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Chayei Sarah 5786

WASTED ON THE YOUNG

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"the years of the life of Sarah." (23:1)

Those of us who are old enough to have trouble recalling large areas of our youth will at least have no trouble remembering some standout moments of total irresponsibility: Like hitchhiking down a German autobahn at 100 miles an hour on the back of a BMW 900 in the dead of night in driving rain. "Youth is wasted on the young" runs the old adage. As our hair thins and our waistlines thicken we try to shed the immaturity of youth and improve our characters and our actions.

It comes out then that what we really can call our "life" our arriving at some kind of perfection in this world happens pretty close to our departure from this world. Viewed in this way, our "lives" are even shorter than we thought, and even without the help of lunatic escapades and motorcycle madness.

All the above is true of the average person. However, there are those special people whose entire lives are unspoiled. Such were "the years of the life of Sarah." As Rashi says "all of them were equal in their goodness." None of them were wasted or misspent. And even though, of course, Sarah's stature grew in old age, this was the dividend of a holy life spend in doing mitzvot and good deeds, rather than the necessity to forsake the foolishness of youth for "all of them were equal in their goodness."

What Is the Real Meaning of Integrity?

CHIEF RABBI WARREN GOLDSTEIN (Aish.com)

Integrity is a word we hear about often. We know it's one of the highest compliments you can pay a person. And we all want to be regarded as people of integrity. When we picture someone with integrity, we think of a person who is upright, honest and honourable. But, what does it actually mean?

It's an important question to answer because, according to the Talmud, one of the first questions a person is asked when appearing before the heavenly court after leaving this world is: "Did you deal faithfully and honestly with others?" (Talmud Shabbos 31a) Clearly, integrity is one of the most basic and important values we are expected to live by. But what is it?

It's obviously a multifaceted concept, but one essential expression of integrity relates to fulfilling the promises and commitments that we make. As Shammai, the great Talmudic sage, puts it: "Say little and do much." (Pirkei Avot 1:15) The Talmud (Bava Metzia 87a) states that saying little and doing much is in fact the defining quality of a truly righteous person - and that someone who promises much and doesn't deliver on those promises is the very opposite of a righteous person.

To illustrate this idea, the Talmud cites the example of Avraham from last week's parsha. When a group of travellers (who later turn out to be angels, although Avraham didn't know that when he first encountered them) pass by Avraham's tent in the heat of the day, he runs out to meet them, promising them bread and water. In the end, though, he goes to extraordinary lengths to lavish them with a huge meal and the finest delicacies - in the words of the Talmud, a royal banquet fit for the table of King Solomon himself. Clearly, Avraham exemplifies our Mishna's teaching: "Say little and do much."

The Talmud also cites a counter-example from this week's parsha, Chayei Sarah. Avraham wishes to purchase the Cave of Machpelah as a burial site for his wife Sarah (which would also become the burial site for the forefathers and foremothers of the Jewish people). Ephron, the owner of the plot of land, initially seems to tell Avraham, very publicly, that he would

give it to him as a gift. But he then proceeds, later privately, to extract from Avraham an outrageously inflated price, even playing it down in the process. Ephron promised much and delivered little.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the great halachic deciders of the 20th century, identifies another potent example of what true integrity is all about, in this week's parsha. Avraham sends Eliezer, his trusted servant, to Charan to help find a wife for Yitzchak - to find someone who exhibits the quality of chessed (loving-kindness), and who embodies the values of the house of Avraham, and would continue the legacy of building the Jewish people. He encounters Rivka drawing water at the well - who, through the seemingly simple act of providing water for Eliezer and his camels to drink, displayed the very traits that would make her a fitting wife for Yitzchak and one of the great mothers of the Jewish people.

According to Rav Moshe Feinstein, what impressed Eliezer was that she was careful with her promises. Integrity demands being careful not to make promises that you will not be able to keep, and so only after Rivka had already delivered on her first promise to give Eliezer water, did she then offer to give water to the camels. Rivka demonstrated the trait of integrity - so fundamental to Avraham and Yitzchak, and to the Jewish people as a whole.

This value of integrity encapsulated in the phrase "say little and do much" is connected to a network of values so essential to human greatness. One such value is the sanctity of speech and fulfilling verbal commitments.

In the context of making and keeping vows, the Torah says: "He shall not desecrate his word." (Numbers 30:3) The word "desecrate" implies that speech is holy, and that, therefore, one should honour verbal commitments. Reinforcing this idea of the holiness of speech, Onkelos translates the verse: "...and Adam became a living soul" as: "Adam became a speaking being." It is the power of speech that distinguishes the human being from the rest of creation that defines the human being.

In fact, the Talmud describes the human being as the medaber - the 'speaker'. Speech is sacred, and by extension, so are the promises we make to others.

But, making promises isn't just about upholding our commitments to others, it's also about being true to ourselves - what we might call personal integrity. And this is something separate to the sacredness of speech, because it includes keeping promises we make to ourselves, promises we make "in our hearts". The Talmud (Bava Basra 88a) describes the great Talmudic sage, Rav Safrá, as the epitome of "one who speaks truth in his heart". (Psalms 15:2) On this, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch says faithfully fulfilling what we undertake to do in our hearts is also an important part of personal integrity.

There's another aspect of "say little and do much" that characterises good virtue and integrity. Virtuous people are interested in acting rather than talking about it. They aren't interested in publicising what they do. They don't need affirmation, or honour and recognition, from others. Their focus is on getting things done: helping others, performing mitzvot, doing good deeds for their own sake. But those who are not virtuous are actually interested in the opposite - in what people will say about them, and the honour and recognition they will receive, rather than actually doing good. These are people who will say a lot and do comparatively little.

The prophet Micha speaks about "walking modestly with your G-d", (Micha 6:8) which the Talmud interprets as doing good without seeking the publicity and acclaim that comes with doing so (Succah 49b). Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz writes that the good deeds performed publicly provide ulterior benefits, such as honour and recognition. Therefore, great effort

thelanguageoftomorrow.com is required to purify one's motives by doing these deeds as modestly as possible. (Sichot Mussar 31:46) In other words, we need to purify our inner thoughts and emotions even when performing good deeds.

This focus on inner truth and sincerity rather than externalities is at the core of integrity. We need to ensure our internal state of mind and our external lives are aligned. What we do should be a reflection of who we are. As the Talmud says: "A Torah scholar whose inside is not like his outside is not a true Torah scholar." (Yuma 72b)

Rabbeinu Bechaya, in his book: Duties of the Heart, writes:

"Regarding one's inside who's not like his outside, scripture says his heart was not whole with Hashem, his G-d." (Kings 1,11:4) As is well-known, if someone contradicts themselves or proves themselves a liar, whether in speech or in deed, people no longer believe in their integrity and have no confidence in their sincerity. Similarly, if our outer and inner selves are in contradiction, if our talk is not matched by our intentions, if the actions of our limbs are at odds with the convictions of our heart, then our worship of G-d is imperfect."

And so integrity is about how we interact with others, and it's also how we relate to ourselves. It is a value which cannot be compartmentalised. You see that in the word itself. Integrity is related to the word, "integrated". A person with integrity is a person whose inner life is in harmony with how s/he acts. There is no disconnect.

And this, ultimately, is why integrity is one of the core values of the house of Avraham, and therefore a vital part of our legacy as the Jewish people. Avraham is someone who embodied truth and sincerity, kindness and concern; someone who sprang to the aid of others, moved by a deep inner well of goodwill towards all people and a deep inner devotion to the will of his Creator.

Do You Own What You Have?

RABBI AHARON LOSCHAK (Chabad.org)

I vividly remember the moment I passed my driving test, back when I was a teenager.

It was during a break from yeshivah, I believe over the Passover holiday, and I quickly took the permit test. After successfully getting through that, I dutifully carried out the minimum hours of driver's training before going to the DMV and taking my official live driving test to get the license. The neighborhood was quiet and spacious, so suffice it to say that the test was very easy.

In a few minutes, I was officially licensed to operate a vehicle in the State of California.

My mother had driven me to the DMV for the test and was waiting for me in the parking lot. I emerged from the building, giddy with excitement and with a stupid grin on my face. I approached my mother, and she asked, "Nu, did you pass?"

"Yep, I sure did!" I replied with confidence.

"Oh no!" she blurted out.

"Ma!" I shot back, "Why are you saying that?"

"Because you don't know how to drive!"

It's a funny anecdote I recall all the time (and laugh about with my mother), both for its quintessential Jewish mother vibes, but more importantly, because it's truly a valuable life lesson.

