



Chaye Sara



English version

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## THE ART OF BEING AN ESHET CHAYIL

One of the greatest things I ever taught was the explanation of Eshet Hayil. There are many explanations of the Eshet Hayil. It was written by King Solomon, at the very end of Mishlei. It could be explained as the soul, (Malbim) as the Torah (Vilna Gaon's commentary), as the Hall of Fame of Eshet Hayil women (Midrash Mishlei) or as Avraham's eulogy on Sarah. (Tanchuma Chaye Sarah 4). In its most simple explanation, it is the recipe to become a super woman. (see Malbim – דרך הפשט)

Eshet Chayil, a woman of valor. Valor is not just any strength. It is courage, boldness, bravery, strength of mind, particularly in place of fear and great danger. All the women of the Eshet Chayil hall of fame got in there for a certain display of intrepidity and inner strength that they displayed at some specific episode in their life. *Sarah, for making her husband rich from Pharaoh. Rivka, for helping Yitzchak overcome the loss of his mother. Leah, for greeting Yaacov with a cheerful face when he returned from the field, when she purchased that night from Rachel for some mandrakes. Rachel, for going through embarrassment of having no children, every day. Bitya, daughter of Pharaoh, who converted and dealt with Moshe. Yochebed, for being the mother of Moshe. Miriam, for prophesying that her mother would have the child that would save the Jewish People, for getting slapped on her head over her prophecy by Amram when the slavery got worse instead of the redemption arriving, and when Little Moshe was thrown into the Nile, she stayed strong*

*to her prophecy, by waiting on the side of Nile to see what would happen to her brother. Chana, for praying for a son, and in that merit of prayer, to be the mother of Shmuel, who was equal to both Moshe and Aharon, together. Yael, for not killing Sisra with a sword, so as not to wear a manly item, but instead, killing him with a tent peg. The widowed woman who gave bread and water to Eliyahu the prophet. Rachav, the harlot, who was willing to help the Jewish Spies when the Jews came to destroy Yericho. Bat Sheva, for being the mother of King Shlomo. Michal, for saving King David's life from the hands of her father, King Shaul. Shimshon's mother. Elisheva bat Aminadav, the wife of Aharon, and the mother of all Kohanim. Serah Bat Asher, who saved a whole city of Jews, with her sound advice. The wife of Ovadiah the prophet, who prevented her sons from falling into King Achav's persuasion to worship idols. Shunamit, for feeding the prophet Elisha. Ruth, for converting and embracing the religion in such a way that she merited to be King David's grandmother. (Midrash Mishlei)*

What brought King Solomon to write the Eshet Chayil? The heavy rebuke his mother Bat Sheva gave him! The same night that King Solomon celebrated the completion of the building of the Temple, he married the daughter of Pharaoh. The party for the Bet Hamikdash was not as festive and fancy as the royal wedding! (Midrash Mishlei 4) King Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, right after he killed his Rabbi, Shimi Ben Gera, as commanded by his father King David, before his



death. (Melachim x Chapter 2-Chapter 3) When he had no Rabbi to consult with, he made the biggest mistake of his life, despite his having been the smartest man, ever. (Berachot 8a)

The beginning of the chapter in Mishlei, before mentioning the Eshet Chayil, is where it all began. The night of the wedding, Pharaoh's daughter staged a "setup" for King Solomon. Under King Solomon's pillow were the keys to the Temple. She set up the room in such a way that the ceiling would be dark, and she had paintings of the moon and the stars as props. She brought the best musicians, and she kept King Solomon up all night, all in order to be sure that the first Korban Tamid would not be brought! In the morning, the people were petrified to wake up the king, to get the keys, as they had just seen that Shimi had been killed, for betraying the king's word. When King Solomon woke up, his new bride told him it was still night, and that he should go back to sleep. Until Bat Sheva, King Solomon's mother, came into the room, woke up her son, got the keys, and the Korban Tamid was brought four hours into the day, on the very first day of the Bet Hamikdash! And G-d thought at that moment that He would eventually destroy this Temple! (M. Mishlei)

Bat Sheva tied her son King Solomon to a pole and whipped him, saying the strongest Mussar a mother could ever give her child. מה־בְּרִי ומה־בְּרִבְּוֹנֵי אִמָּהּ בְּרִבְּוֹנֵי בְּרִבְּוֹנֵי You are an embarrassment to your mother! All the other wives of King David prayed that their sons would be the next king. But I prayed only for a son to be a kosher child, a Tzaddik; a child who lives by Torah. You are not the child that I prayed for!!! Don't give your strength to women, don't let wine take over your mind!

About his mother who rebuked him, who almost regretted being his mother, King Solomon composed the Eshet Chayil! Avraham Avinu eulogized his wife Sarah, with the Eshet Chayil. בטח בה לב בעלה for when she lied for Avraham, saying that she was just a sister and not his wife. דרשה צמר ופשתים - for when she separated between Yitzhak and Yishmael when she got up early to help Avraham get ready for his early morning trip to Akeidat Yitzchak. הגרה בעוז מתניה for when she rushed to prepare the food for the

angels/guests. ידיה שלחה בכשור for when she would give food for the passersby. כפה פרשה לעני for when she would give charity to the poor and dress them. עוז והדר לבושה for her having the clouds of glory over her tent, פיה פתחה בחכמה for when she said to Avraham to marry Hagar. Etc. The Midrash finishes off that after she died, suddenly, Avraham got very old. Indeed, after Sarah's funeral, we don't see any more activity on the part of Avraham. As if to say that Avraham was only Avraham, as long as he had Sarah at his side.

The simplest translation of the Eshet Chayil is discussing the resourcefulness of the woman. Her ability to run the home and allow her husband to learn Torah, and bring up children who go in the way of the Torah. It starts from her being able to balance the finances, to live within her budget. בְּטָחָהּ הַיְתָרָה לֵב בְּעֵלָהּ אֲשֶׁלֶל לֹא יִחָסֵר having a no-waste, financially responsible mindset. Continuing with stitching and sowing, וְרָשָׁה צִמְרָה וּפְשָׁתִים וְתַעֲשֶׂה בְּתַבְּנֵי דוֹנָהּ Doing business, buying at a low overseas, and selling at a high, לְחֵמָה תְּבִיא לְחֵמָה . While still running the home, making the sandwiches, and staying up late nights, with the kids. וְתִקְוָה בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה וְתַתֵּן טָרַף לְבִיתָהּ אֲחֵק לְנַעֲרָתֶיהָ . Even going out to the field, to make it work, and managing the calendar of the seasons. וְזָמְמָה שְׂדֵהָ . All this, in order to allow her husband and sons the time and patience they need, to grow in Torah and to become G-d fearing. וְתִקְוָהוּ מִפְּרִי כִפְיָהּ נֹטַע גִּטְעָה כָּרֵם וְנוֹדָע בְּשָׁעֵרִים בְּעֵלָהּ בְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עִם זִקְנֵי אֶרֶץ . and, וְתִנְוֶלָה מִפְּרִי הַגִּידָה וְיִהְיֶה לְלוֹיָהּ בְּשָׁעֵרִים מְעֻשָׂיָה Dressing modestly, knowing that in the next world, she will be rewarded for dressing like a true Bat Yisrael, and a Bat Melech. עוֹזְוֵהָ לְבוּשָׁה וְתִשְׁחַק לְיוֹם אַחֲרוֹן

Being an Eshet Chayil is not being a Barbie doll with Yirat Shamayim. It is not about being C3, Calm, Cheerful, and Cute, letting her husband get away with being irresponsible, making bad decisions, or not caring when he is supposed to. It is about being a woman of valor. A woman that has to, sometimes, when appropriate, stand up for her values, to make sure that her home will be a place where G-d will feel comfortable and accepted. Never being lazy about her duties of being a mother, וְלִתְּתָם עֲצָלוּת לֹא תֵאָכֵל . And knowing what real beauty is, וְהָבֵל הִפְיִי אִשָּׁה : יְרֵאת־יְקֻנָּה הִיא תִתְהַלָּל :

## THE ART OF BEING CALM AND CHEERFUL

I can't believe I am writing this. But if just one reader, or one reader's child thinks *this helps me feel better*, it's well worth it. Lately, I have not been feeling calm, present, cheerful. I decided to turn to a good friend, Moshe Landesman, a calm and cheerful life coach, for guidance. I say to Moshe, "I am not sure why I am coming to you, someone my age, a friend. I usually go to speak to my Rebbeim, to people who are much smarter than me." Moshe's answer came across strong. "Because you did not come to see me. You came to see yourself. I am just going to be your mirror."

