



# Rambam

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## זמני שבת

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## Achieving Immortality

Generally, a Parsha's name reflects its overarching motif- for example, Parshas Lech Lecha discusses Avraham's personal journeys, Vayera discusses the consequences of Avraham's encounter with Hashem etc. Parshas Chayei Sarah seems to depart from this common pattern. Chayei Sarah revolves around what happened after Sarah died, not Sarah's life.

The Parshah begins with Sarah's burial, but soon focuses on Yitzchak's marriage to Rivka, at which time "Yitzchak found consolation for the loss of his mother". The end of the Parsha is completely removed from Sarah as we learn that Avraham takes another wife, and we discuss Yishmael's lineage. How then is the parsha's central theme of the Parshah about Chayei Sarah, the life of Sarah?

The Gemara in Masseches Taanis teaches that: "Yaakov Avinu never died, he simply expired physically; his spirit lives on through his children." The truly timeless aspect of human existence stems from striving to be one with G-d, who is truly timeless and eternal. Since Yaakov lived in a pure manner, his true life includes his continuing spiritual effect on the world, even after his soul left his body. This effect was perceived not only in his soul's continued unity with G-d - an eternity of the soul - but more importantly, in this world as well, he continued to live through his children - who strove to perpetuate the eternal lifestyle of their father Yaakov. Similarly Sarah continues to live on through her children.

This interpretation raises a difficulty. Why would this Parsha be unique to Sarah and not Avraham?

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**Aryeh  
Shmelezman**  
*Sophomore*

## Ma'aseh Avdei Avos Siman L'Banim

Parashas Chayei-Sarah recounts the story of the search for Yitzchak's bride; a task that Avraham assigns to his faithful servant, Eliezer. The Rabbis teach that Eliezer had a daughter, whom he expected would marry Yitzchak.

After all, who would be a more suitable candidate to become Avraham's daughter-in-law? Eliezer was Avraham's devoted disciple for seventy years, and an accomplished scholar and teacher. The Rabbis describe that he "drew water" from his teacher's infinite wellsprings of wisdom and disseminated this wisdom to others. It was only natural for Eliezer to assume that he would earn the distinction of joining Avraham's family, and his daughter would be chosen as a wife for Yitzchak.

However, Avraham informed Eliezer that his daughter could not marry Yitzchak because Eliezer descended from Canaan, who was cursed by Avraham's grandfather, Noach. This curse remains with Canaan's descendants for eternity, and a person of such lineage was not qualified to join the blessed family of Avraham.

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**Aaron  
Kattan**  
*Senior*  
*S.G.O. President*

Avraham and Sarah differed in that Avraham fathered Yitzchak, Yishmael, and six other nations, thus becoming not only the father of the Jewish people but also of other nations, “Av Hamon Goyim.” In direct contrast Sarah was exclusively the mother of the Jewish nation. Thus, Sarah was better able to discern the unique quality of the Jewish people, who descended solely through Yitzchak.

Avraham buried Sarah in the Meoras HaMachpeilah, the burial place of Adam and Chavah, parents of all humanity. As such, the Meoras HaMachpeilah was seemingly connected to all of mankind, not only to the Jewish people. Nonetheless, Avraham purchased it for the exclusive use of the Jews, thereby emphasizing an underlying theme of Sarah’s life - the distinctiveness of the Jewish people.

The conclusion of the portion then informs us of an even greater dimension to this special quality found in the Jews – they outclassed Avraham’s other children due to Sarah’s positive influence. The Torah goes on to say “Avraham married another woman whose name was Keturah,” and mentions the children born to them. It then states: “Avraham gave all that he owned to Yitzchak. And, to the children of the concubine, Avraham gave gifts and sent them away.” (25:5-6) Similarly, Yishmael’s offspring are alluded to as descending from “Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s slave” - of decidedly lesser rank than Yitzchak.

Herein lays the connection of this Torah portion to Sarah’s life: it stresses her life’s work – creating the deep innate spirituality present in the Jewish nation, the trait that distinguishes it from all others.

**Ma’aseh Avdei Avos Siman L’Banim** *continued*

We can only imagine Eliezer’s disappointment upon hearing Avraham’s response. But Avraham added insult to injury by assigning Eliezer the task of finding a bride for Yitzchak.