AVRAHAM'S CURIOUS SHOPPING HABITS

In this week's parshah, we read of a grieving Avraham mourning the death of his wife, Sarah. He searches for a suitable burial site for his soulmate of many years, and settles on the plot of land that would eventually become the famed Cave of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs in the city of Hebron.

The land belonged to a certain individual named Efron the Hittite. Avraham approached Efron and offered a sizable sum of money to purchase the property. Efron, who talked a big game, declared:

No, my lord, listen to me. I have given you the field, and the cave that is in it, I have given it to you. Before the eyes of the sons of my people, I have given it to you; bury your dead. (23:11)

In a surprising move, Avraham won't have any of it and insists on paying retail:

But, if only you would listen to me. I am giving the money for the field; take [it] from me, and I will bury my dead there.(23:13)

Efron quickly turns out to be like the rest of them, and gleefully responds, "Great! Between me and you, what's 400 shekel?"—an astronomical amount of money in those days. But Avraham doesn't flinch, and hands over the money.

The rest is history. You can even visit the cave today.

It's very puzzling: if Efron offered to give it to him, why did Avraham insist on paying full price? Even if you argue that Avraham didn't want a handout, why did he have to go to the opposite extreme and insist on giving so much money? A nominal sum could have sufficed.

AVRAHAM APPRECIATED A SIMPLE yet sometimes difficult truth: if you

want to make something truly yours, you must pay for it. Full price.

This land belonged to Efron. It was Hittite property, and emphatically not part of the Avrahamic family. Avraham wanted to bury his wife, his partner with whom he had founded and promoted a glorious and revolutionary way of life. To be a fitting and honorable host to such a legacy, this eternal monument needed to bear the majestic stamp of those interred inside without traces of anything or anyone else.

So Avraham paid the premium. He knew that if he accepted the gift, it would never truly and wholly be the legacy and heritage of the Jewish people. In some small way, there would still be a figurative plaque on the west wall stating, "Donated by Efron the Hittite." And that would not do for his wife and the movement to G-d they had initiated.

"No donor plaques in my burial hall!" Avraham resolved. And so, he opened his purse and bought the plot at a premium, no questions asked. It was now his and the Jewish people's forever.

AND SO IT IS IN LIFE. If you want to really own something, you must pay for it.

Payment isn't always in cash. Like my mother taught me then, payment also means hard work, investment, and time. Don't think you can sail into the DMV after driving with your older cousin for two hours and expect to be a "driver." That I got away with it when I was younger was a missed opportunity; had I failed, I certainly would have been compelled to actually learn how to drive, and that would have ultimately made me "own" my driving skills so much more (spoiler: I think I've got it by now).

It's like that with so many things. Certain people are naturally gifted with a generous amount of smarts; they coast through school without breaking a sweat. They ace their tests, get good report cards, and don't even really bother listening in class.

Are they better off? Have they positioned themselves better in life? I wager not, for they have not "earned" or "owned" their progress, at least not in the fullest sense of the word. Too much of what they've achieved bears the mark of "someone else"; it may not be Efron, but it's certainly not them. To own it and proudly fly that flag requires plain old hard work.

Think about it this way: Are you naturally good at something? If yes, here's the real question: are you challenging yourself in that area? Or are you being lazy and letting yourself get away with what's convenient because you know you're good at it and whatever you spit out will be "good enough"?

If you're a naturally gifted writer, ask yourself, "When was the last time I really challenged myself to write something extraordinary?" If you're a born artist who can paint in her sleep, challenge yourself to paint something you've never tried before, to work hard, tear it up, and then try again. If you're a great speaker, don't just pull out a TED talk you have on file; sweat a little and come up with something new!

Be like Avraham, and pay retail. Trust me, it's the Jewish thing to do.3

This essay is based on Likutei Sichot vol. 10, p. 60-64.

G-d of Heaven and Earth

RABBI MENACHEM FELDMAN (Chabad.org)

Avraham is undoubtedly one of the most successful people in history. He began with an idea that pitted him against the entire world, but now, three millennia later, his ideas are mainstream.

Avraham was called Ivri, "the Hebrew," which literally means "from the other side," not just because he arrived in Canaan from the other side of the river, but because, figuratively, he was "on the other side" of society's belief system. While society was pagan, Avraham the Hebrew was the outcast, the one who believed in one G-d.

AVRAHAM THE HEBREW WAS THE OUTCAST

And today, the majority of the world's population, more than 3.8 billion people, consider themselves adherents to an Avrahamic religion.

How did Avraham view his achievements during his lifetime? What did he see as his mission? And how did he evaluate his own accomplishments?

In this week's Torah portion, we read about Avraham dispatching his servant Eliezer to Charan to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. While instructing Eliezer about the details of his mission, Avraham assures Eliezer that G-d will help him succeed in finding a proper match for Yitzchak. Avraham says:

The L-rd, G-d of the heavens, Who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and Who spoke about me, and Who swore to me, saying, "To your seed will I give this land," He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. (24:7)

Rashi, the classic commentator on the Torah, is intrigued by Avraham's description of G-d. In this verse, Avraham refers to G-d only as the "G-d of heavens." Yet, in an earlier verse, Avraham refers to G-d as the "the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth." Why the change? Rashi explains that Avraham was telling Eliezer the following:

Now He is the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth, because I have made Him familiar in the mouths of the people, but when He took me from my father's house, He was the G-d of the heavens but not the G-d of the earth,

because mankind did not acknowledge Him, and His name was not familiar on the earth.

When Avraham first heeded G-d's calling, leaving his father's home and journeying to what would become the Land of Israel, G-d was only the G-d of the heavens. Now, Avraham was saying, after decades of work, G-d is not only the G-d of heaven, but He is also the G-d of the earth. He is at home in both realms.

This is Avraham's achievement. Avraham is not satisfied with a G-d in heaven; Avraham wants G-d to be felt right here on earth.

Each of our lives is made up of "heaven" and "earth." There are moments when we are connected to spirituality, prayer, acts of kindness, and Torah study, moments when we sense the Divine.

Then, there are the "earth" moments. Moments when we feel that our existence is mundane. We may be at work, eating lunch, running errands, sitting in traffic; the list goes on.

The core of Judaism is to bridge the gap between heaven and earth

Avraham teaches us that the core of Judaism is to bridge the gap between heaven and earth. The message of Judaism is that G-d wants to feel at home not only in heaven, but also on earth, that we can and should infuse our earthly activities with spirituality and meaning.

To be a Jew is to experience that G-d is "G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth."

Based on a sicha, Shabbat Chayei Sarah, 5739.

Yiddishe Nachas

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (Chabad.org)

Once upon a time, a pious Jew was traveling through the countryside in Eastern Europe. He came to a shtetl where the local schochet (ritual slaughterer) had just taken ill. The town butcher had no one to do the slaughtering and was desperate when he bumped into the visitor. The traveler looked pious and G-d fearing (perhaps he wore a black hat and a beard) so the butcher asked him if he was, by any chance, a qualified schochet. The visitor replied that he was indeed. Overjoyed, the butcher started arranging for the man to begin work in the slaughterhouse immediately. Then the visitor asked the butcher if he would kindly lend him some money as he had just arrived and needed to purchase a few things. "But you're a complete stranger," said the butcher. "I don't know you at all, how can I possibly lend you money?" Whereupon the visitor replied, "You were prepared to trust me with the spiritual well-being of your entire community even though you never laid eyes on me, but as soon as I asked you for a few rubles suddenly you hardly know me?"

THIS WEEK'S PARSHAH tells the story of the very first shidduch in history. Avraham sends his faithful servant, Eliezer, to find a bride for his son Yitzchak. He hands Eliezer a document ceding his entire wealth to Yitzchak and makes him take a solemn oath that he will not bring back a Canaanite woman for his son but someone from Avraham's own family, from Mesopotamia.

Amazing Avraham! He writes over his entire fortune in a document to help Eliezer find the right shidduch. Is there even a mention that Avraham demanded some security from Eliezer for the wealth that he was entrusted with? There is not a word about Avraham insisting on any guarantees, promises, or even a handshake. On what did Avraham ask Eliezer to take an oath? Not on the money, but on the woman! When it came to the nature of the prospective bride, the character of the person his son would be marrying, Avraham demanded nothing less than a solemn oath.

What an incredible lesson for our own priority system in life. What is of most important to us? What do we truly value? When it comes to our money, everything must be under lock and key, safe and sound, with ironclad securities. Are we as careful with our children? Are we as particular about whom they go out with, where they go and what they get up to?

