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A MANIFESTATION of True Greatness

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Chayei Sarah

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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Negated To His Master To Be A Servant Of G-d

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Brokering An Acquisition to Yield Exponential Value

1. Avraham asks Bnei Cheis to be intermediaries to purchase a burial plot for Sarah.
2. The words "Bnei Cheis" are written 10X regarding the acquisition of the Tomb of Machpela.
3. Midrash: One who facilitates the acquisition for a Torah sage is valued as one who fulfilled The Ten Commandments.
4. The letter "Ches" is mentioned 10X in the 10 Commandments; alludes to the acquisition of the burial location on behalf of Avraham.
5. Why?
6. There is a Positive commandment to revere a Torah sage, no less than one must revere G-d.
7. Maharal of Prague: Only through the Torah teaching of the Torah sage does one come to revere G-d.
8. One who does not eulogize a Torah sage deserves to be buried alive.
9. At Sinai the Jews were given an ultimatum with a mountain over their heads: either accept the Torah or be buried under the mountain.
10. Initially, they accepted the Torah unequivocally.
11. Midrash: That was in regard to the written law; regarding the Oral Law they were resistant.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Chayei Sarah



Sarah's Passing, a Consequence of the Akeidah

Torah regarding the *Akeidah* (the binding of *Yitzchak*) which was the most difficult test presented to *Avraham*: “And it happened after these things (words) G-d tested *Avraham* and said to him...Please take your son, your only one, whom you love – *Yitzchak*...”

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: “G-d requested of *Avraham* to bring his son as an offering in a beseeching manner – as the verse states, ‘Please take your son...’ I am pleading with you to withstand this test so that it should not be said that the reason you succeeded in the previous tests was because they were not truly viable challenges. Therefore, please take your son...”

The only reason the Jewish people are able to silence the prosecution of satan, on the day of judgment, *Rosh Hashanah*, is because of the merit of the *Akeidah*. It is only the blast of the ram’s horn (*shofar*) that silences the prosecution of satan. Had it not been for the *Akeidah*, the prosecution of satan would have caused the Jewish people to be destroyed and thus the objective of Creation

would not be met. However, this is not the basis for the plea that G-d had made to *Avraham* to fulfill the *Akeidah*. How do we reconcile *Chazal* that tell us that it was “so that it should not be said the only reason *Avraham* succeeded in the previous tests was because they were truly not viable tests ...” and *Chazal* that tell us that the value of the *Akeidah* was to silence the prosecution of satan?

Torah: After the *Akeidah*, Sarah our Matriarch passed away.

Chazal: Satan had come to *Sarah* and revealed to her that *Avraham* was about to bring their son *Yitzchak* as a sacrifice. Upon hearing this, she was overwhelmed with pain and passed away. Why did satan need to inform *Sarah* about the *Akeidah* so that she should pass away?

Torah: The journey to Mt. Moriah, the location of the *Akeidah*, was a three-day journey. On the way to the *Akeidah*, satan had attempted to prevent *Avraham* from actualizing the will of G-d. He presented himself as a raging river which made it impossible for *Avraham* to continue on his way. *Avraham* called out to G-d saying, “I want to do Your Will, but I am unable to do so because

the water is rising to the point that I am going to die!" Immediately after his supplication, the river ceased to be.

After *Avraham* had bound *Yitzchak* and was about to slaughter him, the *Torah* tells us that an angel called out to him from heaven and commanded him not to harm the lad in any way. *Avraham* believed that in order to achieve the ultimate value of the *Akeidah*, which was not performed, he needed to actualize his intent. He then saw a ram approaching him. He decided that he would sacrifice it in the place of his son, *Yitzchak*. Satan attempted to intercept it in order prevent it from going to *Avraham*. This is the reason the ram was caught in the thicket.

Because satan understood that the *Akeidah* would silence his prosecution forever, he attempted to prevent it from happening. Despite the ram being caught in the thicket, *Avraham* retrieved it and brought it as a sacrifice in the place of *Yitzchak*. Seemingly, at that moment, satan was defeated. The affect of the *Akeidah* would ensure the future of the Jewish people until the end of time. However, satan believed that he still had the ability to undermine and nullify the value of the *Akeidah*.

Rambam in the Laws of Repentance: If a person was devoutly righteous his entire life and at the last moment he chooses to regret all the good deeds and spiritual accomplishments that he performed, his record is nullified and there will be no mention of his righteous deeds at the time of judgment.