He asks me, Yosef, I know that you are successful. Your Parasha Sheets are *the* Mamtak (the sweetest part) of the Shabbat table of so many families from such a broad spectrum in readership. But, Yosef, do *you* think of yourself as successful?" I said, I am not sure. If I had better financial security for my family like X, if I were learning more like Y, praying better like Z, I would probably feel more successful.

Moshe strikes again. "Yosef, you are one of the best life coaches I know. I am going to pitch you a model coaching session. Imagine your teenage daughter comes to you, crying, that she wishes she was more beautiful. Now, you know that she is beautiful. But she does not see it. Yosef, how do you coach her out of it?"

I answered. "Oh, that's easy-shmeezy! Honey, you are confusing the mirror with the window! You are not looking in the mirror; you are looking out the window!" Stop looking at others; start looking at yourself. You are so unique, so beautiful!

Yosef, you are not looking in the mirror! You are looking out the window! You are comparing yourself to others, measuring your success by others' goals and not by your own unique goals!

It is so interesting. The Western wall is called the Wailing Wall, partially because more people come there to pray with tears of pain and suffering than people who come to pray with tears of joy and thanks. When the Torah eulogizes Sarah, it tells us that Sarah was not like that. When she was 100,

she was like she was at 20. There is a Hassidic twist on those words. Psalm 20 is יַעֲנֶה יְיָ יְקוּם בַּיּוֹם צָרָה *G-d will answer you in your day of pain*. Psalm 100 is מְזִמֹּר לְתוֹדָה *A song of thanksgiving*. When things worked out for Sarah, and she said psalm 100, she thanked G-d with the same passion and fire as she prayed to G-d when she had difficulties and was saying psalm 20! And the reverse was also true. When she said psalm 20, expressing pain, she read with the same fervor and thankfulness with which she read psalm 100 – both with a heart equally full of gratitude.

We forget to thank G-d when things work out the way we wished and prayed for. Why? Because we stop looking in the mirror, and we start looking out the window! And this is precisely why, so many times, our prayers are not answered. After G-d solves one problem for us, after we reach one milestone, we are already looking at others ahead of us, building new goals, praying for new things, and forgetting to thank for the miracles He has already performed! וְהַגִּתִּי אֶת-אֲשֶׁר אָתֶּן *And I will grace those that I will grace*. What do those words mean, I will grace those that I will grace? The Sefer Hazchut says that Heaven bestows grace only on those He is sure will recognize that the blessings were kindness from G-d, after receiving those blessings! The key to having your prayers answered is not to forget that it is G-d Who answers them. The Mashiach will come, when G-d is sure that we will love Him for it. ומביא גואל לבני. בניהם למען שמו באהבה. One of the most powerful Segulot is to promise G-d, Bli Neder, that if He answers your prayers, you will not forget to sing him Nishmat in front of 10 men. And to write it down. (Peleh Yoetz; Kaf Hachaim; R Yehudah HaHassid)

ויהיו חגי שָׁרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים שָׁנֵי חַגֵּי שָׁרָה And they were, the life of Sarah, 100 years, and 20 years, and 7 years, the years of the life of Sarah. What is the point of the seemingly redundant words at the end of the passuk? Rashi answers שוין לטובה כלן שוין *all of her years were equal for good*. What?! All of Sarah's life was equally good? Avraham's ten tests were as hard on Sarah as

they were on Avraham, if not harder, in their own way! How could we possibly say that it was all good?

The answer is Sarah's lesson to the world. She was the pillar and embodiment of the concept of an attribute the Baal Shem Tov calls "Equal". To Sarah, Bad was *equal* to Good. Insult was *equal* to Compliment. Being ignored was *equal* to being praised. Because it is not the person, place or thing, that is the source for the bad or good coming my way. It is all from one source; it is all G-d! It is all equal! This is the secret to calmness and cheerfulness.

Whatever difficulty Sarah went through, it was just an *opportunity* to do kindness with G-d and trust in Him. When we say, in our prayers, זוכר חסדי אבות, G-d remembers the kindness of the Forefathers,... what kindness can *anyone* do for G-d?! G-d does not need anything!! The only kindness you can do for G-d is to put your trust in Him when the going gets rough, and rely on Him because you recognize the fact that there is no one else/nothing else to rely on! *בֵּה אָמַר יִקְרָא זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ אֶהְבֵּת כְּלוּלָתִי לְכַתֵּךְ. אֶתְרִי בְּמִדְבָּר: So said YKVK, I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, your going after Me in the desert...* And before G-d tests us, He asks us for a favor - to stay strong and believe in Him. As G-d asked Avraham to offer up Yitzhak on the altar: He asked him as a favor, קח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ. *Please take your son...* וְהָאֵמֶן בִּיקְרָא וַיִּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה

When the unexpected happens, when things don't go as planned, people tend to lose their calm and cheerfulness. The Chida points out that the word וַיִּהְיוּ, *and they were*, can be spelled both forward and backward. Even when things in Sarah's life

*In loving memory of my grandmother, Savta Sarah. A woman who never stopped laughing, no matter how hard how hard her life was.*

Selfie steps to staying happy no matter what.

1. Stop looking out the window at others. Start looking in the mirror, at what G-d gave you. Your success is measured by how much you realize that G-d made you unique, gives you unique challenges and adversity, and uniquely helps you overcome them. הוּא-עֲשָׂנוּ וְלוֹ אֲנַחְנוּ עֲמָנוּ וְצָאן מֵרַעֲיוֹנוֹ.

were out of order, exactly opposite of what she wanted, Sarah was able to see them in a unique perspective, as the meaning of her name, יסכה, implies. She did not look at her days as independent, unconnected units, but she saw each day, each moment as part of a bigger picture of life, ויהיו ימי שרה, and ויהיו חיי שרה. She was happy from the day she was born, till the day of her death. She even died laughing, וַתִּשְׂחַק לְיוֹם אֶתְרוֹן, knowing that she had fulfilled her mission in this world to raise a son who was willing to give up his life for G-d.

How does one ascend to this mindset? שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת *A song of ascents. When YKVK returns the captivity of Zion, we shall be like dreamers. אז ימלא שחוק פיננו ולשוננו רגה. Then, our mouths will be filled with laughter and our tongues, with songs of praise. We will be like dreamers – but like which dreamer?*

The dreamer the pasuk refers to is Yosef, the master of dreams! וַיְהִי יִקְרָא אֶת-יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מַצְלִים וַיְהִי *And YKVK was with Yosef, and he was a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. Yosef, the prize student of Yaakov Avinu, is sold as a slave to an Egyptian master, whose wife is obsessively enticing him, but Yosef is considered a "successful man"! Didn't Yosef have a dream when he was a teenager that he would be a king and support his father and brothers?! How is being a slave in Egypt being successful? Because Yosef knew that G-d was with him. It was all G-d. If you feel that G-d is with you, and you have a real relationship with Him, you feel successful, no matter what is going on in life. Everything else, everyone else, is just a dream.*

2. Thank G-d for what you have with the same passion that you prayed for what you don't have. If you want your prayers for salvation to enter G-d's gates, you need to first open those gates by thanking Him for what you've got. *בְּאוֹ שֶׁעָרְיוּ בְּתוֹדָה*
3. Learn the secret of calm, the perspective of Equal. It is all G-d *שוויון* *ה' לנגדי תמיד*. *Everything that confronts me; it is all equally from G-d. Even though, and especially when, things don't go as planned.* The story of Nachum Ish Gamzu teaches us that the worst things happening to you, like all of your gold and silver turning to sand and dirt, can be the best thing that can happen to you. The Roman Emperor did not need a box of treasures from the Jews. But the sand of Avraham Avinu that turns into arrows to fight the enemy, that is priceless!!! The “dirt” that G-d gave you, can have more value to you than the gold and silver of everyone else!
4. Stop needing people's likes, praise, feedback to be the unique person G-d created you to be.
5. Learn to laugh things off. Get into the habit of finding humor and using it, especially when things are not going as planned. *ויהי*
6. Learn to look at life from a broader, lifelong perspective *היי שרה* and not be hyper-focused on the annoyances and frustrations of the moment by moment, day by day, *ימי שרה*.

## Kindness - Inside Out

R' Chaim Vital, student of Arizal was quoted saying something that I hope I will never forget. There are people who perform acts of kindness with everyone, but with their own families, they do not do kindness. They think to themselves that when they come to the next world, to the Heavenly Court, the gates of Paradise will be opened wide... Woe is to them! Woe is to their souls!!! For they do not know that all their kindness is worthless!!! (see Sefer Chaim Sheyesh Bahem pg. 100) What? Why?!

