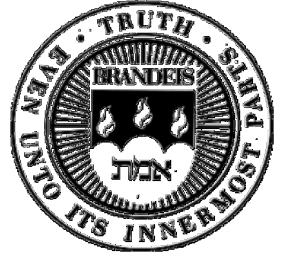




תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

27 Cheshvan 5770 / 14 November 2009 Vol. XI Issue 12

PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH

Candle-lighting: 4:06 pm
Shacharit: 9 am
Sof Kriat Shema: 9:01 am
Sof Zman Tefilla: 9:51 am
Mincha 3:55 pm
Shkia: 4:23 pm
Motzei Shabbat: 5:09 pm

Parsha in a Box

- Sarah dies at 127 years old
- Avraham buys *Mearat HaMachpelah* to bury Sarah there
- Avraham sends his servant Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak and he finds Rivka, who gives water to both him and his camels
- Rivka goes back with Eliezer
- Yitzchak and Rivka get married! *Od Yishama Biarei Yehudah.....*
- Avraham marries Keturah and has children
- The descendants of Yishmael

Shabbat Shalom!

Mincha

By Rabbi Kaplowitz

This week's *parsha* contains a crucial episode in the history of the Jewish people – the introduction of *tefilat Minchah* (the afternoon prayer). The Torah tells us: *And Isaac went out to meditate in the field (la-su'ach ba-sadeh) toward evening, and looking up, he saw camels approaching.* The *Gemara in Brachot* tells us that this is the moment that Yitzchak established *Tefilat Minchah*. Our understanding of *tefillah* in general, and *Mincha* in particular is greatly enhanced by focusing on this key verse.

The commentators argue over the meaning of the term *la-su'ach ba-sadeh* – translated above as *to meditate in the field*.

The Sforno explains that Yitzchak went to the field in order to pray – “he strayed from the road in order to pour out his cries before Hashem in the field – so other travelers would not bother him.”

The Radak and Ibn Ezra explain that the root of the verb *la-su'ach* is the same word for brushes (*sichim*). They understand that Yitzchak went to walk in nature.

The Rashbam and Chizkuni also see the verb as deriving from the word for brushes or plants. But they explain that his intention was to plant trees. As the Rashbam writes, “[he went] to plant trees and to investigate G-d's ways.”

Each of these explanations enhances our understanding of Yitzchak's moment of prayer. There are many people who relate to prayer in the way described by the Sforno. They have to remove themselves from the rest of the world, lest they be interrupted and distracted. For many of us, *tefillah* can take place ONLY in a *shul* at set times with a set text found in the *siddur*. While this model of prayer is of the utmost importance, it is not the only model.

There is also the model of the Radak and Ibn Ezra – to walk in nature. Many people spend time in nature because it inspires them.

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on page 3)

Ish vs. Eved

By Ora Gold '13

Many of us know that late in his life Avraham sent his servant (who we often refer to as Eliezer) back to his homeland to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. Reading the text carefully, one notes that Avraham's servant is never named, and is merely referred to as “*eved*”. However, this is only part of the story! Throughout an important segment of his interaction with Rivka and her family the *eved* is referred to not as “*eved*” but rather as “*ish*”. The initial change comes in 24:22 where the Torah says, “*em zahav haish vayikach*” Then in the interaction with Rivka's family he is referred to as *ish*. The final transformation back to *eved* is found in 24:61, where in the first part of the *pasuk* he is referred to as *ish*, and in the second part he is called *eved*.

The use of the different terms, either *eved* or *ish* is dependent upon the relationship of the man (henceforth to be referred to as Eliezer) to the different people in the episode. The episode begins with Avraham in conversation with his servant, so it properly refers to Eliezer as *eved*. Then the scene changes from *Eretz Kna'an* to *Ur Kasdim*. There, Eliezer now dialogues with Rivka and Lavan. It is in this context that the wording switches and Eliezer is now referred to as *ish*. Later, the Torah will again refer to him as *eved*. According to Sforno, Eliezer's status changes in *pasuk* 61 and he is now referred to once more as *eved* as Rivka becomes part of Avraham's family and therefore Eliezer becomes her servant and is referenced as *eved*.