Avraham’s assignment to Eliezer is somewhat analogous to the following theoretical situation. Imagine a man who lives next to an attorney whom he consults with to receive legal advice. The attorney graciously spends time reviewing his documents and offering his professional advice, as a neighborly favor. But then, when the man needs to hire a lawyer to oversee a major transaction, not only does he pass over his friendly neighbor for the job, he asks the neighbor to recommend another lawyer. After the lucrative deal is completed, he gives the neighborly lawyer a tremendous sum and asks him to give it to the other attorney! What insensitivity.

Eliezer, Avraham’s loyal servant and disciple for seventy years, clearly had sufficient reason to feel slighted. Nevertheless, he executed his mission faithfully and masterfully, praying to God to assist him and employing every technique he could to win a favorable response on the part of Rivka’s family. Avraham had told him that if the suitable girl refused to come to marry Yitzchak, then Eliezer was excused from his mission. He could have easily gone to Rivka’s family without making any effort to secure their consent, so that he would return to Canaan without a match, in which case Avraham might rethink his decision and allow Yitzchak to marry Eliezer’s daughter. Instead, Eliezer makes every effort to ensure the success of his mission, so that he would return to Canaan with the ideal match for Yitzchak.

Eliezer learned this trait from Avraham himself. As we read last week in Parashas Vayera, Avraham prayed on behalf of Avimelech, the king of Gerar, who was punished for abducting Sara. Despite the pain Avimelech inflicted on Avraham and his wife, Avraham nevertheless agreed to pray on Avimelech’s behalf, and felt concerned for his well-being. Eliezer observed this and followed Avraham’s example. Even though he felt slighted, even though he may have had a valid grievance, he nevertheless put his selfish interests aside and executed his mission in good faith.

Perhaps that is why the Torah devotes so much time to Eliezer’s story, when in general; it is so thrifty in its verbiage. Some of the most important Mitzvos of the Torah are covered in just several verses, but the stories of the patriarchs – and, in this case, even of their servant – are given dozens of verses. Each day we must ask, “When will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers?” We are to study and gain inspiration from the story of Eliezer, and work towards implementing these critical lessons in our own lives and following in the footsteps of our holy ancestors and those who cleaved to them.

## Life is Good

Parshas Chayei Sarah begins with the following statement: “the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; [these were] the years of the life of Sarah.” (23:1). “[These were] the years of the life of Sarah” appears to be superfluous as the next Pasuk immediately discusses the details of Sarah’s death. Rashi explains that these words teach that every year of Sarah’s life was of equal goodness. At first glance, Rashi’s explanation appears to be absurd. At the age of Sixty-five, Sarah permanently left her birthplace in the Fertile Crescent to begin anew in a strange land. Once there she was forced to travel to the licentious land of Egypt thanks to a ravaging hunger. Unscrupulous kings kidnapped Sarah; she endured years of childlessness and constant wandering. When she finally gave birth to a boy, her maidservants’ son began to abuse him. Finally, Sarah expired upon hearing the terrible, albeit false, rumor that her addled husband was sacrificing her son. How then can Rashi interpret this Pasuk to mean that Sarah lived a good life?

Rashi may offer his explanation to highlight Sarah’s fundamental outlook on life. No matter what happened to Sarah, she always viewed life positively and that is why her years were equal in goodness. A contemporary story may illustrate Rashi’s point well.

Rabbi Label Lam, a community Rabbi once gave a congregant a ride to hospital so she could have some stitches removed. After the procedure, Rabbi Lam politely asked how she was doing, “I’m fine, thank G-d,” she responded nonchalantly. This neutral response led Rabbi Lam to inquire as to the nature of the surgery. “Oh, I had a malignant growth removed” she responded to Rabbi Lam, as if she had a splinter removed. Rabbi Lam, so amazed by her attitude toward this whole incident, had nothing to say but, “I’m so sorry, I didn’t know”. This woman realized that all she possessed was limited knowledge of the universe, and that there was a greater purpose to everything in life. She didn’t let a potentially life altering procedure bad incident to affect her way of life, as she knew there was a deeper meaning to it. Similarly, Sarah Imeinu took the challenges in life and used them to raise her level of Emunah in Hashem. She fully comprehended that all in life is from Hashem and that Hashem has a reason for everything. As the Mishna in Pikei Avos says: who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot. Sarah viewed everything in her life positively, and thus she truly lived a good life.