The Halacha regarding charity is that family comes first. To be a community leader, you need, first, to be a family leader. Your family before another, your city before another. And your wife comes first, before anyone else, even your parents! *וּמִבְּשָׂרָהּ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם* (Yeshayahu 58)

But some “leaders” don't get it... some people who are kind and available outside the house, are “unavailable” inside the house. The only way a family member can get through to such people is “long distance”. An email, WhatsApp or text.

How cruel! Why would you want your children to develop a hatred for acts of kindness performed for other people? If you are kind to everyone, except for your wife and children, what generally happens? Your wife and children subconsciously

begin to feel that they are not worth your time, love, interest, affection. This kindness is not kindness. This kindness is cruelty! The proof is that your children will not follow in your way; they will not do kindness outside their own homes, because they do not want to hurt anyone, like they were hurt!

Avraham was the epitome of Balanced Kindness, by being sensitive for his own family first. When Avraham offered meat to his three guests, he went through the trouble of slaughtering three cows, to give a whole tongue in mustard sauce to each, with three Se'ah of fine flour. But when he offered them water to wash, he offered only a *small* amount. *יִקַּח-נָא מְעַט-מַיִם*. Why didn't he trouble himself to serve them a lot of water? The Talmud teaches, that the flour and the cattle, Avraham dealt with himself. But the act of bringing the water was delegated to a household member. (B. Metziah 86) That is why he only asked for the smallest amount of water. (R' Yisrael Salanter)

It is so interesting. The Torah uses the word *Chessed* in two regards. **Kindness** and **embarrassment/abomination**. (Vayikra 20;17) What is the significance of this? Why would the Torah use this word for two diametrically opposed meanings?

Let us take a look at the Chessed of Lot. When he invited the angel guests and was surrounded by the mob of the entire city of Sodom, he was given an ultimatum. “Give us your guests, so that we can defile their bodies!” Lot stepped out and quickly closed the door behind him, as he faced the angry mob. And then, Lot offered them the most despicable offer, *in the name of kindness!* *הַגְּדִה־נָא לִי שְׂתֵי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ אִישׁ אוֹצִיא־הֶנָּה אֶתְהֶן אֵלֵיכֶם וְעָשׂוּ לָהֶן כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם רַק לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ דָבָר כִּי־עַל־כֵּן בָּאוּ בְּצַל קַרְתִּי: Here, I have two daughters who have never known any man. I will bring my daughters out to you, to do with them as you wish! But do nothing to my guests, for they have come under the shelter of my roof!!(Bereshit 19:8)*

Lot got the first part of Avraham’s class on kindness, but he missed the second part. All he knew, all he learned from Avraham was kindness, before Avraham had a family. Lot never got a chance to learn from Avraham how to balance kindness with family, because he went out on his own path before Avraham had any children! He thought that by being kind, by sacrificing his family to protect his guests he would be "Avrahamic", a drop like his uncle. But he paid a heavy price for it. His own daughters, the ones who had not yet married, got back at their own father in the cave, with the most awkward and embarrassing story of bearing children ever! She even named her child Moab- *From father*, forever announcing to the world - *this child is from my Dad! Because I learned from dad that being kind to others, saving the world, comes first, before saving face for family!*

Our Parasha begins with a very detailed episode of Avraham purchasing a grave for his deceased wife Sarah. The Midrash Rabbah comments on this achievement of Avraham with the passuk in Mishlei וְכָבוֹד וְחַיִּים יִמְצָא חַיִּים יִמְצָא חַיִּים יִמְצָא חַיִּים *He who pursues charity and kindness will find life, charity, and honor. (Mishlei 21, 21) Who is the one who pursued charity and kindness? This is Avraham, who performed kindness to his wife Sarah!*

What? Avraham is known as the King of Kindness, only because he was kind to his wife Sarah? Why is buying her a grave considered kindness? Isn't every Joe Shmoe expected to buy his wife a grave, as promised in the Ketuba?

Yes. Every husband has to buy a grave for his wife, but this was not any ordinary grave. This was the Maarat Hamachpela, something that Avraham paid \$8,160,000 dollars for, despite being promised by G-d that the Canaanite land was his. (see Kav Vnaki) Avraham knew that deep inside that cave is the entrance to Gan Eden. (Midrash Rut) Avraham knew that this is a place where all prayers and praise pass through, before going On High. (Rama Mipano, Yonat Ilem,; Migaleh Amukot)

But there is a deeper message here. Avraham got into the Kindness Hall of Fame not for being kind to the world, *but for being kind to his wife*. All the greatest kindness that Avraham did does not add up to the one act of kindness to his own wife, Sarah: getting her the best grave in the world! Your ticket to Olam Haba is not the kindness of changing the world and making it a better place. It is the kindness of changing *your* world

Why are people not kind inside-out? There are two main reasons for this.

**Aleph-** Doing kindness outside home is more attractive than doing kindness inside your home. You don't get any medals for saying something kind to your wife, or spending time with your kids. Acts of kindness at home won't make you famous or make you any “connections”.

**Beth-** You are *expected* to be nice at home, to your wife and children. And the rule in life is - people do not usually do what they are expected to do. As our Rabbis teach גדול המצווה ועושה יותר ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה. *Greater is one who does what he is commanded from someone who is not commanded and he does.* (Kiddushin 31a)

But real kindness is inside-out. First inside, and then outside. We all have a commandment that is almost impossible to fulfill. וואהבת לרעך כמוך *Love your friend like yourself*. How is it possible to love someone else like I love myself? R' Chaim Vital writes that the situation in which you can actually love another person as yourself, can be fulfilled through loving your wife. (Shaar Likutim Ekeb) The Talmud learns from this passuk that it is forbidden for a man to marry a woman, without seeing her first. Why? Because it could be that after he marries her, he will not like the way she

looks (one of the worst feelings for a woman), and the Torah says ואהבת לרעך כמוך *Love your friend like you love yourself!* (Kiddushin 41a) After all, the real, original Chessed, was from Adam to Chava, kindness from a man to his wife, before anyone else was born!

Hillel taught אל תדין (תדין) אדם תבנה עד שתגיע למקומו  
*Do not judge a person until you reach his place.*

The Rambam rules that a Middah, a characteristic, that is not balanced is a bad characteristic, even if the characteristic is kindness. (Deot 1;5) So how does a person balance kindness? Here are the selfie steps... The self- help steps that put things into balance.

1. Master the art of kindness by learning Sefer Ahavat Chessed of the Chafetz Chaim. Chessed is a skill- not an impulse. Ask your Rabbi when in doubt.
2. First make sure that your own home is functional before helping others. Here are some ingredients to a functioning home, a home where family needs are met: Selfless love. Joy. Peace and calm. Patience. Kindness. Compassion. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Acceptance. Boundaries. Responsibility. Individualism. Health. Social life. Reasonable expectations.
3. Learn to accept yourself, and love yourself. You do not need “medals”, you just need to recognize how much good G-d has given you. You do not need connections. You just need to realize that your best and most important connections are your own family. They are G-d’s gift to you. Cherish them.

(Chapter 2) R Moshe Aharon Shtern would add a twist to that. If you want to judge a person, check with his wife and children, his home, *his place*. How do *they*, *his place*, perceive their Abba? Because who you are at home, is all you really are in the World of Truth.

## A LITTLE LOST

The greatest cause for “midlife crisis” is the belief that you are supposed to be in control. There is no greater haughtiness than the belief that you have your whole life mapped out for you. Life is full of crises, because we are all a little lost. And it is totally fine to be a little lost. The problem is when we title it as a crisis. It is just being a little lost, and that is fine. Sometimes, the best things in the world happen when we’re a little lost. There is nothing wrong with stopping and thinking. Because during those times when we are a little lost, we need to recalculate, reset our destination and, most importantly, realize that we need to humble ourselves a little to an Almighty G-d. I would not call it crisis, I would just call it *shalsholet*.

Probably the most interesting of the *ta’amim* is the *ta’am* we call *shalsholet*. The *ta’amim* set the tune for the way we read the *parasha* from the Sefer Torah. And the *ta’amim* have hidden in them great wisdom. The *shalsholet* is found in the entire Torah a total of 4 times. And a total of 3 times

in *Neviim* and *Ketubim*. Interestingly enough, we had one in *Parashat Vayera* and we have one in *Parashat Chaya Sarah*, back to back. What is the meaning of the *shalsholet*?