The difference in the servant's titles is based on both Eliezer's behavior and his relationships. When he is mentioned in the context of Avraham and his family, Eliezer is referred to, appropriately, as a servant. Avraham is on a high spiritual level. This is apparent, both because he is Avraham Avinu, and because he does not want Yitzchak to marry a Caananite woman. Avraham is too great a person to want his most beloved son to marry a woman from the spiritually inferior Caananite population. In comparison to Avraham,

(Ora Gold continued on page 3)

The Nameless Servant

By Hepzi Rapoport '12

This week's *parsha* is all about Abraham settling all his affairs. Abraham is getting old and needs to ensure that everything is taken care of before his death. Thus, he buys a burial plot for Sarah and himself in the first part of the *parsha*. The next order of business is to find his son a wife. Before Abraham dies, he needs to make sure that Isaac will continue the Jewish people. The main character in this part of the story, however, is not Abraham or Isaac, it is not even Rebecca, Isaac's eventual wife. Instead it is an unnamed servant of Abraham. Abraham instructs his servant to return to Abraham's birthplace and find a wife for Isaac among his kin. The servant is not named, yet he is entrusted with the job to ensure the continuity of the new nation.

The unnamed servant first appears in 24:2: "And Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, who controlled all that was his." Abraham gives this servant a mission to find Isaac a wife from among Abraham's kin, specifically not from the Canaanites. All commentators assume that this servant is Eliezer, the steward Abraham mentions in *parshat Lech-Lecha* 15:2, but not once in this story is the name Eliezer used. Instead he is referred to as "the servant of Abraham," "the servant," or just "the man." Even when the servant tells Abraham's family who he is, he refers to himself as "Abraham's servant." This is the ultimate act of self-effacement. According to Rabbi Avi Weiss, "It is extraordinary that Eliezer does not identify himself by name, but this omission makes sense as Eliezer works selflessly for Avraham, even at the risk of his own personal gain." The servant, whoever he is, realizes that he is not finding a wife for himself and therefore, his identity comes second to his task.

Beyond just the lack of a name, the servant's actions also call attention to the story. Once Abraham gives the servant directions, he sets out to the city of Nahor with ten camels. He reaches the well of the city in the evening when the women come to gather water. What the servant does next is truly fascinating: "And he said, G-d of my master Abraham, cause for me an occurrence today and kindness for my master, Abraham" (24:12). The first word of the verse, *va'yomer*, is chanted with a *shalsholet*, one of the most unusual cantillation marks. This *parsha* is the second of four occurrences in the Torah of this note. The *shalsholet* suggests a state of mind, some hesitancy on the part of the subject. But why would the servant be hesitant to ask G-d for help? The *Midrash* provides one answer. According to the *Midrash*, the servant, Eliezer, had his own daughter, who he wanted Isaac to marry, but as a Canaanite, she was forbidden to Isaac. Thus, Eliezer was not sure if he really wanted to succeed at finding Isaac a wife and this is why he hesitated before asking G-d for help. Another reason for the servant's hesitancy could be his uncertainty about G-d. After all, the servant had no personal connection to G-d. The only connection he had was through Abraham. Even in his direct prayer to G-d, G-d is the G-d of Abraham not of himself. Therefore, the *shalsholet* might indicate the uneasy feeling Eliezer had in requesting help from a god who was not his own.

This second reason for hesitancy also helps explain some of the other peculiarities in the story. When the servant asks for G-d's help, he asks for good luck and then explains exactly how G-d should indicate Isaac's intended. When the servant will ask the women to give him a drink of water, the woman who also offers to water his camels will be the one intended for Isaac. Throughout the centuries, Rabbis and scholars have been troubled by this request. In the Talmud, this request is cited as an example of the forbidden act of divination. According to the Talmud, one cannot determine the future through an unrelated sign. Nechama Lebowitz and others have a problem with the Talmud citing the servant's prayer as an example of the divination. The sign that the servant uses is not unrelated to finding a good wife for Isaac. By offering to water the servant's camels, the girl

shows traits that were extremely important for Abraham and Sarah, who were known for welcoming guests. But the formulation of the request is still problematic, the conception of G-d within Judaism is not a god of luck. Because the servant has no previous relationship with G-d, he is unsure of how G-d works. Therefore, the hesitancy of servant indicates his uncertainty of G-d's ability or willingness to help.