There was a time when Jewish parents actually took responsibility for their children's social well being and even their matchmaking. Ok, times have changed and children don't appreciate parental interference in their romantic endeavors. Even Tevye the Milkman had daughters who insisted on marrying for love. But even if we can't "arrange" things, we can still try to "engineer" an introduction behind the scenes. Or, at the very least, we could take an interest.

Today's young people might be horrified at the thought of a shadchan assisting them to find a marriage partner. Still, surely parents should be talking about marriage to their children when they come of age. Surely, the importance of getting married ought to be conveyed to our kids before they turn 35! And wouldn't it be a good idea for parents to sit down with their kids at some stage to discuss what to look for in a marriage partner?

Avraham was worried about the wrong woman having a bad influence on his son. How much more should we be concerned about our children who are rather less pious than Yitzchak was. And children might want to take their parents' advice a little more seriously. After all, the experience of history indicates that parents often do see things that children—blinded by

"love"—do not.

The "singles" phenomenon is arguably the single biggest social problem in the Jewish world today. People are marrying older or not marrying at all. Often, the biological clock runs out before a family can get off the ground. Too often, desperate people make choices born out of desperation only to regret it in time.

Avraham teaches us that it is our responsibility as parents to ensure that our children mix in the right circles and are not exposed to the wrong influences. Please G-d, all our children will find suitable marriage partners sooner than later and raise strong Jewish families that we will all be proud of.

LOOKING FOR A SARAH

RABBI BEREL WEIN (RabbiWein.com 8-11-25)

The death of a parent at any stage of life and at any age is a tragic and traumatic experience. I find that the grief is more profound for the surviving spouse than even for the surviving children. Children somehow find a way to move on with their lives. They factored in the inevitability of the death of a parent into their subconscious and thus usually were and are able to deal with their loss. Not so with the surviving spouse who never imagined being left alone and bereft especially in old age.

Avraham remarries Hagar/Keturah and even fathers children from her. But his concern and fatherly love is concentrated on his son Yitzchak, the son of his beloved Sarah. Through Yitzchak, Sarah is still alive and present in the life of Avraham. Avraham's concern regarding his son's being unmarried is somehow reinforced by the continuing subconscious presence of Sarah in his life. The rabbis teach us that when Rebecca arrived at the home of Avraham and Yitzchak, the 'presence' of Sarah returned with her. Her candles became lit again, her bread was once again blessed in her home and her spirit of holiness and G-dliness hovered once more in the tent of Avraham and Yitzchak. Rebecca was Sarah incarnate.

People say that men, so to speak, always seek to marry their mother. Rebecca becomes Sarah to both her husband Yitzchak and her father-in-law Avraham. This is one of the more amazing insights that this week's parsha offers for our consideration and education.

All of this is implicit in Avraham's instructions to his trusted servant and agent Eliezer. He tells him to find a wife for Yitzchak who is descended from Sarah's family. Eliezer is not to take a woman from any other genetic stock to be considered for marriage to Yitzchak. There are many explanations to these instructions given to Eliezer. But certainly the simple explanation and obvious insight is that Avraham is committed to find another Sarah through whom the Jewish people will be built and preserved. Eliezer is apparently unaware of this insight, so he concocts an elaborate scheme as to which woman he will choose to bring back as a wife for Yitzchak. He is not looking for Sarah as much as he is placing his mission in the hands of G-d to send him the proper woman. The Lord complies, so to speak, but it appears that Eliezer is never conscious that he is really looking for a Sarah.

That is why, according to Midrash, Eliezer harbors within himself hope that perhaps his own daughter, who is not Sarah by any stretch of the imagination, could be a potential bride for Yitzchak. It is the Lord, so to speak, that is in on the secret of Avraham's wishes and provides Yitzchak with a wife who brings him solace and closure after the death of his mother. She is able to do so because of her uncanny G-dly ability to be Sarah in a spiritual and emotional sense. Perhaps this is why the parsha begins "these are the lives (plural) of Sarah" for Sarah lives on through Rebecca and through all Jewish women throughout the ages who emulate her and live by her value system and way of life.

Like Rivka by the Well

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

She descended to the spring, filled her jug and ascended. The servant ran towards her and said, "Let me sip please, a little, from your water jug." She said, "Drink my lord" and she hurried, and lowered her jug to her hands and gave him drink. When she finished giving him drink, she said, "I will draw (water) even for your camels until they have finished drinking." So, she hurried and she emptied her jug into the trough and kept running to the well to draw (water) and she drew for all his camels. (Breishis 24:16-20)

Since when is giving water to camels or other animals such a major priority that it becomes the only and final criteria for choosing the future mother of Klal Yisrael?! The whole story and the test that Eliezer set up is crying out for an explanation. The Beis HaLevi opens up the entire story and sheds incredible and sensible light, to the point that after becoming aware of his approach, it's hard to look at this episode any other way.

Eliezer was setting her up. It was almost evening. People are collecting their water to bring home for the rest of the night. There is not much time to operate. He is going to ask a girl who has just finished filling her jug for a drink.

If she refuses, then she lacks empathy. Once she gives him then a dilemma wakes up. What does she do with the rest of the water in the jug after he

has drunk from it? The concept of PAGAM predates Louis Pasteur. If she brings that jug home, then she is reckless and irresponsible. If she just spills it out then she is insulting him directly. She can't just spill out the jug on the ground because that would be wasteful. So, what could she do? She brilliantly announces before that she is ready to give water to all of his ten camels, and make that gigantic effort, so that she could spill the remaining water into the trough and continuously fill up the jug, thereby cleaning it out and fulfilling all her obligations while not offending him even a little. The entire business with the camels was never about the camels. It was all just a major coverup so as to be able to give that stranger a drink of water and simultaneously preserve his honor.

I have a theory that people make their own Shidduch! Somebody impresses someone else and draws some kind of positive attention about themselves, even in unguarded moments and that makes the whole difference.

One of my oldest sons was home briefly from Eretz Yisrael for Pesach. He was heading back. There was a local Torah scholar that had been learning with my son since they met up in high school. I asked this Rebbe to keep his eye open please, for my son. I figured he knows and appreciates him. It didn't take long before we got a call. He would give a ride once a week to an elderly Rebbetzin that was teaching PreiA in Queens for more than 50 years. He presented the idea of my son and asked if she knew any good girls. She began to fount about her assistant, that there is no one like her. How good can a PreiA assistant be!?

When I called her, she related the following story. She came to Yeshiva one day ready to go to a wedding in Brooklyn that night. She brought along her jewelry case. At the end of the day the jewelry case was nowhere to be found. It contained both expensive jewelry and many sentimental pieces. They checked everywhere but to no avail. Her and her assistant concluded that it must have been swept into the garbage and when they went to check, the Yeshiva garbage had been taken out and taken away by the sanitation department already. She went to the wedding broken-hearted.

Her assistant did not give up. She found out where in Staten Island the garbage from that location is brought. She went there and started rummaging through mountains of garbage bags until she found bags from that Yeshiva. After much digging, she found the jewelry bag and returned it. The Morah told me that she cannot imagine anybody in the universe going to that extent.

Then she told me that this was not the first call she got inquiring about her. I called my son back from Eretz Yisrael and they got married. What an amazing mother she is, caring so much and sparing no effort, like Rivka by the well.

THE QUALITY OF A PERSON

AVROHOM YAAKOV

Arriving in Aram Naharayim in search of the perfect mate for his master's son, Eliezer prayed to G-d for guidance.

"... let the maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Yitzchak." (24:14)

Rivkah arrives at the communal well and the Torah tells us that when he saw her, "... the servant ran toward her and said, 'Please let me sip a little water from your pitcher.'" (24:17)

Why did Eliezer choose Rivkah? Rashi explains that Eliezer saw the water in the well rise up to Rivkah. He realized that this was a sign that the girl was selected by G-d.

If so, why did Eliezer need to ask her about watering the camels? Surely the miraculous rising of the water would be sufficient proof? Why did Eliezer need to check her character?

R' Yechezkel of Kozhmir explains that a thousand miracles do not outweigh a single act of kindness.

Living in Avrohom's home, Eliezer saw miracles all the time. Hagar, Sarah's servant, was not fazed by being accosted by angels when expelled from their home. The miraculous was de jure. For all Eliezer knew, Avrohom's extended family also had the supernatural at their fingertips.

Therefore, from Eliezer's perspective, he needed to assess her character. Was she the right fit for Avrohom's household. Miracles are a poor indication of who a person really is. But if the person is prepared to go out of her way to help another person, then you have found the right partner for Yitzchak.

In our lives, many of us are impressed by the achievements of others. But often, success does not reflect the core person. They could be great in a specific area, but as a person, they are a disaster. The quality of the person can be determined only when asked to perform an act of kindness for another.