The Vilna Gaon said that the first mention of a word in the Torah sets the tone for the rest of the usages of that word throughout the Torah. Looking back to the first time the *ta’am* of *shalsholet* appears, it is obvious that the words marked with a *shalsholet* have a double meaning. Wherever a *shalsholet* appears, the person who is being referred to is going through a crisis. And that crisis will cause a long-lasting chain reaction, a ripple effect on history.

In *Parashat Vayera*, Lot was going through a crisis. The angels were pressing him to leave quickly, leaving all his worldly possessions behind, in order to save his life. Lot needed to think fast and decide what is more important: his career or his life. וְהִתְמַהֵּלָהוּ — He needed to make a quick decision; that is indicated by the *psik* after

the *shalsholet*. The word is broken up into מה and מה. What or what? My status... or my ability to have something live on after me? And his decision is what brought us his descendant, King David. This is something we can learn from. At one time or another, we all need to deal with this type of crisis: choosing between our career and our family/future generations. And probably, the best way to make the decision is with humility.

In *Parashat Chaye Sarah*, we find the *shalsholet* used to accentuate the crisis of Eliezer, when he was sent to find a wife for Yitzhak. Eliezer was the ever-so-righteous servant of Avraham – as we know, *המושל בכל אשר לו* — Eliezer ruled over his *yetzer hara* just like Avraham (BR 59:11), and he did not die, but entered Gan Eden alive (*Kallah Rabti* 3). But at that time, he was dealing with an inner battle. Eliezer so much wanted his own righteous daughter to marry Yitzhak. The top girl in Sarah’s seminary, she was a perfect match! She would have been, theoretically, the best mother for the Jewish Nation. There was just one problem. Eliezer was from Canaan, and Canaan was cursed by Noah. Avraham told Eliezer that it just won’t work – they are just not compatible. One who is blessed cannot marry one who is cursed. Avraham made Eliezer swear that he would not take a Canaanite girl for Yitzhak, and if he couldn’t find one, Eliezer would be freed from his oath. This would mean that if Eliezer did not find a wife for Yitzhak, then Avraham would have to reconsider taking a wife from either Lot’s or Yishmael’s daughters, or even from Eshkol or Mamreh, who were actually Canaanites, but they had made a covenant with Avraham. But because Eliezer was a Canaanite slave, his daughter was just not an option.

Now, it was one thing for Eliezer to try his best for his master and realize that his daughter had no chance to be Yitzhak’s bride. But then, there was another step: for Eliezer to pray to G-d for help in finding the right match for Yitzhak. Eliezer mustered up the strength to pray wholeheartedly to G-d. *וַיֹּאמֶר! קִנְיֹן אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם הַקָּרֵה-נָא לִפְנֵי הָיָוִם* *וַיֹּעֲשֶׂה-ה' כְּסֵד עִם אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם*. And he said, “YKVK, the G-d of my master Avraham, may You arrange it for me this day that You do kindness with my master, Avraham.”

There is a lot of talk about the shidduch crisis. People suffer from crises in relationships, and from sometimes being not wanted. How can a person accept rejection? There is only one way. Humility. G-d has His plans, and only He knows what is the best for us. Relationship crises usually occur when the person involved asks, aloud or subconsciously, “Why am I not loved/accepted/respected?” But the truth is that *only G-d has the answer to that question*. And when Eliezer fully realized that he couldn’t be accepted, when he humbled himself, he became the greatest *shadchan* of all time. We all owe him our existence. A tremendous ripple effect – a historical chain reaction.

The third time there is a *shalsholet* in the Torah is when 18-year-old, most-handsome Yosef was at the height of being tested by Zilka, the beautiful wife of his master Potifphar. Yosef had been seemingly betrayed by his holy brothers, sold as a slave, lost, to be “forever” alone in Egypt – orphaned from his mother and estranged from his father. And now, he was actually popular in his master’s home... just a little too popular. All she wanted was just one time to be with him, just one child from him, as her astrology told her she would. No one would ever know. *וַיִּמָּאָן*. And Yosef refused. This was a tremendous crisis for Yosef. He could have given in to his desires, enjoyed the present, and ignored G-d, Who, it seemed, might have been “ignoring” him. But, Yosef overcame his desires in order to be true to his faith. He rejected the present pleasure and got himself thrown into jail, accused of the worst. But, this refusal of Yosef is what had the greatest ripple effect on his life and on the history of the entire Jewish Nation. It was from prison that he became known as the Dream Interpreter, and from there that he arose from the bottom of the pit to the top of the Egyptian empire.

The fourth time in the Torah where the *shalsholet* is mentioned is when Moshe Rabbeinu was in crisis. He was performing all the services of Priesthood, a service to G-d that was meant to be his. And, when he needed to slaughter the sacrifice to inaugurate his brother Aharon and his four children, the Torah tells us, *וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה*. These were the seven days of *miluim* (inauguration). But, the Midrash tells us that G-d waited for Moshe at



the burning bush for seven days, until Moshe agreed to take out the Jews. On the third day, Moshe said, *שְׁלַח-נָא מִיָּד־תְּשַׁלַּח* — which, in essence, was asking, *Please, send the Jews out in the hands of Aharon*. Because Moshe refused G-d's proposal and instead recommended Aharon, G-d took the Priesthood from Moshe and gave it to Aharon. The Midrash teaches, *Rav Halbo says that during all of the seven days of miluim, Moshe thought he would be the Priest. But on the seventh day, G-d gave the Priesthood to Aharon*. And when Moshe gave the Priesthood to his brother, he did so with his whole heart, despite the enormity of his regret. We all have things that we regret having done in life. And sometimes, there is not much we can do to change

### AN 18 YEAR OLD SHAWARMA

Coaching yeshiva students is my life's passion. Usually, students fall out of "ben Torah performance" because of two factors: lack of academic achievement and lack of social blending. If one of these two is still in force, the academic or social factor, then the boy is somehow able to stay afloat. This being the case, I have invested a lot of time learning about social acceptance. And there are two types of students. Those who, when they come, people say to themselves, Wow! Baruch Hashem, he came! And those who, when they leave, people say, Wow! Baruch Hashem, he left! What is the difference between the two?

So many coaching sessions boil down to the question, "How do I get the guys to like me?". Well, ancient Jewish wisdom teaches that if you want to be honored, honor others. This is the secret to being liked. Give, don't take. This is such a pivotal thought. It is so simple that too often, we tend to forget it. Why?

The reason seems to be, because many times we focus on giving, but with ulterior motives. When Lavan heard what Rivka said about Eliezer, when he saw her jewelry, *וירץ לבן אל האיש החוצה אל העין*. *Lavan went running outside towards the man, to the spring*. Why does it say, *העין*, the spring, and not *באר* *the well*, mentioned earlier (passuk 11)? The reason is because the word *עין* also means eye. All of Lavan's efforts to make room at home for Eliezer were for the sake of finding a way, looking how to get money from him. (Lekah Tov ) His

the past. But this is part of G-d's plan. We need to accept that we are human, and we sometimes miss out on opportunities that we mistakenly thought we were not ready for.

Whether your crisis is deciding between your career or your family and future, or if your crisis is about accepting wholeheartedly that you are not accepted, whether your crisis is about standing strong in the face of forbidden desire, or accepting that you missed out on a past opportunity and there is no going back... Whatever makes you feel a little lost... it is okay. Relax. Recalculate. And Remember, that the greatest things in life "happen" from those times that we were lost...

name was *לבן*, white, because after the meal any guest that ate by him, Lavan would ask afterwards for payment, and make the guest's face turn white. At his own daughter's wedding, he did not return the coats to his guests, until they paid for their portion. (Hemdat Hayamim)

If you want to get people to like you, you need to have a giving mindset, no strings attached. If you are approaching a situation with another person, or persons, and you come looking to receive attention, affection, appreciation, or any other benefit, even if it is down the road, then you fall under the category of a taker; and if you abuse your ability and/or right to take, people get sick of you. Allow me to mention two people that I love very much, until today, and everyone I know that knows them, loves them. And this story will tell you why.