When G-d immediately sends Rebecca to the servant, the servant is surprised at the quick answer to his prayer. If we understand the hesitancy indicated by the *shalsholet* to indicate the servant's feelings about G-d, the subsequent surprise makes sense. After all, why would G-d answer a request from a mere servant who doesn't necessarily believe in G-d? This also might explain why the servant is not named. G-d isn't causing good luck for the servant, but rather on account of Abraham. If the servant was named, we might think G-d is answering a presumptuous request, instead of just insuring that Isaac and Rebecca continue Abraham's line.

Hepzi has the cutest haircut! Make sure to compliment her on it!

Having Everything

By Shevy Baskin '11

In *parshat Chayei Sarah* 24:1, it states that "Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything." Ramban asks what is meant by this—how is it even possible to have **everything**? Ramban's explanation for this is remarkable. He said that Avraham was blessed "with wealth, property, prestige, longevity and children- for these are all of man's desires." When I read this, I thought this was an odd statement. According to Ramban, everything a person desires, such as property, wealth, and progeny are all **material** wants. On the matter of Avraham's emotional fulfillment—was Avraham happy?—Ramban does not mention it. He is concerned with why this statement is mentioned in the context of Avraham searching for a wife for Yitzchak. Ramban reasons that because Avraham's life was complete in all other manners, except for seeing his son have a family, Avraham hoped to pass along his distinction and honor by marrying off Yitzchak.

Perhaps there is something more to Ramban's interpretation of having everything. Avraham had all his physical, material concerns taken care of. But Sarah had died, and his son was still unmarried. Even though Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything—he was lacking. He did not have grandchildren, and maybe was still mourning the loss of his wife.

Avraham, who put his faith in Hashem and was rewarded for it, still felt something had to be done. Maybe Hashem had taken care of his physical needs, but it was up to Avraham to fulfill his emotional needs. Avraham took this initiative to gain fulfillment by giving his son a wife and passing along his heritage. We can learn a significant lesson from this. However much Hashem gives us the proper physical and material resources to serve Him and make our lives easier, it is our responsibility to fulfill our lives, to make them complete, and feel as though we have everything. Our emotional well being, as well as our legacy, is our initiative to take on. You might have everything, and still be missing something. Our task is to utilize all that Hashem offers us, and create our own fulfilling legacy.

Shevy loves watching Ayelet and Zahvi fight.

M O D A O T

- **This Shabbat we are joined by Rabby Ethan Tucker!** Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Hadar, where he teaches Talmud and Halak-hah. Rabbi Tucker was ordained by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel after years of study at Yeshivat Ma'ale Gilboa and earned a PhD in Talmud and Rabbinics from the Jewish Theological Seminary. A Wexner Graduate Fellow, he is a co-founder of New York's Kehilat Hadar and a leading figure in the independent minyan scene in North America. Rabbi Tucker will be teaching throughout Shabbat: Fri-

day, 7:30 PM: "To Die or Not to Die? Martyrdom in the Jewish tradition," in Feldberg Lounge. Saturday, 1:30 PM: "How far do we have to go to keep mitzvot?," in the Beit Midrash (basement of Shapiro dorm). Saturday, 4:15 PM: "Ethical norms as the foundation for Torah," in Berlin Chapel (After Mincha; feel free to join BUCO for seudah sh'lishit) Questions? Contact Ezra Fishman.

- **Sponsor Kiddush!** Speak to Mimi Cooper if you, a group of your friends, or even better - your parents would like to sponsor kiddush

in honor of someone's birthday or another special occasion. Special requests for food and decor will be considered.

