

Parshat HaShavuah

חיי שרה  
**CHAYEI SARAH**  
 כ"ה חשוון תשע"ו  
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# Ashreinu

Candle Lighting

5:17

S"Z Kriat Shema

9:18

Sunset

5:35

Motzei  
 Shabbat

6:11

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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## THE MIDAH OF BITUL

DR. YOSEF WOLF

This week's parsha includes several events that, on the surface, seem to only be related due to their chronology. However, we must investigate whether a deeper connection exists between Avraham's negotiation of acquiring a burial plot for his wife and the detailed accounting of arranging a *shidduch* for his son. What might this connection teach us about navigating successful relationships in our own lives?

This year our sophomores are learning Masechet Kiddushin, which opens with a discussion of how a man and woman initiate the marriage process: "האשה נקנית בשלש דרכים" - "a woman is betrothed in 3 ways", where the first method of קנין involves a man giving a woman either money (at least a *prutah* -- the most minimal coin of halachic significance) or an object worth at least a *prutah*.

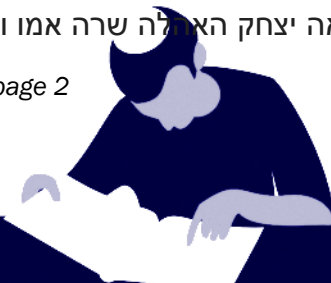
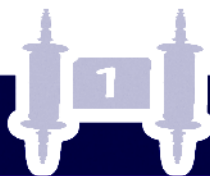
After asking how we know that money is allowed for the betrothal of a woman, the gemara answers:

גמר "קייחה" "קייחה" משדה עפרון. כתיב הכא: "כי יקח איש אשה" (דברים כב, יג), וכתוב התם: "נתתי כסף השדה קח ממני" (בראשית כג)

The gemara utilizes a גזירה שוה, method of Torah exegesis of the textual similarity of the word יקח in the pasuk describing the process of a man marrying a woman to the word קח ("to acquire") in the story of the acquisition of the field of Ephron. Given this, and given that Avraham procured the field of Ephron with money, we learn that a man must give a woman money in order to betroth her.

Is it just a coincidence that in this week's parsha we find both the first mention of a man (Yitzchak) marrying a woman (Rivkah) (using the same language as the more general pasuk mentioned in Parshat Devarim) and the story of the acquisition of the field of Ephron (the exact wording of which is needed in order to justify the use of money in order to enact *kiddushin*-marriage), "ויביאה יצחק האלה שרה אמו ויקח רבקה ותהי לו לאשה" (24:67)

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And what if Avraham had accepted Ephron's generosity in acquiring his field for free? Not only would the gemara not be able to use the above גזירה שוה, but we would also lose the valuable life lesson that for a marriage to last, both the *chatan and kallah* must believe that they are getting the better end of the deal in feeling that each is fortunate to be marrying "up" (just as both Avraham and Ephron felt in their exchange).

Lastly, nothing in the Torah is written by accident, and this even includes the name of the land owner! The root of the name of עפרון is עפר (dust/dirt), which indicates the concept of *bitul* (self-nullification; e.g., we nullify chametz on Erev Pesach by declaring it as ownerless as the dust of the earth).

Chassidut, the inner dimension of Torah, comes to reveal that hidden away in this standard usage of a גזירה שוה, combined with these well-known stories in the same parsha, is perhaps the most important piece of advice regarding not only a marriage but any relationship: the ability to put someone else's needs ahead of your own and the ability to downplay the apparent importance of your own needs in comparison to others.

Most fights occur because a person feels that s/he is being attacked, her/his ego gets hurt, and s/he retaliates. We automatically assume that someone else is out to get us, even at the subconscious level. When we take to heart this deeper message of flattening our ego, we suddenly find that apparent attacks hurt just as much as a flat piece of paper is hurt when it is walked upon. As we saw in last week's parsha, Avraham Avinu epitomized the quality of *bitul*, as he placed his relationships with others, especially with God, ahead of his own wants and desires. We should merit to achieve success in our own efforts to learn from this parsha, and from the example of Avraham Avinu, of the importance of working on the midah of *bitul*. For with this refinement will we find improvement in all of our relationships.

## ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

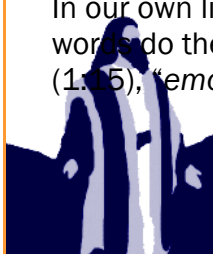
LEOR LEVENSON ('16)

At the beginning of this week's parsha, Avraham negotiates with Ephron to purchase Ma'arat Hamachpela so that he can give Sarah a proper burial. Chazal comment on the stark contrast between the personalities of Avraham and Ephron at this moment. Ephron promises in front of the large crowd to give the cave to Avraham for free; however, when Avraham counters with a fair offer to purchase the land, Ephron immediately seizes his opportunity and quotes an outrageous price for the land. Ephron initially plays to the crowd to make himself look generous and kind, but his actions tell a different story. On the other hand, Avraham always acts reasonably, saying little and keeping his promises.

This demonstrates a unique and important aspect of Avraham's character—his actions speak more than his words. In last week's parsha, for example, Avraham promises his three visitors some bread, then goes to prepare an entire feast with cakes and meat. His actions go above and beyond his words, which reveals a lot about what it means to be great.

Later on in this week's parsha, we see another character express this important idea. When Eliezer travels to find a wife for Yitzchak, he goes to find a girl who actually demonstrates her good qualities, not just someone who appears to be a good candidate. Rivkah offers water to Eliezer and all of his camels, a tremendous task for someone so young. Rivkah, like Avraham, lets her actions do the talking, and therefore Eliezer recognizes that this is the woman who should marry Yitzchak.