I remember, 18 years ago, when I first came to Mikdash Melech in Bayit Vegan, a few days before the z'man started, Rabbi Rafael Ashkenazi, (then nicknamed Ryan Ash) greeted me in the empty building, right when I came in from the airport. He greeted me with a smile, and before I could say "Who...", he took my two heavy suitcases up three flights to the room he thought was mine. When I finally caught up to him, I told him, no, I was told that I am not in that shiur. I was told my Rebbi will be Rabbi Lamet. He said, "Wow! Chashuv!" And without blinking an eye, took my two suitcases down two flights, to that part of the dorm. Then, Rabbi "Gil" Attar saw me, and said, within the first

minute of meeting me, “Can I have the honor of taking you out and buying you your very first shawarma? You can’t turn down such an offer; it’s on the house!” I can never forget the acts of kindness they both did for me. It’s already eighteen years later, and the memory is so fresh in my mind. There is so much chessed we can do, if we just get into that mindset. Become a giver. It is not an action, it is a mindset. You either have it, or you don’t. If you don’t, it takes time and effort to acquire it.

Some people have the feeling that they are being used. Of worrying that if they focus on how to give in their relationships, they will not get what they need. This is where Emunah kicks in. If you have Emunah, if you know that Hashem is going to provide whatever you need, that Hashem gives you attention, appreciation, and affection, financial aid, honor and help, and if you understand that you do not need to take from the other person in the relationship, you will find favor in their eyes, and you will be perceived as a giver. Because if you believe you have everything you need, and trust that Hashem is taking care of you, you are not worried about giving without getting. People who are loved by all are givers. Of course, we all need to take from some people, some time in our life. But the focus is always on being the one who is ready to give, not to be the one who is looking to take. So the first issue that I work on in social performance is the desire to contribute, to give. The more your mindset is one of giving, the more people will be drawn to you. You will not become well-liked by the people in your life just because you “exist”. You will become liked because you have something to offer in the relationship.

The Orchot Tzaddikim lists what you need, in order to be appreciated by people. And the main focus of all the list is to help others as much as you can, with your soul and your money. This includes, 1. Lending (safely) 2. Giving presents (even to the rich) 3. Helping 4. Forgiving 5. Behaving with honesty 6. Giving of your time, patience and/or empathy 7. Not being a taker 8. Speaking calmly 9. Not revenging your disgrace, or mistakes of others

10. Being responsible for others 11. Not expecting others to be responsible for you 12. Not being argumentative. 13. Greeting people with a pleasant face, showing that you are happy to see them 14. Caring and sincerely asking others how they are doing 15. Offering consolation to others for their frustrations and fears 16. Keeping confidential matters to yourself 17. Not speaking badly about others 18. Judging favorably 19. Not being haughty, and 20. Do whatever you do, with intention of serving G-d. (Orchot Tzaddikim; Ahava; ובאיזה דרך)

I have not met anyone who keeps all these 20 and still feels that he/she is not appreciated, loved, or respected. No one really cares for you because you have money, good looks, or strength. They might want your money, looks or strength, but they do not care for you because of what you have. People care for you if you are a giver.

When Eliezer was searching for the most suitable mate for his master’s son, it made no impression on him that Rivka was the best-looking girl “on the market”. והנער(ה) טבת מראה מאד . He did not care that she did not need to bend down in order to draw water. All he cared about was that she was a giver. Even Yitzhak was happy with Rivka only when he saw that she had the giving character of his mother, Sarah. And that was despite all the miracles that Eliezer said happened on the way.

The Seforno points to an interesting question. Why did Eliezer wait for Rivka to finish giving all the water in the bucket to the camel, before giving her the jewelry and making the proposal? Once Rivka offered to give water to both Eliezer and all of his camels, didn’t she fit the bill? A match made by Heaven? What was Eliezer waiting for?

The Seforno answers, he wanted to see if Rivka would ask for any sort of payment for her good deeds. He wanted to see if, perhaps, she was looking for a compliment. But after finishing, Rivka turned around and started out on her way home. That was when Eliezer went running after her!! When she was a total giver, without expecting anything in return!

## SARAH’S RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

State of mind is probably the most crucial element for peak performance in all life areas. In business, playing sports, and wherever else performance makes a difference, state of mind can be “the make it or break it” factor. Especially in serving G-d, state of mind is a key component. *Yehuda Ben Temah said, be brazen like a leopard, light like an eagle, swift like a deer, and mighty like a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven.* To do the Will of G-d, to learn, to pray, to do kindness, to be superb as a spouse/parent at home, you can’t “just do it” to do it right. You need just the right emotion. Human beings have many built in features – moods, states of mind, emotions. Each state of mind can make a person into a different being, a different “animal”. You need swiftness, might, to be brazen and light; you need to tap into the right emotion that you have already built up in your personality, in order for the Will of G-d to be achieved.

A teacher in an Israeli classroom found written on the board one morning, “*Our teacher wants us to wake up in the morning like roosters, to jump out of bed like lions, to schlepp our schoolbags like donkeys, to copy from the chalkboard like monkeys, to remember word for word what we are taught like parrots, to be quiet and still in class like fish... and then, the teacher complains to the principal that we are like a bunch of animals!!*” The truth is, the teacher is right. The way to successful living is to find in ourselves the appropriate state of mind for each situation life brings us, in each situation asking ourselves the following question: “Which mood or state of mind can I tap into to help me perform my best in accomplishing the Will of my Father in Heaven?”

And this is what we can learn from G-d’s eulogy on Sarah, in the first passuk in our Parasha. G-d encapsulated Sarah’s life into one sentence. *Sarah’s life was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah’s life.* (Breshit 23 1) Rashi explains that all the years of Sarah’s life were equal in goodness.

My Rabbi added some spice to Rashi’s explanation. Life is split into three stages, childhood, parenthood and grandparenthood. The child, with his youthful attitude towards life, has this sort of optimism, creativity, purity and “out of

the box” thinking. Adulthood comes with the sense of responsibility, working hard and beginning projects. Grandparenthood brings wisdom, understanding and acceptance, with (hopefully) feelings of accomplishment. If you can’t laugh in life, it is because you can’t tap into youthfulness. If you keep making foolish mistakes, it is because you are not tapping into that 100- year-old you. And if you are not taking responsibility for your life’s dreams, you’re missing the twenty-year-old you. Each day, Sarah found inside herself youthfulness, responsibility and wisdom, simultaneously. Even when she was still a 7-year-old, she had wisdom of a hundred year old, and the sense of responsibility of a 20-year-old. And she was full of youthfulness, even at the age of a grandmother. This is the way to an amazing life: 100 years old, 20 years old and 7 years, all at once. From nursery school till nursing home.

I would like to add my own twist to the Rashi, but first a fairytale. There is a story told (heard from Eliyahu Shiri) about a man with no luck. He had no money, no wife, and no happiness. A friend told him to walk in a certain distant desert for three days, in a particular direction. He would then reach a specific spot, that G-d would not refuse to answer his prayer, to change his Mazal. Desperate, he set out on his journey.

The first day, he met a tree. The tree was crying. “Dear tree, why do you cry?” The sobbing tree responded, “I am so thirsty. There is a pond of water, just near my roots. But I can’t reach it!!!” The man responded, “Don’t cry. I am on my way to ask G-d to change my Mazal. I will pray for you, as well. I’ll be back soon.” He continued on his journey, and he found a fair, young lady wandering in the desert, sobbing. “I came all the way here to pray for my shidduch, my match, but I can’t find the right place. I’ll never merit having a family.” “Don’t cry, fair lady. I am on my way to ask G-d to change my luck, and I will ask Him to help you find your mate, as well. I’ll be back in a jiffy.” And with that, he tilted his hat and was on his way. The morning of day three, he spotted a weeping lion. “Dear lion, why do you weep so?” “I am so hungry! I haven’t eaten for a few days.” “Don’t worry, lion dear. I am on my way to ask G-d to

change my luck, and I will pray that He send you prey in no time.”

He hurried on, and soon after, he arrived at the place of prayer. “G-d, I came all the way here to ask You to change my Mazal, my luck. I have no parnassah, no wife, and no happiness. Please, G-d, change my Mazal. And also, G-d, please help the tree’s roots reach the water, send the fair, young lady a groom, and feed the lion.”

Suddenly, he heard a booming, Heavenly voice. “I will change your Mazal, son. But you need to recognize the opportunities that I send you in life and grab them. Here are three envelopes, one for the tree, one for the fair lady, and one for the lion. Tell them I have answered their prayers as well.”

Full of expectation, the man set back home. On his way, he reached the Tree. He handed over the envelope, and the tree read aloud.” Dear Tree. Find someone to do you a favor and remove the treasure chest full of precious gems blocking your roots.” The tree begged the man with new luck to help it and take the hidden treasure from its roots, so it could have water from the pond. “Sorry, tree, I have helped you enough. I am on my way to my fame and fortune with my new luck. Find someone else.” With that, he continued on, soon after,

## PACKING IT WITH THOUGHTFULNESS

Imagine what your life would be like if I were to give you a tool that made people think of you in the most positive and desirable way – something that would make them think “*that* person is worth caring for and helping. *That* person knows how to appreciate...” – *just at the mention of your name*. Imagine I were to give you a tool that would make people think of you *as being a thoughtful person*: a person who is not only a pleasure to have around, but *one without whom things are just not the same...* Well, there is good news. I am about to give you those tools. But first, a word from the Beit Halevi on our Parasha...