On Whose Account?

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

This week, the Torah tells us the fascinating story of Eliezer's mission to find a wife for Yitzchok, his master Avraham's son. Eliezer was referred to in previous portions as one who drew from the teachings of his master. In

order to accomplish his mission, Eliezer must interact. First he must meet the prospective bride, Rivka, then her parents, Bsu'el and Milkah, and then Rivka's conniving brother Lavan.

The Torah spares no effort to describe at length the ordeal of choosing the bride. Throughout the narrative, Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, is referred to in different ways. Sometimes he is called the "servant of Avraham," other times he is called, just plainly, "the servant," and other times he is "the man." First he gives Rivka gifts: "And it was, when the camels had finished drinking, the man took a golden nose ring, its weight was a beka, and two bracelets on her arms, ten gold shekels was their weight" (Bereshit 24:282).

When Lavan sees the gifts he is excited, and he "approached the man, who was still standing by the camels by the spring" (ibid. v.30).

When Eliezer formally introduces himself to B'suel he declares his identity quite firmly. "I am a servant of Avraham" (ibid v. 34). And when Eliezer hears the words of acceptance from the soon-to-be in-laws, the Torah tells us, "when Avraham's servant heard their words, he prostrated himself to the ground unto Hashem" (ibid v.59).

Once again, he gives gifts to the new-found family. This time, however, he is not called with Avraham's servant, but just plainly, "the servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebecca; and delicious fruits he gave to her brother and her mother" (ibid v. 60). There seems to be some special condition for using the terms servant of Avraham. Don't we know who he was? I'd like to add my inflection on that title.

One evening, Rav Moshe Feinstein received a call from a young man whom he had never met. "I would like to ask the Rosh Yeshiva to be m'sader kidushin at my wedding." Rav Moshe reacted with a bit of surprise. "But I do not know you. Why are you calling me? Don't you have your own rabbi?"

The young man explained. "I come from a simple family with no yichus, (important lineage). I daven in a small shul with a little-known rabbi. Boruch Hashem, I am marrying a girl who comes from a family of well known origins, and many distinguished rabbis and lay leaders will be attending the wedding on her behalf.

"I, on the other hand, have little money and even less genealogical prestige. My in-laws don't think I am much of a scholar, and though I try to learn whenever I can, it seems that my bride's parents are disappointed in her choice. My parents are very quiet and simple people. They hardly know anyone, and I must admit that I am embarrassed that I will have no famous rabbis who will come from my side of the simcha. It would therefore be a tremendous encouragement to me if the Rosh Yeshiva would come on my behalf, and serve as the officiating rabbi."

At the time, Rabbi Feinstein was the dean of the prestigious Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem in New York, the head of the council of Torah Sages of Agudath Israel, and filled with myriad responsibilities to fulfill on a communal and personal level. In addition, he was not a young man, and the trip to the wedding would put further strain on his weary body. Nevertheless, Rav Moshe obliged. And the kallah's (bride's) family reacted in with awe for the prestige of the groom. "Imagine," they thought, "his rabbi is none other than the revered Gadol HaDor, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein!"

With that, the young man was able to forge the foundations of a respect that reverberated throughout his married years.

Matches are very delicate, and when Eliezer produced the beautiful gifts, he did not have to be known as Avraham's servant. "The servant gave gifts. The man took out a nose ring." But when it comes to laying the story out clearly, Eliezer puts away the monetary status and replaces it with something that money can't buy.

He declares his affiliation. I am the servant of Avraham. And when he thanks Hashem for the success, it is not the man talking, nor is it the servant. It is the servant of Avraham. Because when one goes into a spiritual deal, he need not present pecuniary credentials or show his bankbook. All he has to do is align himself with the right people, those who are well connected.

Bachelors in Heaven

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

You meet the man of your dreams. It's love at first sight (you practically fall off your camel the first time you set eyes on him). Not only is he righteous, gracious, handsome, sensitive and spiritual — the kind of guy who's out meditating in the fields on summer afternoons — he's also immensely rich. The stalwart heir of the most prestigious family in Canaan!

But there's this one strange thing: no one knows where he's been or what he's been doing for the last three years. Three years ago, following a trip with his father to the summit of a lonely mountain, he vanished into thin air. And now he's returned as suddenly as he disappeared, not a day older — those who know him swear — than the day he dropped off the face of the earth.

What does this mean? What does this bode for your marriage?

In marked contrast to other religions, Judaism does not advocate disengagement from the physical world. In fact, some would say that the Torah way of life is not a "religion" at all. The bulk of its 613 mitzvot (divine

commandments) are concerned with decidedly non-religious issues: what you eat, how you dress, what kind of neighbor you are, how you treat your parents, how you speak to your children, how you relate to your spouse.

The Tanya (the basic work of Chabad Chassidism) puts it thus, *This is what man is about; this is the purpose of his creation, and of the creation of all the worlds, higher and lower: to make for G-d a dwelling in the physical realm*

Certainly, there's lots of spiritual stuff going on as well. Each day begins with a lengthy hour of prayer. Each day has set times devoted to the study of Torah. The Jew is instructed to meditate upon the greatness of G-d and develop feelings of love and awe in his or her heart. The Talmudic passage (Ethics of the Fathers 5:22) which describes the ideal life-cycle for the Jew designates the first two decades of life wholly to spiritual pursuits.

But always the spiritual stuff is there as a prelude and preparation for the physical — not vice versa. The morning prayers set the tone for a day in the marketplace; a sanctified childhood and youth prepare for a lifetime of interaction with the material world; a wholly spiritual soul is created and primed for its descent into physical life; the spiritual state of Gan Eden (the "afterlife") precedes the soul's reinvestment in its body in the divinely perfect, yet also physical, "World to Come".

The "dwelling for G-d in the physical realm" is the objective, the purpose. The spiritual stuff is the roadmap, the pep-talk, existing solely to guide, inspire and vitalize the making of our physical lives something that is true to its creator and essence.

An examination of the chronology of Yitzchak's life, as recounted in the Book of Bereshit and its attendant Midrashim, reveals an inexplicable gap of nearly three years. According to Bereshit 21:5, Avraham was 100 years old when his son, Yitzchak, was born. According to Bereshit 25:26, Yitzchak was 60 years old when his twin sons, Yaakov and Esav, were born, twenty years after his marriage to Rebecca at age 40. That same chapter recounts an event (Esav's selling of his birthright to Yaakov) that occurred on the day that "the lads matured". The Torah regards 13 as the age of maturity, which would make Yitzchak 73 at the time. But that day was also the day of Avraham's passing. As per Bereshit 25:7, Avraham lived 175 years — which places that day 75 years after Yitzchak's birth.

According to one explanation offered by the biblical commentators, Yitzchak spent three years — the period between the time he was bound upon the altar on Mount Moriah and his marriage to Rebecca — in the Garden of Eden, in a wholly spiritual state of existence. These years were not part of his physical life. Thus, on the day that Yaakov and Esav made their historical deal, Yitzchak was in his 73rd year of physical life — while for everyone else, 75 years of physical time had transpired from the time of Yitzchak's birth.

What does this mean for us? The Lubavitcher Rebbe offers the following insight. In the life-cycle of a human being, there is nothing that signifies the soul's descent into physical life more than the act and experience of marriage. Marriage is when a person ceases to live within his own body and begins to share his very soul with another body, in a relationship that is predicated on the most physical of human drives. The "mundane" aspects of life — earning a living, financial planning, homemaking, shopping — consume ever-widening arcs of one's existence and ever-deepening involvement of one's energies. At the same time, it is the most deeply satisfying of life's endeavors. For this is what man is about.

How does one prepare for marriage? By becoming more physical, more materially oriented, in preparation for this further plunge into the human state? Yitzchak did the very opposite — he retreated to a state of utter spirituality. This gave him the vision, the perspective, the fortitude, to make his physical life a divine place, rather than a place that obscures the divine. Want to know how close you are to G-d? Look at what kind of a husband you are. Want to be a good husband? Get close to G-d.

News & Views

Hamas Committed Genocide

BASSEM EID (TimesofIsrael.com 7-11-25)

Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir once expressed her yearning for peace like this: “We can forgive the Arabs for killing our children. We cannot forgive them for forcing us to kill their children.” No one forced Hamas to invade Israel on October 7, 2023, which resulted in the largest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust. No one forced them to rape and genitally mutilate their female victims, or to take over 250 hostages back to Gaza. The actions were the deliberate and cruel choice of Hamas. And those actions were an attempt at genocide.