- **Manginah Fall Show!** Sunday at 5:30 pm in Golding Auditorium come hear your favorite Jewish a cappella group sing all of your favorite songs at the 15th Annual Manginah Fall Show. From "Bonim" to Latet, they are doing it all...PLUS they will debut some awesome new songs that you don't want to miss!
- **Shabbat Shalom!**

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued from page 1)

They feel more in touch with G-d and more freely able to express themselves. Along the same lines, by praying while in nature, we see the understanding of prayer as something which is part of the natural world. We need not remove ourselves from the world around us in order to have prayerful, spiritual experiences. Our spiritual lives should be integrated with the rest of the world.

Finally, there is the position of the Rashbam and Chizkuni. It is not enough to be a passive observer of nature. For many people, prayer and spirituality are possible only through action. I am reminded of the famous quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel, commenting on his experience marching in Selma with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was both protest and prayer. Legs are not lips, and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. **I felt my legs were praying.**"

The *Gemara* in *Brachot* 6b says "R. Chelbo said in the name of Rav Huna: A person should always be diligent with regards to the *Mincha* prayer." The Tur explains that extra diligence is required for *Minchah* because it requires a conscious and deliberate break from our daily routine. Especially during this time of the year, when it gets dark so early, it is very easy to get caught up in all that we are doing and forget to *daven Minchah*. Even if we do remember to *daven*, it is often quite challenging to have proper *kavanah* and concentration when we know that we have so much work to get back to. It is helpful to keep in mind all of the models of prayer described above. There is no right or wrong approach, but different approaches that work for different people and at different times.

Rabbi Kaplowitz Fun Fact: Rabbi Kaplowitz was in the 23rd season of *Sesame Street*.

(Ora Gold continued from page 1)

Eliezer is merely an *eved*. He cannot approach Avraham's level of holiness or closeness with G-d, so he is referred to as *eved*. The same reasoning applies to Avraham's family. Eliezer is referred to as an *eved* when dealing with Yitzchak who is also a spiritual giant in his own right. Yet with Rivka, Eliezer is referred to using both terms *eved* and *ish*. Throughout the camel scene when he first meets Rivka and is working as Avraham's servant he is referred to as *eved*. But once he gives her the jewelry he is now referred to as *ish*.

Why does the Torah choose here to change the man's designation? It changes at this exact point in the story because he is about to approach Rivka's family and interact with them. When dealing with Lavan and his family, Eliezer's status is raised and he is now referred to as *ish* because Lavan and company are such spiritually low people. This is illustrated by Rashi's comment on why Lavan ran to greet Eliezer and Rivka. Lavan noticed the gold that Eliezer had given to Rivka and that she was now wearing. Lavan was so obsessed with money that he **ran** to greet Eliezer and Rivka. A similar recurrence will be found when Lavan meets Yaakov in *Vayeitze*.) Because Lavan and his family are such base people, in comparison to them Eliezer is an *ish* and not an *eved*!

In addition, Eliezer is referred to as *ish* because of his actions immediately before he met Rivka. Eliezer *davened* to Hashem for help in finding a suitable wife. Eliezer understood that he was in an area where G-d's presence was greatly diminished and perhaps not recognized at all. By praying to G-d for assistance, he raises himself up, and now becomes an *ish*. As we learn in *Pirkei Avot* in 2:6, "*bamakom she'en anashim, hishtadel lihiyot ish.*" Eliezer has now become the *ish* in this particular situation since he has acted as Avraham would have acted by praying to Hashem.

Unfortunately, the reference change did not last for Eliezer. On his way back to Canaan his title reverts from *ish* back to *eved*. What is the reason for this? Why did he change? He changed because he no longer had to be the person to praise G-d, to *daven* to Hashem, because Avraham, Yitzchak, and Rivka could and would do that. He is therefore referred to again (and finally) as *eved*.

Ora has crazy pencil twisting skillz.

SHORT VORTS

The Key to Finding Your Bashert in BOO

By Rachel Miller '13

Was it really a coincidence when BOO Girl X and BOO Boy Y, who just got married, bumped into each other (not literally) at their freshman orientation?