Eliezer was on a difficult quest. His master, Avraham, asked him to find the second Matriarch of the Jewish people. How could he find the intended woman for Yitzchak? He prayed that G-d guide him to the right girl. Eliezer asks G-d to give him a sign by which he can recognize the intended

noticing the fair, young lady. He delivered her the envelope from G-d. “Marry the first man you meet upon receiving this letter. You will live happily ever after, with lives full of plenty.” She turned to the man and asked him for a date. “Sorry, I am on my way, fair lady, to my new mazal. Ask someone else.” And with that, he continued on his way and saw that hungry lion. He handed over the letter from G-d. “If this Shlumazal manages to bring you this letter, eat him for lunch! He was too foolish to take advantage of the first two opportunities I sent him. He is a waste of a life!”

So many people get stuck in life, waiting for that Mazal of the next stage. Childhood has its beauty, adulthood has its great times, and the golden age of grandparenthood has its bliss, as well. But you have to grab the opportunity when it presents itself, not wait for the next stage, or wish you were in a previous one.

When we make the most of each stage in life, we can live a life of fulfillment, like Sarah, who lived 100 and 20 and 7. We can then say that each and every year was the best year of our life. Because the only way that a part of life is great is if we make it so.

one. “The girl that I will ask to tilt her bucket of water so that I can drink from it, and who will say, afterwards, to me – ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink,’ – this will be the sign from You, G-d, that she is befitting for Your servant, Yitzchak.”

Why did Eliezer pick that sign, specifically? He could have come up with a million and one signs by which G-d could show him who the intended girl was. And, wasn’t it somewhat risky to rely on something random like that for such a heavy decision?

A little introduction, before the Beit Halevi. The way many businessmen see if they can trust and believe someone else in business, to find out if he is an individual with good character, *is not* by talking business with him. When talking dollars and cents, every salesman or businessman knows

that he has to be careful and to appear as trustworthy as possible. So, to test a person's character, canny businessmen take their prospective candidate out to a restaurant, to eat. They watch his behavior, and this way, they get to observe him in a natural situation. They play ball together. You can see much more about a person's character when his guard is down, during eating a meal or while playing a competitive sport, than you can in a business meeting.

The best way Eliezer could test Rivka was by seeing how she behaved naturally, in everyday life situations. *At the well.* He could test how kind she was, what her basic values were, and how they affected her behavior. He could *test how thoughtful she was – by asking her for a glass of water.* “How does she behave when she has the opportunity to bestow kindness?” Eliezer knew that the most important thing for Yitzchak was a wife with traits like his mother. Not just kindness, but kindness with *thoughtfulness*. Although the water miraculously came up in the well for Rivka, this was not yet proof that she was worthy of being a Matriarch. But, if Rivka would offer Eliezer a drink from the bucket, she would be a possible candidate. And, even this was still not enough to decide that she was worthy. The deciding factor was step two. What will be her next move? She has water in the bucket that a stranger drank from; *what will she do with that water?* If she brings it home for her family to drink, then there could be germs in the water, and this would show that she did not know the laws of Derech Eretz, not to drink from a stranger's cup. If, before filling it up again, she would spill it out on the floor in front of Eliezer, this would show that she was not sensitive to his feelings. It might give the impression that, “We are afraid that you are a sick man.” But, if she would pour the remainder of water for the camels to drink, this would show that she was used to performing deeds of kindness *with thoughtfulness*. Thoughtful and mindful of Eliezer's feelings, through kindness with the camels. This was Eliezer's test.

And Rivka's thoughtfulness, at three years old, was even more than Eliezer's expectations. She said *I will also draw for the animals to drink, until the camels finish drinking the water...* The Beit

Halevi explains that Rivka didn't even want it to *appear as if* her giving the camels the remaining water from the bucket was in order not to disgrace Eliezer. Offering to give the camels to drink till they had had their fill, (they had exhausted their water supply on their desert journey, and thus, providing them with enough water would involve a lot of work for Rivka) Rivka showed that she would go to tremendous effort, where she accomplished two things at once. Showing genuine care to the camels, and simultaneously, not leaving even the slightest trace of disgrace for Eliezer. So much thoughtfulness! This girl must be the right one! *Because kindness with thought is a completely different, much higher level of kindness...*

Excuse me if I ask you to be honest and answer a personal question. Did you ever *feel* that when you had done someone a favor, he said “thank you”, but still, *the recipient of your kindness did not really appreciate your efforts?* Why did you *feel* that way? After all, he did say “thank you.” Isn't that enough?

No. It is, sometimes, not enough. Sometimes, *in order for a person to feel that we really appreciate their efforts, we need to give thought to the way in which we express our thanks.* “Thank you *for that delicious supper,*” is very different from a plain old “Thank you” after your last bite. “Thank you *for the ride all the way home,*” is different from a “Thank you” after you get a lift. Why? *Because when you make your appreciation personal and specific, it shows that you respect and appreciate what this person did specifically for you: he had your needs in mind, and tailor made his kindness just for you.* It was not that the giver was a kind person *anyway*, and you just happened to jump on for a ride on his kindness. By devoting thought to how to say your ‘thank you’ and making it specific, you display your real gratitude to the person. You put *life* into the thank you. You custom tailor it to the appreciation you feel. *It was not a plain old “thank you.”* Try this, and people will feel that you appreciate what they do for you. All you need to do is dress it up with the specific words, make it really personal, relating to the act of kindness and the person, himself. This magic happens because you

add thought to your appreciation. *It brings it to a new level.*

Tip two. When you give someone a compliment, relate to the person: instead of praising a tie, a suit, or some other article of clothing, you can comment on the excellent taste reflected in the choice that was made. Even if you praise the tie, add some spice to the compliment. Instead of a bland “Nice tie”, avoid using the commonly used word “nice.” In its place, try “Sharp tie”. “Classy tie.” “Gorgeous tie.” What will suit the person you are complimenting better, “Stunning tie” or “Elegant tie”?

Instead of saying the food was delicious, try complimenting the effort expended in preparing it

with a different compliment each meal – “The food was so tasty,” or “This food was really amazing”. “The meat came out fantastic” will flatter. “It must take so much patience to prepare such an amazing meal.” *Praise like that* will go straight to the heart of any hardworking housewife. She deserves it. She doesn’t make the same food for you every day, so why compliment her with the same compliment every day? Instead, try to use words that show that you realize how much thought she puts into her cooking, and reciprocate by putting *thought* into your compliment.

These three tips, thoughtful kindness, thoughtful appreciation and thoughtful compliments, will make people like having you around.

## YISHMAEL THE BAAL TESHUVA

I was coaching a very serious yeshiva boy who was feeling horrible about himself. He said that he had done some type of sin, and that he could never repent. Repentance to him meant to regret the past so much that he could uproot the past. He felt that there was no way for him to “uproot” the stain that he had put on his clean slate. He felt far from G-d. This caused him to feel very depressed, and each time that he would try to learn or pray, this thought that he had to undo the past would come up. As much as I tried to bring him to the present, he would resist, saying that first he had to fix the past. I asked him how exactly he would be able to fix the past, and he thought about it: there was nothing *he could do* about the past except to better the present. He came to the realization that you cannot fix the past by dealing with it. You can only fix the past by dealing with the Now, and the actions we do can change who we “are”. I will elaborate. But first, I would like to bring your attention to something in this week’s parasha...

*And Yitschak and Yishmael, his (Avraham’s) sons, buried him at the Maarat Hamachpela, at the field of Efron ...* Our Rabbis draw our attention to the order here: Yitschak was mentioned before Yishmael in burying their father. Yishmael came from afar to attend Avraham’s funeral. The midrash comments on the order of mentioning the two sons of Avraham, *This “proves” to us that*

*Yishmael had done Teshuva, repentance. Despite the fact that Yishmael was the first born of Avraham, he let Yitschak precede him, for he knew that Yitzchak was a greater tzaddik than he.* Rashi also comments that Yishmael died with the special death reserved for tzaddikim (ויגוע), stressing this point of Yishmael’s repentance before his death.