The term genocide was first coined during World War II at the height of the Nazi’s deportations, as lawyers and scholars of the age had no other words in the English language to describe the systematic murders of 6 million innocent Jews in a mass campaign of planned extermination on the basis of

their shared heritage. The atrocities of the Nazis were so indescribably evil that it was not until 1946 that “genocide” was defined as a crime against humanity, adopted into the United Nations Genocide Convention in 1948.

For a genocide to have taken place, a perpetrator must have committed acts with the specific “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Intent is the key factor in determining whether a genocide has occurred.

Hamas’ desire to violently destroy Israel and replace it with an Islamist theocracy is hardly a secret; they openly and repeatedly expressed their intentions in their 1988 founding charter and in their oft stated desire to repeat October 7 over and over in televised interviews.

Since its violent takeover of Gaza in 2007, Hamas has deliberately propagated genocidal rhetoric throughout Gazan society. The curriculum for Gazan children features incitement to kill Jews, support for terrorism, and prayers for Israel’s destruction. Children and young teens in Hamas summer camps practice stabbing, shooting, and kidnapping Jewish civilians. Copies of Mein Kampf have been found in terror bases across the enclave.

Holocaust scholars recognize that a key stage of genocide is denial, and historically, its worst perpetrators (notably the Nazis) took great pains to cover up their crimes. Hamas, on the other hand, filmed and broadcast their savage atrocities for the world to witness. Yahya Sinwar, planning the assault, directed Hamas to deliberately target civilians and residential communities. As victims-like kidnapped children and the violated corpse of a young woman—were paraded through the streets, scores of civilians emerged into the streets to spit on them, celebrate, and hand out candies.

Hamas’s intent to commit unspeakable crimes was very clear. Hamas deliberately carried out its villainy on a joyous Jewish holiday, Simchat Torah. With them, the attackers carried maps of the civilian communities they planned to target, with marked infiltration routes, designed to maximize civilian casualties.

Hamas deliberately targeted the Nova Music Festival, murdering 378 mostly young people, innocent dancers. Hamas shot barrages of bullets at an ambulance at the festival, then threw a grenade into it, and then set it on fire with an RPG. The genetic material of eighteen unique individuals was found inside the ambulance.

Captured Hamas records prove that Hamas originally collaborated with Iran and the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah to commit similar massacres in Northern Israel, with the intent of provoking the collapse of the state of Israel. Although it never launched a full-scale invasion, Hezbollah did launch a missile barrage into Israel that slaughtered children.

Perhaps nothing shows intent so clearly as Hamas’s civilian hostage taking. 251 innocent people were dragged into Gaza, including 30 children under 18 years of age, and 16 under 10. Two babies, Kfir and Ariel Bibas, were murdered in captivity. Hostages were starved, filmed emaciated, and forced to dig their own graves in the tunnels. Some were raped repeatedly. Teenage hostages were forced to commit sex acts on each other. Others were executed.

Hamas has weaponized genocide denial, engaging in a strategy of reverse accusations, smearing Israel as a way of deflecting attention from their crime. In so doing, Hamas is weakening the precedent for identifying and prosecuting genocide around the world. They hope to villainize Western powers that go out of their way in wartime to protect innocents and distract from their own barbarism.

Israel is acting based on military need and prioritizing civilian survival, fighting under unthinkable circumstances engineered by Hamas to turn civilian infrastructure into military sites. Hamas apologists misquote Israeli politicians to claim intent, and grow silent when confronted by tens of millions of warning messages, thousands of tons of aid, and guarded humanitarian corridors provided by the IDF. The legitimacy of genocide charges themselves is compromised when accredited international institutions have committed clear errors in the rush to judgment of Israel, the victim power, instead of identifying the actual aggressor, Hamas.

Meanwhile, real genocides are being ignored by the rest of the world. According to the United Nations, more than 740,000 people are killed each year in armed conflict and criminality. The slaughter of tens of thousands in Sudan has left pools of blood in the sand visible from space. Hamas’ false accusation does an injustice to the actual victims of genocide who lost their lives on the basis of their shared heritage. It leaves tens of thousands massacred around the world without the chance of getting justice for their murders.

As a Palestinian, it is vital that I speak the truth. Hamas committed genocide on October 7th. Every attempt to aggravate their denial by smearing Israel only dishonors the victims, weakens the legitimacy of real genocide charges, and protects the perpetrators. Justice must be done, and history must never forget the crimes that were committed on October 7, 2023 – and by whom.

THE OVERTON WINDOW AND ZOHRAN MAMDANI

MICHA DANZIG (Algemeiner.com 6-11-25)

In politics, people talk about the Overton Window — the range of ideas society deems acceptable to discuss in public. It shifts with time. And over the past 15 years, no form of hate has moved more dramatically from taboo to tolerance than antisemitism.

After World War II, antisemitic tropes in the United States largely lived on the margins — muttered in extremist circles, scribbled in pamphlets, and later echoed in chatrooms on the Dark Web. But somewhere between the rise of “The Squad,” the mainstreaming of anti-Zionism, and the transformation of identity politics into a hierarchy of victimhood on the left and a mirror-image grievance culture on parts of the populist right, the world’s oldest hatred has been repackaged for the modern age.

What once cost you credibility in public life now earns applause, retweets, and primetime airtime.

Antisemitism didn’t vanish — it adapted.

The shift began before “The Squad,” but the rise of these antisemitic and anti-Israel members of Congress marked a turning point — the first-time open hostility toward Israel, and by extension the vast majority of Jews, could be celebrated as moral courage from the House floor.

When Ilhan Omar (D-MN) tweeted that Israel had “hypnotized the world” and that support for Israel was “all about the Benjamins,” she didn’t face moral reckoning. In 2019, Congress responded with a diluted resolution condemning all hatred — an “all lives matter” moment for antisemitism.

Rather than directly condemning antisemitism, Democratic Party leaders blurred it into abstraction — because calling it out was politically inconvenient. It was a watershed: the moment the Democratic Party signaled that antisemitic rhetoric, if veiled as “anti-Zionism,” was tolerable. When Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and others began claiming that Jewish sovereignty itself was oppression, they weren’t shunned — they were lionized as purported truth-tellers. The moral vocabulary of the left, once rooted in universal rights, morphed into a simplistic hierarchy of oppressor and oppressed.

Within that framework, Jews — a historically persecuted people — were recast as “white colonizers.” It was an ideological coup: turning the survivors of genocide and mass expulsions from Arab lands into the villains of the story.

AS THE PROGRESSIVE LEFT mainstreamed antisemitism in the name of “justice,” the “anti-woke” right embraced its own version in the name of “nationalism” and “America First.” The parallels to the antisemitic 1930s isolationists — Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, and Father Coughlin — are unmistakable.

Conspiracy theories that merely a decade ago belonged largely to the far-left now circulate freely among populist conservatives. Tucker Carlson, once a self-styled defender of Israel, now amplifies Holocaust minimizers and open antisemites, people praising figures who idolize Hitler and Stalin, while blaming “Jewish influence” for Western decline.

They aren’t alone. Matt Gaetz, Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), and Candace Owens have trafficked in antisemitic memes, “globalist” conspiracies, and blood-libel tropes that would have ended political careers a decade ago.

And on the other side, far-left pundits like Mehdi Hasan — apparently unaware of the horseshoe theory — find themselves surprised to be sharing these same figures’ social media talking points. In their mirror-image hatreds, the far right and far left converge, using the same ancient scapegoat to explain modern grievances.

THIS MORAL DRIFT EXPLAINS how someone like Zohran Mamdani could become mayor of New York City — a city that is 12% Jewish.

Mamdani blames police brutality on Israel, claiming “the laces of the NYPD’s boots are tied by the IDF.” He instructs fellow socialists to link every domestic “austerity issue” to the US–Israel alliance — as if the 0.04 percent of the Federal budget connected to Israel explains rent prices in Brooklyn.

That isn’t criticism. It’s scapegoating — the oldest antisemitic reflex, wrapped in today’s language of social justice.

And the most revealing part is that it doesn’t hurt him politically. The use of antisemitic tropes no longer disqualifies candidates; it energizes them. The Overton Window has moved so far that such rhetoric isn’t scandalous — it’s strategy.

FOR JEWS, THIS MOMENT carries an echo. We’ve seen it before — in Warsaw, Minsk, Baghdad, and Tripoli — cities that were once over 30% Jewish and home to flourishing Jewish life. In each, the pattern was the same: what was once unspeakable became debatable; what was debatable became acceptable.

Within a generation, those cities became Judenrein — emptied of Jews — not by accident but by political design. It always began with talk: the idea that the Jews were powerful, disloyal, manipulative. That “the people” were suffering because of them. Then talk became action.

