraham placed such great value on each day, that he perceived the finite number of things that he possessed as being worth everything.

In addition to the aforementioned idea, another exemplary trait of Avraham is reflected in the above *passuk*. In examining the second clause of the *passuk*, "Hashem blessed Avraham with everything," one may ask what caused Hashem to award Avraham with this blessing. The answer to this question lies in the *Midrash*, which explains that following the war with the four kings, Avraham felt the need to express his gratitude to Hashem. As such, Avraham gave all his war spoils to the *tzadik*, Malkitzedek, king of Shalem. Rav Pam interprets this *Midrash* as offering an insight into the true purpose of the blessing of wealth: the ability to use it for *tzedakah*. Avraham clearly demonstrated this quality, and as a result of this, Hashem continuously blessed Avraham with wealth, in order that he would be able to continue to support *tzadikim*.

Once we can fully appreciate these two lessons taught to us by the actions of Avraham, it becomes evident how applicable they are at the current moment. For example, by recognizing the immense value that each moment contains, we are able to better devote our time to what is most important. Nowadays, this could mean designating time to recite *tehillim* or learning Torah in the *zechus* of those put in danger by the attacks in *Eretz Yisrael*. Alternatively, we must also dedicate the use of our material wealth to causes that assist those in need, such as donating supplies to our *chayalim* fighting on our behalf. It is through these two ideas that we have the chance to become closer as a nation, and to help out Jews whom we may not have even met. May we continue to do our part in the coming of *Mashiach* and may the *Bais Hamikdash* be built *bimeheirah viyameinu*.

Yahrzeits & Insights: This Week in Jewish History

Rosh Chodesh Kislev - The Rebbe Recovers

This coming Tuesday, *Rosh Chodesh Kislev*, marks the return of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to public life after suffering a major heart attack just thirty-eight days earlier. During the celebrations of the evening of *Simchas Torah* in the year 1977 (5738), while dancing with the Torah in the main synagogue, the Rebbe's face suddenly turned pale. As he sat back in his chair, the *chassidim* knew that something was very wrong, and the synagogue was quickly cleared. Still, the Rebbe stoically completed the last dance together with his brother-in-law Rabbi Shmaryahu Gurary. Dr. Ira Weiss, who flew in from Chicago to treat the Rebbe, testified that "on a scale of one to ten, he had the full-ten-scale-heart attack.....it involved such extensive cardiovascular damage that in anyone's normal medical experience, one would worry about the possibility of survival."

And then, on the First of Kislev, for the first time in five weeks, the Rebbe left his office at 770 Eastern Parkway and returned to his home, signaling his complete and miraculous recovery. *Chassidim* all over rejoiced at the good news.

Rosh Chodesh Kislev marked the beginning of sixteen additional years of life and leadership for the Rebbe. During this period he revealed ever deeper Torah secrets, and inspired many thousands of people to transform themselves and the world for good.

From that day forward, the Rebbe redoubled his efforts on behalf of the Jewish nation, and for the dissemination of Torah and *chassidus*. The first of *Kislev* has since been celebrated by Lubavitcher *chassidim* as a day of thanksgiving and rejoicing.

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Neshamah and Guf

David Winston ('24)

Perek 23 possuk 2 of parshas Chayei Sarah states:

ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע היא חברון בארץ כנען ויבא אברהם לספד
לשרה ולבכתה

"Sarah died in *Kiryas Arba*, which is Chevron, in the land of Canaan, and Avrohom came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her." The *Zohar* teaches that Sarah is a *remez* to the *guf* (body) and Avrohom a *remez* to the *neshamah*. This *possuk* demonstrates a clear connection between the *guf* and *neshamah*, even after the body's death. The *passuk* begins with, "*vatomos Sarah*," when the body dies. It then says, "*bkiryas arba*," explaining that the body represents unity between the four elements (earth, water, air, and fire, as mentioned in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:12). The *passuk* goes on to say, "*hee chevron*," as long as the body was living, the four elements were united, and continues, "*vayovo avrohom*," comes the *neshamah*, finishing off with, "*lispod sarah vlivkosoh*," and the *neshamah* cries, even after the death of the *guf*. The *passuk* shows that Sarah was the *guf* and that Avrohom was the *neshama*.