How can we understand this? We know that Yishmael had done such bad things in his life, as seen from the words of Sarah. ותרא שרה את בן הגר המצרית אשר ילדה לאברהם מצחק. The midrashim tell us what that word “מצחק” entails. Yishmael killed. He stole. He committed adultery. So how do we know that Yishmael bettered his ways? Just because he allowed his brother Yitschak to go before him at his father’s funeral? Just because he came from afar for his father’s funeral?

The answer is, yes. Yishmael cannot go back into the past and undo his former ways. That is not what happens in the Teshuva process. As much as one thinks that he has to erase his sins and uproot them, that is far from the truth. The one and only way that the sins of the past are uprooted is by changing one’s behavior in the present, and getting closer to G-d. What happens when we change the present behavior? באשר הוא שם, *We are what we are at the present moment.* Because that is the only “I” that is in existence. The “I” of yesterday has been relegated to the past.

But there is another point about this teshuva that Yishmael went through. He did not pick just anything at random to change. Yishmael made a complete turnover in his belief system. Once Yishmael showed respect to Yitschak for being the Tzaddik, this meant that Tzaddikim deserved respect in the eyes of Yishmael. This one belief had a lot of ramifications.

In order for one to repent, he needs to take upon himself one act that will make him a different type of person. Now, although this one act of Yishmael was a seemingly small act, in reality, we know that here lay one of the underlying, lifelong grudges that Yishmael had with Yitzchak. We know that Yishmael would say to Yitzchak that he, Yishmael, was more religious than him, for he was circumcised at the age of 13, while Yitschak was circumcised at the age of 8 days. In infancy, this is much easier to endure. We know that Sara caught Yishmael shooting arrows at Yitschak; he obviously wanted to get rid of him. We also know that Avraham was very close to Yishmael, so close that Avraham was specifically told by G-d regarding the Akeida **קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק**, Please take your son, your only son,

### SIBLING RIVALRY – MORE THAN KIDS’ STUFF

The Midrash (*Rabba* 56) provides some of the details missing from the Torah’s account of the *Akeidah* (the “Binding of Isaac”). Among other things, it tells us just what kind of approach Satan used in trying to trip up Avraham and Yitzchak and get them to fail the great test G-d was giving them. Satan approached Avraham and said to him: *Grandpa, Grandpa, have you gone mad? Are you really going to slaughter the son you have been given at age 100? When Satan saw that Avraham’s resolve was firm, he tried again: Avraham, chances are that G-d will bring you an even greater test than this one, one that you will not be able to pass. Would it not make sense, then, to give in this time for the sake of your son – your entire future – and fail this test?* Avraham rejected this as well. He was ready for any test that G-d might send his way. He knew very well that G-d does not throw a pitch that a person cannot hit.

whom you love, Yitzchak... G-d had to state explicitly that he was referring to Yitzchak, because in Avraham’s eyes, Yishmael was loved, unique and a son just as much as Yitzchak. We also see that after the Akeida, the second hardest test for Avraham was sending Yishmael away. *All these details point to the fact that Yishmael felt greatly loved by his father, Avraham.* This probably caused Yishmael to think that he was just as great as Yitschak – that little Yitzchak could not teach his older brother anything about G-d that he did not already know. And then, things turned around. Yishmael changed his belief. This major change was reflected in a single act, showing that he respected his younger brother; but that one act was the result of the big brother having reached the recognition that he had to lower himself and learn from his younger sibling.

We all have things we can do that can lead us to greatness. It does not mean that we have to change everything about ourselves. It just means finding the belief that we have that is invalid, changing it, and acting upon our corrected belief. Then everything changes. The “I” changes.

Satan then approached Yitzchak, hoping for better luck: *Son of the woman who lived a life without children: your father is going to slaughter you!* Yitzchak answered that he is even ready to be slaughtered. Satan then issued the following surprising challenge. *If so, all those nice things that your mother made for you will go to none other than your sibling and arch enemy, Yishmael!...*

How on earth can we understand this Midrash? Satan knew who he was up against: Yitzchak, a spiritual giant who was eminently qualified to become the second Patriarch of the Jewish People. And he was no mere child. Yitzchak was now 37 years old! On the verge of being slaughtered, he was a million miles away from concern about Yishmael inheriting some of his personal possessions. We might have expected Satan to try to induce some heretical thoughts, or to shake Yitzchak’s trust in his father, Avraham, and encourage him to start a new belief system. Why

would an attempt to stir up sibling rivalry be Satan's first choice? Given Yitzchak's age and his level of spiritual perfection, he would surely not be persuaded by this nonsense.

Apparently, though, our assumption is incorrect. The Midrash teaches us that sibling rivalry and the fury brought on by jealousy is a real test for even the greatest people. If Satan used this sort of persuasion, it must mean that Satan knew that he had to work fast and effectively. He knew that inducing heretical thoughts or shaking Yitzchak's trust in Avraham might take time, and would probably never work. On the other hand, no matter what level people achieve, they can be profoundly influenced by the thought of forfeiting something dear – or even something of very limited value – to a sibling or colleague. These types of thoughts can become obsessive, and can quickly distort a balanced perspective on reality. It happened to the greatest human beings: Yosef's brothers, Korach, King Saul, Yeravam – the first king of the Commonwealth of Israel (the "Ten Tribes"). Successfully overcoming this temptation is what makes people great.

Yitzchak was not the only one to pass this test with flying colors. Aharon the Kohen, Moshe's brother, merited eternal Priesthood for it. Although Aharon was then the greatest rabbi of the Jews in Egypt, he was not in the least bit fazed when his younger

brother, Moshe, was given the role of leader and savior of the Jewish People, the one chosen to receive the Torah at Sinai. This testified that Aharon's heart was pure enough to wear the priestly breastplate.

\*

A close friend related what was probably his most powerful childhood memory to me: His father lived a low-key lifestyle, and the latest Nike sneakers were simply not a topic of discussion at home. One day, my friend, a successful student in school, noticed that his younger and far less studious brother was wearing those sneakers. He approached his father and asked for an explanation.

His father, who had built a strong, trusting relationship over years of parenting, explained softly: *For your brother, Nike sneakers is a need. For you, it is just a want.* My friend was able to accept this, and never brought up the subject again.

This little story illustrates two principles of good parenting: To determine what each child needs, and build enough trust with each child so that he or she will feel that the parent knows what his/her real needs are; not to put children in situations which invite and encourage jealousy. Of course, parents must also train children to overcome jealousy on their own. As we see from the Midrash, jealousy is a great test even for the greatest people.

## SPOUSE'S EXPECTATIONS

We can see in our parashah just how basic – and inevitable – expectations are in a marriage. The Torah tells us: *Yitzchak brought her to the tent of Sarah; and he married Rivkah. She became his wife, and he loved her. Yitzchak was then consoled after the passing of his mother. (Bereisheet 24:66-7)* Why did Yitzchak bring Rivkah specifically to the tent of his mother, Sarah? Rashi explains (based on the Midrash) that as long as Sarah lived, the family experienced three special signs of her holiness: a Cloud of Glory above her tent, a blessing in her bread, and a candle that lasted all week long. Upon her passing, these signs disappeared, and for three years Yitzchak struggled to get over the loss of his mother. When Yitzchak married Rivkah and brought her into his mother's

tent, the light and the blessings returned. He saw that she followed in his mother's ways, and this alone consoled him.

We can see from here the importance of the subconscious expectations that arise in marriage. They are very real. Yitzchak's happiness was dependent on having a wife who followed in his mother Sarah's holy ways. This was one of the most important things in Yitzchak's value system.

Another episode in the *parashah* testifies to this as well. We read that when Eliezer went to find a wife for Yitzchak, he brought clothes with him as well as jewelry. He gave the clothes to Rivkah just before her parents approved the match. Now, we



might well ask, how did Eliezer know the size of the would-be bride? Maybe she would need a size six, maybe she would need a size ten. Maybe she would be tall. Maybe she would need “elevator platform” high heels. As a matter of fact, it turned out that the bride Rivkah was, at the time, still a child.

The answer is that the clothes were sent as a statement. *This is the dress code in the house of Sarah.* This is the type of modest clothes we wear. Only a bride who would feel comfortable wearing modest clothes could possibly meet the expectations of Yitzchak.

The model we see in the *parashah* is no less true today. Consciously or subconsciously, a man expects his wife to do for him more or less what his mother did for his father. And a woman expects that her husband will handle the chores that her father took care of at home. Often, these duties and chores are taken for granted to be the partner’s responsibility. *This is how it was done at home, so this is how it will be done in my new home..* Sometimes, this can lead to domestic problems: If the husband’s mother took care of the paperwork

and bills, and the wife’s father took care of these chores in her home, then they may have difficulty understanding why the bills are never paid. If the wife’s father was the cook and the husband’s mother did not let her husband into the kitchen, then supper may not be ready on time. This can lead to frustration.