Americans flatter themselves that it can’t happen in the USA — that its

institutions and pluralism are too strong. But Overton Windows don’t move because of evil people; they move because of complacent or cowardly ones. TODAY, ANTISEMITISM doesn’t always come in jackboots. It travels in hashtags and soundbites. It calls itself “humanitarian,” “anti-imperialist,” “decolonial.” It thrives in elite universities, “progressive” city councils, and digital echo chambers — and on the identitarian right, where “replacement theory” and “globalist” conspiracies recycle the same poison in a different accent.

It comes dressed as virtue and camouflaged in the moral language of the age.

That’s why the 2019 “all hate” resolution mattered. It wasn’t merely a procedural dodge — it was a moral surrender. It told every rising activist and politician: if your antisemitism is ideological enough, you can survive it — even thrive. And thrive, they have.

THERE’S A JEWISH LESSON older than America itself: when societies decide antisemitism is acceptable — even in coded form — they do not remain moral or safe for long.

Yes, the Overton Window has shifted. But it can shift back — if we make antisemitism, in every form, politically toxic again. That means calling out the right’s conspiracies and the left’s moral inversions with equal force.

History has already shown us where silence leads. The only question is whether we recognize the warning signs — or once again pretend the rhetoric is “complicated.”

HOW OCTOBER 7 AFFECTED JEWS

AVI WEISS (Jpost.com 6-11-25)

Almost a month into the ceasefire, it is clear that it will take time – much time – to assess the outcome of Israel’s two-year war against Hamas.

On the surface, as many have noted, the constellations of the Middle East have been profoundly altered. Gaza lies in ruins; Hezbollah is degraded; Assad of Syria is gone; and Iran’s nuclear program is set back.

Beyond the physical lies the spiritual – the emotional standing of the Jewish state itself.

To be sure, the country as a whole is suffering from deep PTSD. Almost one thousand soldiers were killed, forever altering the lives of their families and friends. Thousands of wounded face months, years, perhaps lifetimes of rehabilitation.

Residents of the South, so brutally attacked on that October 7, will need time to regain trust in the IDF. Yet there is another side to the story. Although these years have been painfully dark, they have also radiated a penetrating light.

STEPPING UP

From the moment of the pogrom that took 1,200 lives, young people snapped to attention. Soldiers in sadir – their primary years of service – fought valiantly.

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Reservists (miluimnikim) donned their uniforms again, some returning from abroad, putting their lives and limbs on the line.

While antisemitism spiraled around the globe, Jews everywhere stood tall. Not since the Soviet Jewry movement has world Jewry been so galvanized: confronting antisemitism on campus, marching weekly for the hostages, and volunteering in and outside Israel, each doing whatever they could to make a difference.

‘NEVER AGAIN’

Some say October 7 proved that Israel’s founding purpose was breached, that Jews were once again slaughtered mercilessly. I contend the reverse: the *raison d’être* of Israel was reaffirmed.

In the past, when attacked in pogroms and massacres, Jews lacked the means to fight back. Now we did.

Israel fought like lions and lionesses – with courage and with a moral compass unmatched in the history of war – proving to the world, and to ourselves, that Jewish blood would never again be cheap.

NATION AS FAMILY

It wasn’t as if everything was perfect – far from it.

Israelis often clashed bitterly: some denouncing the government, others defending it; some demanding an immediate ceasefire to free the hostages, others insisting the war continue until Hamas was forever destroyed.

Yet despite the fractures, there remained a deep sense that we are not only a nation but a family – and families that endure find ways to love through their differences.

EVERY MORNING BRINGS SOMETHING NEW

Years ago, when speaking to my father in Jerusalem from my home in Riverdale, I’d begin each call: “Abba, how are things going – *ma inyanim*?”

Quoting the prophet, he would always reply, “Chadashim la’bkarim – every morning brings something new.” Sometimes it’s a new challenge, a new twist, a new setback, or a new victory.

Assessing the post-war chadashim la’bkarim will not come easily. It comes, after all, in the shadow of an existential war of survival. And yet, it is a new

day. Walking through the streets of Jerusalem these days, one senses a weight lifted from the nation's shoulders. We can finally breathe again: the living hostages are home.

The nightmare seems behind us – seems – for bodies, including that of Hadar Goldin, whose remains have been held by Hamas since the 2014 war, have yet to return.

With Hamas still shooting at our soldiers, there is great concern that it will never lay down its arms. Meanwhile, Israel's release of convicted terrorists raises another specter: that new Sinwars are already plotting in the shadows.

THE OXYMORON OF LIFE AND DEATH

I felt this tension at Mount Herzl, at the burial of Daniel Perez, one of the hostages whose body had just been returned.

Perhaps the most searing moment came when Matan Angrest, newly freed from Gaza's tunnels, found the strength to eulogize Daniel, his commander in the same tank.

He spoke of feeling Daniel's presence beside him for the rest of his life and of his readiness to return to Gaza to bring back those whose bodies have yet to come home. In that instant, one could feel the oxymoron of it all – the collision between the agony of death and the exhilaration of life.

In no small measure, we as a people are once again simulating the breaking of the glass beneath the wedding canopy – the ritual that concludes the Jewish marriage ceremony.

On one hand, we cry out “mazal tov” as hostages are reunited with parents, siblings, and children, and there is hope – hope that the war has ended and life can begin anew.

Yet alongside those mazal tovs echoes the crackling sound of shattered glass in the air, a reminder that even our moments of joy are marred with loss.

Our sacred task, as the Kabbalists teach, is to gather and fix the broken pieces. As Leonard Cohen, the great poet and singer, put it: “There is a crack in everything – that's how the light gets in.”

Kosher & Halacha Korner

The following article may be at variance to local Kashrus Agencies. When in doubt, contact your local reputable Agency. In Australia, direct any questions to info@kosher.org.au or visit www.kosher.org.au

The Prohibition of Chodosh

KOLLEL CHOSHEN MISHPAT (DinOnline.com)

The prohibition of chodosh is an unusual mitzvah. On the one hand, it is the subject of a massive halachic debate. Yet, nowadays, most people only have a small inkling as to what the mitzvah is and what all the fuss is about. Let us take this opportunity to try to understand some of these issues.

WHAT IS CHODOSH?

The Torah commands (Vayikra 23:14), “Bread, roasted flour and plump kernels, do not eat until this very day; until you bring the offering of your G-d.” This mitzvah refers to the prohibition of eating new grain before the omer offering is brought in the Beis Hamikdash on the sixteenth day of Nisan. New grain includes any wheat, barley, spelt, oats or rye that did not take root before the previous sixteenth of Nisan. These grains are called “chodosh” and are forbidden to eat until the following Pesach when the next korban omer will be brought. The prohibition of chodosh does not apply to the legume family, such as beans, corn, soy, peas, nor rice or millet (Rambam, Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros 10:2-4; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 293:1).

The korban omer, an offering made from barley harvested on the night following the first day of Pesach, permitted any grains that took root by the sixteenth of Nisan. This grain is referred to as “yoshon,” or “old” grain. Those living in Yerushalayim were allowed to eat the new grains immediately after the offering was brought, since they were in close proximity of the Beis Hamikdash and knew what transpired there. Those who lived outside Yerushalayim had to wait until chatzos (halachic midday) before consuming the new produce. They did not have to wait beyond that, because they could assume that Beis Din, who saw to it that the korban was offered, would not tarry beyond that time (Mishnah, Menachos 68a and Rashi ad loc.; Rambam, Ma'achalos Asuros 10:2).

AN OPTIMISTIC TAKANAH

This was true as long as the Beis Hamikdash stood and the omer offering was brought. However, from what time is one allowed to eat chodosh after the churban? The Gemara (Menachos 68a) discusses this. The Mishnah states that after the churban, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai instituted that it is forbidden to eat chodosh the entire sixteenth of Nisan. The Gemara

explains the reason behind this takanah is because Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai was concerned that the Beis Hamikdash could be rebuilt at any moment. If when there is no Beis Hamikdash, people would be allowed to eat chodosh from daybreak of the sixteenth, they may again eat the chodosh from the morning in the next year when the Beis Hamikdash would be standing. This of course will be incorrect, since once there is a Beis Hamikdash, they must wait until after the omer offering is brought.