However, this analogy of Avrohom and Sarah to the *neshamah* and *guf* raises a question on a *passuk* in *parshas Vayeira*. When Avrohom was stressed about Sarah's demand to banish Hagar and Yishmael, Hashem told him "*kol asher tomar eilecha sarah shma bkolah*," meaning, "All that [Sarah] tells you, listen to her voice." Since when is one supposed to allow the *guf* to dominate the *neshamah*? After all, it's the *neshamah* that is connected to Hashem, and the *guf* is just dragging us down, isn't it? Perhaps not.

Another relationship between the *guf* and *neshamah* is elucidated by the Baal Shem Tov commenting on *Shemos* 23:5: "*ki sireh chamor sonagachi roveitz tachas maso'v vchodalto meiazov lo azov ta'azov imo*," "When you see the donkey of your enemy crouching under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall certainly help it." The Baal Shem Tov explains: "*ki sireh chamor*," when you look into your materiality, you will see, "*sona'acho*," that it is your enemy, since in the early levels of one's *avodah* (service to Hashem) the *guf* and *neshamah* oppose each other, "*roveitz tachas maso'v*," the load of the Torah and *mitzvos* were specifically placed on the *guf* as well, with the intention that they should refine the *guf*. But since the body doesn't want this load, it crouches under it.

Despite the fact that the *mitzvos* were given to both the *neshamah* and *guf*, the *mitzvos* themselves are performed through physicality. Certainly *mitzvos* that require actions or objects, like donning *tefillin*, are performed through physicality, but even *mitzvos* like *ahavah* and *talmud torah* are done with the heart and brain, physical attributes, so to speak. Thus explains the Baal Shem Tov in the last part of that *possuk*: "*vchodalto meiazov lo*," since the *guf* seems like such a lowly thing, you will want to break it through decreasing physical pleasures in order to achieve the purpose of the *neshamah*, but nevertheless, "*azov ta'azov imo*," you must purify the *guf*, not destroy it. As an example, one may, in the morning, have all the proper thoughts and ideas about the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* and what connection he will have with Hashem through them. At the same time, he may see his body as solely a vessel for *aveiros* and *shtus* and not want to put the *tefillin* on his body. Even with all the proper intentions, if he lacks the physical aspect of the *mitzvah*, not only is he not *mkayeim* the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*, he is *oveir* being *mvatel* the *mitzvah*! On the other hand, if he didn't have the proper *kavanah* while putting on the *tefillin*, he is still *mkayeim* the *mitzvah*!

Through this explanation, we can understand the *possuk* in this week's *parshah* in conjunction with the teaching of the *Zohar*. The *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Naso* 16) teaches that when Hashem created the world, he desired to have a dwelling place in the lower realms—*dirah batachtonim*. Our job in this world is not to shut ourselves away from the physical. Rather, we must strive to see the holiness within everything Hashem presents us with and to convert that *gashmius* into *ruchnius*.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 1, p. 31-34)



Parsha Puzzlers!

1. The Vilna Gaon cites the *pasuk* “*vaHashem beirach es Avraham bakol*” as proof that Avraham kept the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*. What is the connection?

2. The Torah names two women who covered themselves with veils. Both of these women had twin boys. Who are they?

3. How many cases of *kefitzas haderech* are found in the Torah?

Answers:

1. The Gra noted that there are three phrases in the Torah that refer to the *mitzvah* of residing in a *sukkah* – *basukkos teishvu yamim, kol haetzrach b'yisrael yeishvu basukkos, and lemaan yeidu doroseichem ki basukkos hoshavti* (Vayikra 23:42, 43). These three phrases begin with the letters *beis, kaf, and lamed*, spelling *bakol*. Therefore, when the Torah says “*vaHashem beirach es Avraham bakol*”, it is hinting to the fact that Avraham observed the holiday of *Sukkos*.

2. The two women are Rivka (*Bereishis* 24:65 and 25:24) and Tamar (*Bereishis* 38:14 and 38:26).

3. There are three cases of *kefitzas haderech* found in the Torah: 1 – Eiliezer reached Charan the same day he left Avraham's home (Rashi on *Bereishis* 24:42); 2 – On the way back to Avraham's home, Eiliezer and Rivka traveled from Charan to Chevron in mere hours (there are different opinions as to exactly how many hours it took) instead of the normal 17 days. (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eiliezer and Yalkut Shimon*). 3 – Yaakov arrived in Charan the same day that he left Be'er Sheva (*Targum Yonasan Bereishis* 28:10)

These questions and answers were adapted from “Torah IQ: The Great Torah Riddle Book” with the permission of the author.

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