In our own lives, we often forget the lesson of Avraham and Rivkah and instead act like Ephron—we let our words do the talking, not our actions. Instead, we should try to embody the famous quote from Pirkei Avot (1:5), "emor me'at ve'aseh harbe"—"say little and do a lot."





## LIVING THE “GOOD” LIFE

LEORA KROLL (‘17)

In Parshat Chayei Sarah, we read that Sarah died at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven. Right after we read about her death, Rashi says that Sarah had a good life: "שני חיי שרה: כלן שוין לטובה" – “the years of the life of Sarah: all of them were equally good” (Bereishit 23:1).

This statement is strange. Even though Sarah lived a long life that was full of good deeds, her life was far from what would be considered a good life. It is clear from the Torah’s text that Sarah had many troubles. She had to travel far from her home, she experienced famine, she was kidnapped twice, and she experienced years of barrenness. Then, once she finally gave birth to her son Yitzchak, he experienced terrible conflict with Yishmael and was almost sacrificed (the source of Sarah’s great heartbreak that led to her death—see Rashi, 23:2) These events clearly illustrate a hard, sad, and troubled life.

So why does Rashi say that Sarah had a good life if all these events seem to indicate otherwise? Perhaps the midrash that Rashi cites is trying to convey a message regarding a person’s perspective of his or her own life experiences. The experiences of one’s life are not necessarily objectively good or objectively bad. Each person is given the freedom to understand and process those experiences independently; one can choose to view the events of his or her life positively or negatively. Sarah’s life is described as “good” because that is how she herself would describe it, as a result of her outstanding perspective on life. She understood that her life was replete with meaning. What others may have seen as detrimental pitfalls and deep misfortune, she saw as opportunities to overcome challenges and assert her faith in Hashem. Perhaps what made Sarah so great was her ability to channel the challenging experiences of life into sources of positivity and meaning. She did not dwell on each negative event in her life, but rather looked back at her life as a whole and saw that she really did have a “good” life.

Just like Sarah, we must take a step back and look at our lives as a whole. We must not get caught up in the challenging things that happen but rather grow and learn from each situation in our lives so we too can live “good” lives.

## LEARNING TO PRIORITIZE

SHEVI ZAK (‘17)

This week’s parsha, Chayei Sarah, includes the pivotal event of Yitzchak finding a wife. Avraham instructs his servant, the man who is trusted with running the household, Eliezer, to travel to Aram to find a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham then makes Eliezer swear that he will not take a wife for Yitzchak from Canaan, only from Avraham’s homeland, Aram Naharayim.

There is something strange about this event. Avraham clearly had confidence in Eliezer; he was in charge of Avraham’s entire household: his money, his other servants, his livestock. Why, then, would Avraham need to make Eliezer swear to be careful? Doesn’t Avraham already trust him with everything?

The answer to this question is something everyone can learn from. Of course Avraham trusted Eliezer...with his money. However when it came to the things that were really important, Avraham’s family, his son whom he loved, Avraham wanted to ensure that nothing went wrong. Although Avraham did trust Eliezer, he was being as careful as possible that nothing would happen that could possibly hurt his son.

Clearly, Avraham had his priorities in order. He knew that a person’s family is the most important part of their life, and he knew that he needed to put his family before everything else in his life, including his money and belongings. We can all learn from this to try to recognize the important things in our life, and to prioritize these things above all else.



## THE GIFT OF TEARS

AYALA BROIDE ('17)

In this week's parsha, Chayei Sarah, Avraham hears that his wife Sarah has passed away and he comes "*lispod leSarah velivkotah*"--"to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her" (Bereishit 23:2).

This verse raises two important questions about the nature of mourning and crying. First, as Rabbi Mordechai Shifman points out, aren't eulogizing and crying really one in the same? Why does the Torah take special care to distinguish them as "to eulogize Sarah" and "to bewail her" instead of just "to eulogize and bewail" Sarah? Additionally, Rava asks, why is eulogizing mentioned before crying? It seems unnatural that a person should eulogize first and then cry; it is our natural tendency to cry when we feel pain, not to hold it in until we have formally acknowledged the deceased!

The answers to these questions regarding Sarah's death are found by looking at Sarah's life. Sarah had two identities; on the one hand, she was a leader, traveling and spreading monotheism with Avraham, and on the other hand, she was a wife, mother, and homemaker--a private figure. Avraham eulogizes Sarah first, to mourn her death with the public, with everyone whom she influenced. Only after he has mourned publicly can he cry privately for the Sarah he knew at home. His first priority was to emphasize to the public the greatness of Sarah, and only then does he mourn for his Sarah, whom he knew on a personal level.

We can learn from Avraham's reaction that crying is integral to the personal mourning process, especially during shiva. Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt recounts a conversation at a recent shiva when a man mentioned that he felt his wife, one of the mourners, was crying too much. Rabbi Rosenblatt said that he doesn't believe it's possible to cry too much. When you lose someone you love, there is a great deal of pain--and crying is the only way to release that pain. Obviously a mourner will shed many tears, and if he or she does not, one should be concerned. When a loved one is lost, a great deal of pain is felt amongst those related and connected to them, so it is of course understandable that Avraham felt such pain over the loss of Sarah. When the pain is so strong, crying is the best medicine. And Rabbi Rosenblatt says, "like most medicines, it might taste horrible, but it does a good job." For this, Hashem gave us the gift of tears, of crying, for us to flush out our pain.

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