Rebbi Yehudah takes issue with Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai and contends that there is no need to institute such a decree, as the Torah itself forbids the new grain on that day. He bases this on the posuk cited earlier, “Do not eat until this very day.” He understands that when the Torah uses the word “until,” it is inclusive and the prohibition applies to that day as well.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai on the other hand maintains that although the posuk says, “Until this very day,” the word “until” is non-inclusive. In other words, the sixteenth is not included in the prohibition of eating chodosh. Hence, min HaTorah, chodosh is permitted on the morning of the sixteenth. However, he instituted that chodosh is forbidden miderabbanan for the reason mentioned earlier.

Incidentally, it is worthwhile to point out that the Gemara deals with the fact that there are two seemingly contradictory phrases in the posuk quoted earlier: “Bread, roasted flour and plump kernels, do not eat until this very day; until you bring the offering of your G-d.” On the one hand, the posuk says not to eat chodosh “until this very day.” The posuk then continues, “until you bring the offering.” May one eat chodosh on the sixteenth in the morning, or does he have to wait until the offering is brought?

According to one opinion in the Gemara, the phrase “until you bring” is referring to the situation when there is a Beis Hamikdash and indeed one must wait until the omer is offered. However, the phrase “until this very day” is speaking about the situation when there is no Beis Hamikdash. This view maintains that in our days, when there is no Beis Hamikdash, chodosh is permissible min HaTorah from the morning of the sixteenth. However, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai enacted a decree not to eat chodosh on that day, as perhaps the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt. (There is another view in the Gemara how to answer this contradiction.)

The halacha is that nowadays it is forbidden to eat chodosh in Eretz Yisroel the entire sixteenth of Nisan (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 293:1). Some Rishonim pasken like Rebbe Yehudah that this prohibition is min HaTorah (Rambam, Ma'achalos Asuros 10:2; Rif and Rosh at the end of Pesachim), while others follow the opinion of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai that the prohibition on the sixteenth is only miderabbanan (Meiri ad loc.). The fact that there is a disagreement whether the prohibition is midi'Orysa or miderabbanan, has a practical application for chutz la'aretz, as we shall explain presently.

YOM TOV SHEINI RAMIFICATIONS

The date when chodosh becomes permissible in chutz la'aretz is debated by the Amoraim. However, before discussing this further, a brief introduction is required.

As we all know, in Eretz Yisroel, the fifteenth of Nisan is Yom Tov, while the sixteenth is the first day of chol hamoed. In chutz la'aretz, on the other hand, the sixteenth is Yom Tov Sheini. What is the reason for an extra day of Yom Tov in chutz la'aretz?

Before the fixed calendar was instituted, Rosh Chodesh was declared based on the testimony of witnesses who saw the new moon and it was necessary to send messengers to the Diaspora to inform them of the date of Rosh Chodesh. Often, these messengers did not arrive before Yom Tov and the residents of that country had to observe two days of Yom Tov out of doubt as to which day was Yom Tov. When the fixed calendar was instituted, it was decided that residents of chutz la'aretz should continue to observe two days, as a safeguard that perhaps the calendar would one day become lost. This same doubt applies to our topic as well. Just as the sixteenth of Nisan is Yom Tov in chutz la'aretz as it “might” be the fifteenth, so too the seventeenth “might” be the sixteenth.

According to one of the Amoraim, since Rebbe Yehudah maintains that chodosh is forbidden min HaTorah on the sixteenth of Nisan, people in chutz la'aretz may not eat chodosh until after the seventeenth of Nisan. This is because, in a similar fashion to Yom Tov Sheini, the seventeenth “might” be the sixteenth. The halacha is that indeed, people in chutz la'aretz may not eat chodosh until the evening following the seventeenth of Nisan (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 293:1).

CHODOSH IN CHUTZ LA'ARETZ

A major issue in the halachos of chodosh is whether this mitzvah applies to grain grown in chutz la'aretz. (Although we just discussed from what date chodosh becomes permitted in chutz la'aretz, that is relevant either according to the stringent opinions that chodosh does apply or if one were to export chodosh grains of Eretz Yisroel to chutz la'aretz.) This debate begins with the Tannaim. Several maintain that chodosh in chutz la'aretz is

permitted, while others contend that it is forbidden (see Mishnah Orlah 3:9; Mishnah Kiddushin 37a; Beraisa, Kiddushin 38a).

This disagreement revolves around how to understand a word in the Chumash. When the Torah instructs regarding the prohibition of chodosh, it states: “An everlasting statute, for your generations, in all of your dwellings (b’moshvoseichem)” (Vayikra 23:14). The Tannaim who maintain that chodosh is forbidden in chutz la’aretz point to the word “b’moshvoseichem” as proof that chodosh is forbidden wherever Jews dwell, both in Eretz Yisroel and in chutz la’aretz (Kiddushin 37a).

The Tannaim who hold that chodosh does not apply in chutz la’aretz understand “b’moshvoseichem” differently. As is known, when Bnei Yisroel entered Eretz Yisroel under the leadership of Yehoshua bin Nun, they spent the first fourteen years conquering the thirty-one kings and their armies and dividing the land amongst the shevatim. They were not considered to be “dwelling” in the land until the conclusion of those fourteen years. Therefore, these Tannaim maintain that “b’moshvoseichem” indicates that the Bnei Yisroel were exempt from the mitzvah of chodosh during those fourteen years, until they actually “dwelt” in the Land (ibid. 38a).

Alternatively, they maintain that “b’moshvoseichem” does indicate that chodosh is applicable in chutz la’aretz – when the chodosh grains have been exported from Eretz Yisroel. However, grains that grew in chutz la’aretz are not included in the mitzvah (Yerushalmi Orlah 3:7 and Kiddushin 1:8).

After the era of the Tannaim, the disagreement regarding chodosh in chutz la’aretz continued among the Amoraim as well. Some maintain that it is forbidden min HaTorah, and some argue that it is only a Rabbinic injunction (Menachos 68b).

ARGUMENTS OF THE RISHONIM

There is also a great debate among the Rishonim on this topic. Most Rishonim hold that chodosh that grew in chutz la’aretz is forbidden min HaTorah. Thus anyone eating a kazayis of chodosh, regardless of its origin, is liable the punishment of malkos (lashes) (Rif, Rosh and Meiri, Kiddushin 38a; Rambam, Ma’achalos Asuros 10:2).

On the other hand, there are two primary Rishonim who maintain that chodosh in chutz la’aretz is forbidden only miderabbanan (Rabbeinu Boruch [Baal Haterumos], cited in Shu”t HaRosh 2:1; Or Zarua, vol. I, #328).

In order to understand the disagreement of the Rishonim, a brief introduction is required. One of the undertakings of the Rishonim was to decide definitive halacha based on the discussions between Tannaim and between Amoraim recorded in the Gemara. In order to do so, the Rishonim had many rules to follow. Some of these rules are cited in the Gemara. The three such rules that are most relevant to our discussion are:

1) Halacha k’stam Mishnah – the halacha follows an anonymous Mishnah. Some mishnayos cite the names of the Tannaim when quoting their opinions. In others, the view of a particular Tanna is stated anonymously. The Gemara says in several places that the halacha follows an anonymous Mishnah.

2) Stam v’achar kach machlokes, ein halacha k’stam – If an anonymous Mishnah is followed by a Mishnah in which Tannaim debate the subject of the anonymous Mishnah, the halacha does not follow the anonymous Mishnah. The fact that the mishnayos were arranged as such indicates that the anonymous opinion is not straightforward, and cannot necessarily be relied upon as final halacha.

3) The opposite of the previous: Machlokes v’achar kach stam, halacha k’stam – if an anonymous Mishnah follows a Mishnah in which that issue is debated, the halacha follows the anonymous Mishnah.

We will later discuss the definition of one type of Mishnah “following” another.

We mentioned earlier that the Mishnah in Orlah (3:9) maintains that chodosh is forbidden in chutz la’aretz. That Mishnah is a “stam Mishnah,” an anonymous Mishnah, as it merely states: “Chodosh is forbidden everywhere according to the Torah.” For this reason, most Rishonim, following the rule of “halacha k’stam Mishnah,” maintain that chodosh is also forbidden in chutz la’aretz according to Torah Law.

However, those Rishonim who disagree and contend that chodosh is not forbidden min HaTorah in chutz la’aretz, point to the fact that there is a Mishnah in Kiddushin (37a) that cites a machlokes on this topic. There, the Tanna Kamma maintains that chodosh does not apply in chutz la’aretz, while Rebbi Eliezer says that it does. That being the case, these Rishonim contend that since Kiddushin follows Orlah, albeit many tractates later, it is a case of “stam v’achar kach machlokes,” where the halacha does not follow the stam Mishnah. Rather these Rishonim hold like the Tanna Kamma that chodosh is permitted min HaTorah in chutz la’aretz.