Satan believed that if the *Akeidah* would be the direct cause of the death of *Sarah* our Matriarch, there would be a possibility that *Avraham* would become angered and consequently cause him to regret the *Akeidah*, since it was the cause of *Sarah's* death. If this were to happen, the *Akeidah* would have been nullified and the eternal defense for the Jewish people against prosecution would not exist. The *Torah* tells us that despite *Avraham's* understanding and linkage of events, he remained unmoved. He had no regret or remorse for what he had done. As the verse states, "*Avraham* came to eulogize *Sarah* and to bewail her..."

Chazal: G-d presented the tests to *Avraham* was not evaluate his spiritual capacity, but rather so that "the entire world should see the good deeds of that *tzaddik* (*Avraham*)."
Avraham's mission was to reestablish G-d's Presence in existence. Prior to *Avraham*, the context of choice was non-existent in the world because G-d had become an unknown entity. When the nations of the world witnessed the great and unlimited blessing that came

upon *Avraham*, they understood that it was only because he had demonstrated his dedication to the One G-d. G-d thus rewarded him measure for measure with unlimited blessing. Thus, the context of choice was reinstated through a demonstration of "*tzaddik v'tov lo* (one who is devoutly righteous and experiences blessing)."

If *Avraham* were not to succeed in the *Akeidah*, it would have demonstrated to the world that he was not in fact the devoutly righteous servant of G-d and all of his previous success was unrelated to his dedication to Him, but rather, it was all random. G-d pleaded with *Avraham* to succeed in the *Akeidah* so that the world should not regress to a context in which only paganism had value.

The Jewish people becoming an eternal people was only a consequence of *Avraham's* sanctification of G-d's Name through the *Akeidah*, making it known to the world that G-d is the Omnipotent Being Who Wills existence. Thus, silencing satan is only an issue of there is a Jewish people, which would only be if *Avraham* succeeded in the test of the *Akeidah*.

Avraham's Act of Prostration

Torah after *Avraham*, our Patriarch had purchased the burial plot for *Sarah*: "And Afterwards *Avraham* buried *Sarah* his wife..."

Midrash citing a verse from Proverbs: "'One who pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.' Who is the one who pursued righteousness? It is *Avraham*. As it states, 'They adhered to the way of G-d to do righteousness...' Where do we find that *Avraham* pursued kindness? It states, 'It is the kindness that he (*Avraham*) offered to *Sarah*...' G-d said to *Avraham*, 'My craft is doing acts of kindness. You have now (after providing the burial needs for *Sarah*) taken hold of My craft. You are now qualified to wear My garment (of Kindness). As it states, 'Now *Avraham* was old, well on in years...'"

Avraham was 137 years old when *Sarah* his wife passed away. He had selflessly performed acts of kindness and hospitality his entire life. In fact, the *Torah* details, at length, every aspect of the hospitality that *Avraham* had provided for the three angels that visited him, in order to reveal that his dimension of kindness was at the most unique and advanced level.

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Metizia*: Because of the hospitality that *Avraham* had offered to the angels, the Jewish people

merited to be sustained and protected during their forty-year trek in the desert. Despite the fact that *Avraham* had performed exceptional acts of kindness that had such profound and unlimited ramifications for the Jewish people, it was only the purchase of the burial location for his wife *Sarah* that was considered by G-d to be the equivalent of assuming His Craft of Kindness. Why is this so?

Torah: After the children of *Cheis* informed *Avraham* that they would give him the burial location for *Sarah*, the verse states, "So *Avraham* prostrated himself before the members of the council..."

Torah: When *Avraham* had seen the three wayfarers approaching his tent, he ran towards them and prostrated himself before them. As it states, "So he ran towards them from the entrance of the tent and prostrated himself upon the ground before them."

Avraham bowed before his guests in order to demonstrate to them how much he valued them, to encourage them to accept his hospitality and thus be able to accept monotheism. However, regarding *Avraham's* prostrating himself before the children of *Cheis* when they informed him that they would not deny him a burial location for *Sarah*, what was the value of his prostration?

Torah: *Yaakov*, our Patriarch worked for *Lavan* for seven years for the hand of *Rachel*, our Matriarch. During those seven years, *Yaakov* worked selflessly for *Lavan* despite his suffering the continuous deception of *Lavan*, regarding what was rightfully his. Despite these conditions, the *Torah* states, "*Yaakov* worked seven years for *Rachel* and they seemed to him a few days ..." How is it possible that after enduring such difficulties over such an extended period of time be considered by *Yaakov* the equivalent of a few days?