As we said at the outset, the “simple” solution is for a spouse to eliminate all of his or her expectations. But this is not usually practical. We are better advised to learn what our spouse expects and needs, and try to oblige as much as possible. (Similarly, wise couples plan how to *enhance* their *shalom bayit*, as opposed to planning how to avoid getting into fights.) And both husband and wife must try to communicate their most important needs and expectations clearly.

We can look for inspiration to our great *Avot* and *Imahot*: Yitzchak had essentially one requirement for a mate, and he conveyed it clearly: the ability to carry on the environment of holiness which his mother had created. Rivkah understood this, and made it her business to oblige.

## SECRET BUSINESS ADVICE

G-d sends us many opportunities for wealth and blessing. Unfortunately, though, we often let them slip through our fingers either because we fail to identify them or because we just don’t know how to handle them. In many business negotiations, for example, if an individual had only conducted himself more appropriately, he could have made the deal successfully.

There are essentially three different ways in which people respond to opportunities of this sort. One of the wrong ways is to overreact, to take big steps into something that is still foggy. By overreacting or responding hastily to apparent opportunities, we might make a lot of money, but the chances are even higher that we might never see any of our money again. Then there is the personality who under-reacts to opportunities, taking a lot of time in the decision-making process, and not taking any steps at all unless the opportunity has a 150% chance of gain and 0% chance of loss. This person

never makes a profit unless G-d forces it on him. The third and the most advisable response is to take a step where we can see the next step ahead – without taking heavy risks. In other words: to respond with caution.

If we pay close attention, we can see that our holy Patriarch, Avraham Avinu, conducted himself prudently – in the third way described above – when he sought to acquire the Ma’arat HaMachpelah as a family burial site. The Midrash tells us how Avraham came to want this particular location. After Avraham asked his ninety year-old wife Sarah to make cakes for the three angelic guests who stopped at their home, a miracle happened and Sarah suddenly got her period back while baking. At this point, Avraham decided to take over the preparations in the kitchen, and serve tongue to the guests. But one of calves ran away, and Avraham was forced to chase after it (at the age of 100, during a heat wave, and three days after

his circumcision!). The calf ran into a cave. This cave turned out to be the Ma'arat HaMachpelah on the property of Efron, where Adam and Chavah (Eve) were buried! Efron had no idea that they were buried on his land. Upon entering the cave, which was lit up and had the fragrance of Gan Eden, Avraham was shocked not only to discover Adam and Chavah, but to experience some kind of communication with Adam. He was told that humanity merited existence only in Avraham's merit. At that moment, Avraham developed a great desire to be buried in the cave. And the Midrash tells us how he made sure to get it.

First, Avraham was careful to say nothing for forty years until he actually needed the cave as a burial place for his wife, Sarah. He realized that if Efron knew what Avraham knew, he would never give up the cave. He could not say a word to anyone at the moment, and he could not buy the cave then and there because it might make Efron's suspicious that the cave was especially valuable – at least to Avraham. Instead, Avraham waited many years until he needed the cave before approaching Efron in order that he should look nonchalant. Although it is silly for a person to reveal information that can harm himself, people do it all the time, thus ruining lots of opportunities. Had they been more cautious, they could have been in a much better position to negotiate in the future.

The Midrash tells us Avraham's next prudent move was to first approach the Hittites (Bnei Chet) and

tell them that he would like to buy a grave in their vicinity in order to be among them. They responded that they respected him as a *nasi* (chief), and they were at his service. The Midrash derives that Avraham decided to approach them in a way that did not make it look like he felt more special than them in any way. Now, we all know that Avraham actually felt this way always, and he considered himself as humble as sand and ashes. This was not a business front. Why, then, does the Midrash find in his humble behavior a wise negotiating technique as well?

I think the answer is this: In business, one often encounters an individual who has his nose up in the air, who is unwilling to look down and go into the details of a business deal. Although it is hard to get into a negotiation with such a person, once he needs you – or at least thinks he needs you – you have a great advantage over him. He will not look at little details, and will usually overlook his best interests. At times he will feel that it is below his dignity not to come through with the deal if it is posed as an opportunity fit for elite business people. For this reason, Avraham was careful that the Hittites not think that he had his nose up in the air, and try to take advantage of him. He wanted to protect himself – and keep them from acting inappropriately as well.

## THE BREAKDANCING PRESIDENT

There are three peculiar Berachot, that we make each day. שלא עשני גוי, שלא עשני עבד, שלא עשני אשה. Blessed are You... for You did not make me a gentile, ... for not making me a slave, ... for not making me a woman. What is so bad about being a woman? A woman like Sarah, our Matriarch, was greater than Avraham in prophecy! What is so bad about being a slave, like Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, who was called דמשק אליעזר for he was דולה ומשקה תורה מרבו לאהרים, he would transmit his master, Avraham's, teaching to the world, a servant for whom G-d performed open miracles? What is wrong being a gentile like O. Shindler, or the Druze Arab who was killed in the Har Nof

massacre, both of whom put their lives on the line to defend innocent Jews?

And another question. Why is the blessing made in the negative? Just simply say, thanks for making me Jewish, for making me a free man and for making me male! Why do we make the blessings in this weird fashion?

My friend answered this question with something he said he heard from R' D. Orlofsky. The best way to explain it is using the Rabbi's parable: Marty went to school, from 1<sup>st</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade, anticipating going on the big, graduation, overseas, extreme trip. Two weeks before the flight, his mom

mentioned to him that Aunt Martha, who he's never met, is coming for a visit. He can't miss this once in a lifetime chance to meet her. "I canceled your flight for you, so you do not have to worry. I think that this meeting is very important." "Noooooooooooo!" To make a long story short, he ended up having a great time with his auntie. Now, Marty wants to thank Aunt Martha for this opportunity of getting to know her. He has two choices of what to say. "Thanks for giving me a great time." Or, "I had such a great time! It was worth it for me to miss my grand graduation trip, just to get to know you". Which one has more meaning?

The blessings we make prior to these are that G-d gave us all that we need, and that G-d glorified us as Jews. The blessing we make here is that we thank G-d for making me me. For putting me in the position of being a male, a Jew and a free man, so that I have the full gamut of the 613 mitzvot. "And, G-d, I am so thankful that you made me me, with the challenges of being a male, that I thank you even for not being Sarah, Eliezer, or O. Schindler. I want to know who the next president of the U. S. is going to be, the most respectful position in the world, so that I can thank G-d, saying, it is so worthwhile being the Jew that You made me, that I would give up being Mr. President, if I had to, for that honor.

Where has that Jew gone, the one that is happier to have the opportunity to be commanded to put on tefillin than he is to have the opportunity to be the President? Or happier to have a mitzvah to put on a Tallit, than to be a holy woman, like Rebbetzin

### THE ART OF HOLDING A SECRET

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Kaniefsky? Or to have a mitzvah to learn 3 sedarim in Yeshiva more than having miracles happen to him, like flying camels, and having G-d answer your wish before you finish your request... or to send you angels to poison those who poison you? The authentic Jew thought this way in the last generation, but nowadays, the average Jew wants to be President. He wants to breakdance like a Goy at weddings, and would rather not be woken up for saying Kriat Shema on time, as men are commanded to do.

This reminds me of a common syndrome. I had a meeting with one of my students in NYC last month, on Broadway. I stepped into the Kosher Bravo Pizza and bought a drink. I sat down, and next to me, an African American family, polite mother and kids, sat down to share a pie. The mother asked if it bothers me that they sat next to me. I said, not in the least. "But, I just want to ask you a question. I always thought that non kosher pizza tastes better and costs less. Is it worth it for you to pay more to eat pizza with supervision?" She answered me, "No, Rabbi, you got it wrong. Pizza here costs less and tastes better!"

There is a fear that is underestimated. It is the fear of missing out. The fear that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Or that someone else's situation is better or easier. People do not like to accept that 'G-d made me the way He made me, because He wants me to be me.' He wants me to grow from the position that I am in.

*Blessed are You G-d, that you made for me all that I need.*

There are essentially three different ways in which people respond to opportunities of this sort. One of the wrong ways is to overreact, to take big steps into something that is still foggy. By overreacting or responding hastily to apparent opportunities, we might make a lot of money, but the chances are even higher that we might never see any of our money again. Then there is the personality who under-reacts to



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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H**