The counter-argument to this view is that although according to the order of Mishnayos that we have, Kiddushin indeed follows Orlah, that is not necessarily the order that Rebbi Yehudah HaNasi, the editor of the Mishnayos, taught them to his students. We know that in each particular mesechta, the order of the Mishnayos can be used to dictate the halacha

based on the rules stated above. However, this is not the case from mesechta to mesechta (Biur HaGra, Yoreh Deah 293).

MINHAG VERSUS HALACHA

Now that we have seen that regarding chodosh in chutz la’aretz there has been halachic debate for well over a thousand years, starting with the Tannaim and continuing through the Rishonim, what is the final halacha? The answer is that it depends on how one defines “final halacha.” This is because the issue of chodosh in chutz la’aretz is one of the few areas in halacha where the minhag of the vast majority of people is not in line with the cut and dry psak halacha of the Shulchan Aruch. The Shulchan Aruch writes that the prohibition of chodosh applies both to grain that grew in Eretz Yisroel and in chutz la’aretz, whether the grain belongs to a Jew or a non-Jew (Yoreh Deah 293:2).

Although many Acharonim pasken like the Shulchan Aruch, such as the Vilna Gaon (ad loc.), Mishnah Berurah (489:45) and Shulchan Aruch HaRav (459:30), many go to great lengths to justify the minhag of being lenient.

THE DOUBLE DOUBT

One of the first Acharonim to find a basis to rule leniently is the Rama (Yoreh Deah 293:3). He rules that grain products after Pesach whose chodosh status is unknown are permissible because of the concept of “sfek sfeika” – a double doubt. This is a famous halachic concept where one is permitted to rule leniently even in the face of something forbidden min HaTorah. Normally, wherever one has a doubt whether something is prohibited by Torah Law, one must be stringent because of safek d’Orysa l’chumra. However, when it comes to a sfek sfeika, we generally rule leniently.

There are many approaches as to why a sfek sfeika can be used to rule leniently. According to one view, it is based on the fact that in halacha one generally follows the majority. In a sfek sfeika, the majority of possibilities favors leniency, therefore it is permitted (Shu”t HaRashba, vol. I, #401).

In order to understand how the sfek sfeika applies in this situation, we must first mention at what point of the year chodosh begins to be a problem. As we said, chodosh refers to grains that took root after the sixteenth of Nisan. That means that for the first few months after Pesach, all grains and grain products are completely chodosh-free, as any grains that took root after the sixteenth of Nisan will not be harvested until mid-to-late summer. Thus all grains until then became permitted after the day when the omer was offered. However, after the post-Pesach grains are harvested, there are two types of products in the market, those that are chodosh and those that are yoshon. This situation will continue until the following Pesach, when all grains become permissible again.

Thus, when a person goes to his local grain merchant, say in Elul, any given grain available for purchase has a sfek sfeika:

1) Perhaps this grain is pre-Pesach stock and became permitted on the sixteenth of Nisan.

2) Even if one were to contend that this particular grain was harvested after Pesach, perhaps it took root before the sixteenth of Nisan and anyway became permitted on the sixteenth of Nisan.

This approach of the Rama has a halachic advantage and disadvantage. On the one hand, even if one were to hold that the halacha follows those opinions that chodosh is forbidden in chutz la’aretz min HaTorah, nevertheless, by applying the sfek sfeika one can permit even something forbidden by Torah Law. However, the disadvantage here is that the sfek sfeika only applies in a situation where one does not know the grains’ status. If one knows that the grain was definitely planted after Pesach, one no longer has a sfek sfeika. Indeed, there are certain grains that are only planted after Pesach.

THE BACH’S HETER

Another basis for leniency is the opinion of the Bach (Yoreh Deah 293). Unfortunately, to fully explain his thesis is beyond the scope of this article. However, his main contention is that even if one were to assume that chodosh in chutz la’aretz is forbidden, this only applies to grains planted by a Jew. Grains planted by a non-Jew are not subject to the mitzvah of chodosh.

Before introducing his arguments, the Bach writes, “However, the accepted custom in our countries is to be lenient. Even the Gedolei Torah of the previous generation, such as Rav Shachna and Rav Shlomo Luria (Maharshal) and their students did not forbid this and would drink beer made from grain not permitted by the omer, aside from some pious individuals who recently started being careful regarding this.” He goes on to say that he asked one of the great luminaries of the generation and presented him and the other Gedolei Torah with his thesis, “and no one could contradict me.”

After a lengthy discourse, he writes quite emphatically, “Therefore, no leader should rule stringently, the opposite of the custom – a custom based on the Gedolei Yisroel who permitted it. Whoever wishes to be stringent is following a midas chasidus and should not pasken this for others, in order

that people do not come to argue. Only one who is accustomed to other ascetic behavior and is well-known as a chasid, is permitted to act stringently in this regard.”

An interesting footnote to the opinion of the Bach can be found in the sefer “Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah,” where in Parshas Emor it is reported that the Baal Shem Tov asked in a dream about the status of chodosh in chutz la’aretz. He was answered that after the Bach passed away, they cooled the fires of gehinom for forty days in his honor. In the morning, the Baal Shem Tov asked someone to bring him beer made from chodosh, and after drinking it, said, “The Bach is worth relying on.”

Similarly, the Avnei Nezer reported that his teacher, the Chozeh of Lublin, ate chodosh and said that since his ancestor, the Bach, permitted it, one need not be concerned (Shu”t Avnei Nezer, Choshen Mishpat #115).

Also, the Minchas Elazar of Munkatch related in the name of his father, the author of the Darkei Teshuva, that the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz would take issue with anyone who would argue that it is forbidden to eat chodosh in chutz la’aretz.

Although the Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Orach Chaim 489:30) justifies the minhag to be lenient, he nevertheless maintains that a “baal nefesh,” a conscientious person, should be strict and follow the opinion of the majority of Rishonim. It is interesting to note that even though the author of Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, was himself a great Chassidic leader, and he maintained that one should be strict, the general minhag among the Chassidic community is to be lenient.

THE PROTAGONISTS

As we mentioned, the Bach was very emphatic that chodosh is permitted in chutz la’aretz. However, it must be said that many Acharonim sharply disagree with him on virtually all of the issues that he raised. So much so, that the Vilna Gaon wrote that “all of the Acharonim already hit him on the head and he erred” in his approach (Biur HaGra, Yoreh Deah 293. See also Taz and Shach ad loc. and Magen Avrohom 489).

Those Acharonim who argued against the Bach’s approach found it necessary to try and explain the reason why, as per the Bach’s report, people were generally lenient regarding this prohibition. Some argued that apparently beer was a staple of their diet and they could not do without it. This necessitated them to rely on the opinion cited in the Mishnah that the mitzvah of chodosh does not apply in chutz la’aretz. Although most Rishonim follow the stringent view, the Taz maintains that since the Gemara itself did not decide the halacha, one can rely on the lenient opinion that permits chodosh in chutz la’aretz (Taz, Yoreh Deah 293:3).

The Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 293:6) justifies the minhag of being lenient based on the Or Zaru’a, which was printed and made available in the Aruch Hashulchan’s lifetime. The Or Zaru’a maintains that chodosh in chutz la’aretz is not forbidden min HaTorah, but rather miderabbanan. He proves this from the fact that the Mishnah has two requirements for the omer offering: 1) it must come from Eretz Yisroel and not chutz la’aretz, and 2) that it be barley that is “chodosh” – new grain that had not been permitted by the previous year’s korban omer (Menachos 83b). He derives from this that the Torah only considers Eretz Yisroel grain as being “chodosh,” for had chutz la’aretz grain also been considered “chodosh” by the Torah, we would be able to bring the omer from chutz la’aretz as well.

The Aruch Hashulchan comments that had the earlier poskim who went to great lengths to justify the lenient minhag seen the Or Zaru’a, they would not have had to trouble themselves so much to substantiate the custom, as the Or Zaru’a’s approach is the most straightforward.

REMEMBERING HASHEM IS FOR OUR BENEFIT

As we mentioned, the Torah commands us not to eat the new grains until after the korban omer is brought in the Beis Hamikdash. This korban consisted of newly harvested barley, the first of the five species of grain to ripen. The Sefer HaChinuch explains (#303) that since grain is a main staple of one’s diet, it is only fitting to offer some of the new grain as a korban before benefiting from it ourselves. This is to drive home the message that everything we have comes from Hashem and that we have to constantly thank Him for all that He bestows upon us. By doing so, we bring ourselves closer to Him and thereby give Him the opportunity to shower us with even more good.

Candles (Melb) Friday 14 November 2025, 24 Marcheshvan 5786 7.51/8.54p