When Eliezer was searching to find a wife for Yitzchak he pleaded to Hashem saying, "O Lord G-d of my master Abraham I pray Thee send me good chance this day..." (*Bereishit*, 24:12) It seems contradictory that Eliezer prayed to Hashem to ask Him to create for him a coincidence. As Abarbanel said, if Eliezer prayed to Hashem, he clearly relied on Him. Why would he even think of asking for "good chance" when chance and the workings of the Divine Providence are mutually exclusive? And how can it be that someone who believes in "chance" would request from Hashem Himself to arrange this type of situation?

Solomon Dubnow, a commentator on the Ibn Ezra, explains that the term "chance" is generally used in the Torah when speaking of a situation that is not directly caused by "deliberate intervention and effort." However, Hashem ultimately causes everything. A "coincidence" is something which has no cause and cannot be found anywhere in the Torah because it only exists in our imagination as a result of ignorance.

Pagans, such as the *Plishtim*, believed in "coincidences" and in the existence of a power greater than gods. They didn't recognize that a divine being has complete control and is the only cause of everything that occurs. However, the pagans did acknowledge the existence of a god that was superior to all other gods, who created and maintains the order of the world. Nonetheless, they believed that the original order of existence is an eternal force that is greater than all gods.

Eliezer, on the other hand, was completely conscious of the fact that the belief in chance is caused by blindness. He actually did comprehend that every "chance" is engineered and directed by none other than Hashem himself. Therefore, although Eliezer's prayer to Hashem seems to be paradoxical, he is in fact demonstrating his faith in Hashem as the prime cause of "chance". On the contrary, the pagans would never have thought of connecting the idea of "chance" with any god.

May Hashem open our eyes to see His great wonders and may we never confuse them with "chance." And BOO Girl X and BOO Boy Y were always meant to be basherts – it was no coincidence that they met.

Rachel is looking for her BOO Boy Y. Applications can be submitted to toratemet0809@gmail.com

The Matriarch Speaks

By Raquel Greenberg '10

A lengthy portion of *parshat Chayei Sarah* is devoted to Eliezer's journey to find a wife for Yitzchak. To a modern reader, the narrative is a traditional, and somewhat antiquated, tale about a man who travels to a far-off land to find a woman to marry his master's son. In accordance with societal norms of the time, the men say without hesitation, "Take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son" (*Bereishit* 24:51). Yet, the conversation between Eliezer, Betuel, and Lavan then includes a surprising additional female voice, that of Rivka. Betuel and Lavan recant, and say, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply" (*Bereishit* 24:57). This verse is extraneous to the story and does not change the narrative at all, since Rebecca immediately agrees to go. Though one might dismiss this as a stalling tactic, Rashi makes a bold move and writes that from this specific phrase about a specific woman, we learn a general principle of *halacha*: a woman cannot be married against her will in Jewish law. Thus, it is with Rivka's explicit consent that she is brought to Yitzchak.

Moreover, the positioning of this story about Rivka between the narrative about Sarah that precedes it, and the story of Ketura that subsequently follows, illuminates why Rashi's explanation is so vital to our understanding of Rivka's character and her place in the Jewish matriarchy. The *midrash* (*Yalkut Shimoni* 109) explains that the purpose of Avraham's marriage to Ketura was to bear children. Ketura's descendants help Avraham fulfill the promise of *Brit ben Habetarim*, which stated that Avraham would populate, not only the holy land of Canaan, but also "the land" from the Nile to the Euphrates. However, although Ketura serves a divine purpose, she is unable to fill the void left by Sarah's death, and it is Rivka's legacy that fulfill's Hashem's main promise to Avraham in the holy land.

Eliezer chooses Rivka as a wife for Yitzchak because she exemplifies kindness and faith; she is hospitable and she agrees to leave her family and faithfully follow him to Canaan. However, Rashi's emphasis on Rivka's independent thinking, shown by the deliberate inclusion of her verbal consent, also expresses her personal desire to proactively commit to a future in Avraham's household, and it is for this reason that she is able to fulfill the leadership role of matriarch.

Raquel is going to miss Josh's announcements in shul.

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