**Daniel  
Sobin  
Junior**

## Making the Best of a Bad Situation

In this week’s Parsha, the pasuk tells us that immediately after Avraham buries Sarah he commands Eliezer to find Yitzchak a wife. Avraham’s instructions were clear: the future bride could not be from the girls of Canaan. Yet, when coming down from Har Hamoriyah at the end of Parshas Vayerah, Rashi says that Avraham considers marrying Yitzchak to a daughter of Aner, Eshkol, or Mamreh.

Avraham reasons: “If my son Yitzchak was offered as a sacrifice, I would be without grandchildren. I should have married him off to one of the daughter’s of Canaan. To dispel this notion, Rashi tells us, Avraham is told of the family of Nachor and he is informed that Rivkah was born.

When faced with the possibility of having no offspring, Avraham is willing to have Canaanite descendants. While the idea of Canaanite grandchildren is detestable, it is practical. Faced with the crisis of not having an heir, Avraham decides to take action. But before he can do so, he is informed that Nachor has a granddaughter, and Avraham understands that there are alternatives to Canaanite women as a suitable match for Yitzchak. So he sends Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak, but she cannot be a Canaanite woman. But for a time, faced with the reality that he would have no one to inherit the Land of Israel and follow his legacy, Avraham looks for a solution, even if it is not ideal.

Avraham’s behavior lies in direct contrast to that of Noach when he came out from the Tevah. Seeing the earth without people, and in ruins, Noach concludes that bringing more children into such a world is a hopeless and meaningless endeavor. So Noach, formerly an Ish Tzaddik, is transformed into an Ish HaAdamah. Confronted with a crisis, Noach takes action.

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**Moshe  
Fink  
Junior**

## **It's A Matter of Pride**

**Rabbi Yosef  
Ziskind  
Rebbe**

In this week's Parsha we briefly meet Ephron. When we are first introduced to Ephron, he is involved in a transaction with Avraham Avinu. At one point during their discussion, Ephron even refers to Avraham as a "beloved friend" (according to Rashi). However by the end of the first Aliya, Ephron's name is spelled deficiently, lacking the letter vuv and we never hear anything of Ephron again.

There are a number of opinions as to why Ephron's name is spelled defectively during our final reference to him in the Torah. One compelling interpretation is that Ephron had a unique opportunity to become close to Avraham. Instead of seizing the opportunity though, Ephron greedily overcharged Avraham for a burial plot, ending their brief relationship. The Torah spells Ephron without a vuv, a letter that implies connection, to highlight the fact that Ephron lost the chance to cleave to G-d (termed UVO Sidbakun) through a servant of G-d, namely Avraham. (Rav Aharon Kotler)

Eliezer's actions lie in direct contrast to Ephron's. When Eliezer journeys to Avraham's family in Mesopotamia, he introduces himself quite bluntly as Eved Avraham, Avraham's slave. Eliezer was in fact the controller of Avraham's vast estate, yet he humbly refers to himself as a slave. Eliezer felt privileged to be connected to Avraham and nullified his own honor as he wished to grow in spirituality through Avraham, not benefit from his prestige. He was proud of his connection to Avraham. He could have described himself as the controller of a rich man's land, yet Eliezer truly recognized that it was important to be connected to a great servant of G-d like Avraham, solely for the purpose of serving him and following his way, not for the prestige it could have afforded him.

As practicing Jews we can draw an important lesson from Eliezer's conduct. Eliezer was willing to demean himself in acknowledging his spiritual connection to Avraham. How much more so, should we who have a wonderfully rich heritage, take pride in our religious identity. We should not casually disregard it or be embarrassed of it when it distinguishes us from society.

## **Making the Best of a Bad Situation**

*continued*

But instead of creating new generations and instructing them in the ways of HaShem, Noach chooses to plant a vineyard and become inebriated. He concludes that having no children at all is preferable to having children who may not follow a moral lifestyle. And his decision leads him to break, rather than build, his grandchildren.

The Torah may be trying to teach us an important lesson. Avraham, when faced with a crisis, is willing to sacrifice that which is ideal in favor of a practical solution. He does not become depressed or irrational, and he is rewarded with Rivkah, the ideal wife for his son. Noach takes the easy road and gets drunk and ends up cursing his children and grandchildren. In life, we often find ourselves in crisis, and not every problem has a simple or desirable solution. Yet like Avraham, we must do our best, keeping within the confines of the Torah and making sure not to become despondent.

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**שבת שלום**