Because *Yaakov* appreciated the unlimited value of *Rachel* as the future Matriarch of the Jewish people, his suffering was considered to be inconsequential. The gesture of prostration is an indication of total subservience to another. It is an expression of thanks that cannot be verbally expressed. Thus, when *Avraham* was informed that they burial plot for *Sarah* would be given to him, his sense of thanks was at an unlimited level. It was because of this that he negated himself through prostration.

Avraham understood that by providing the burial needs for *Sarah*, he would be qualified to wear G-d's Garment of Kindness. All the previous acts of kindness and hospitality that *Avraham* had provided to mankind throughout his

lifetime were for the sake of espousing monotheism. *Avraham's* kindness was a vehicle to convert pagans to monotheism. In contrast, G-d's Kindness is an end unto itself. It is not a vehicle to bring about anything else.

King David in Psalms: "The world with Kindness, He Created it (Olam chesed yibaneh)..." Thus, when *Avraham* provided the burial needs for *Sarah*, it was an act of kindness for its own sake and not a means to an end. Thus, it was a reflection of G-d's Kindness. Upon hearing that he would be able to actualize his kindness to *Sarah*, *Avraham* prostrated himself before the children of *Cheis* as an act of subservience. Despite the fact that they did not understand what *Avraham* appreciated, it was something priceless. This is similar to *Yaakov* who contended with endless difficulties in order to marry *Rachel*, which were considered to be meaningless to him because he understood the unlimited value of *Rachel* as the Matriarch.

Sarah's Perceiving Goodness in All of Her Travails

Torah: "*Sarah's* lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years these were the years of *Sarah's* life." If *Sarah* had lived 127 years, it is obvious that these were the years of her life. Why does the verse conclude with the words "these were the years of *Sarah's* life"?

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The conclusion of the verse means, "All of the years of *Sarah* were equally good." How is it possible to say that all the years of *Sarah's* life were equally good when her life was fraught with difficulty, pain and trauma?

Until she had reached the age of eighty-nine *Sarah* was barren. She believed that she would never merit to be the Matriarch of the Jewish people. When *Sarah* and *Avraham* were in the community of *Charan* they were regarded as pariahs. Her husband *Avraham* was taken by the evil king *Nimrod* to be thrown into the fiery kiln of *Kasdim* because he refused to bow to the idol. *Avraham* and *Sarah* had gone to *Canaan* as G-d had instructed them to do. However when they were confronted with a famine, they chose to go to Egypt.

In Egypt *Sarah* was taken by Pharaoh and was nearly defiled by him, if it were not for G-d's intervention. Later again, *Avraham* and *Sarah* journeyed to *Gerar* where she was nearly defiled by the Philistine king, *Avimelech*. After ten years of being in *Canaan*, *Sarah* told *Avraham* to take

her maidservant as a wife because she was certain that she was barren, and would not have a child. *Hagar* bore a son to *Avraham*. This episode with *Hagar* caused *Sarah* great humiliation and was ultimately the cause of *Sarah's* passing when she received the news of the *Akeidah*.

Gemara in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*: When *Hagar* became pregnant, she treated her mistress with disrespect. *Sarah*, being upset said to *Avraham*, "Let G-d judge between me and you." Because she had summoned Divine Justice upon *Avraham*, she was subject to Divine Justice and thus she was not protected from the words of Satan, who informed her about the *Akeidah*, which was the cause of her passing.

Despite all of these difficult moments and painful events, *Chazal* tell us that all of the years of *Sarah's* life were equally good. Perhaps we can understand the words of *Chazal* with the concept of "*Gamzu la'tova* – it is all for the best."

Mishna in Tractate *Berachos*: "Just as one blesses for the good, one must bless for what is (perceived as) the bad." Ultimately, everything is in the best interest of the individual. Because of the level of trust that *Sarah* had in G-d, she envisioned her entire life for the good. However, it is difficult to say that this is what the *Torah* is communicating through these words.

Sarah, our Matriarch, did not only believe that the years of her life were "good" despite their difficulty, she understood and perceived the goodness in every one of the events. She appreciated and understood that every event in her life was integral to her own spiritual growth and the future spiritual development of the Jewish people. Although *Avraham* was thrown into the fiery kiln of *Kasdim*, when he had immersed, he was established as the founding father of the eternal people.

When *Sarah* was taken by Pharaoh and not defiled as a result of her own initiative, which was through summoning an angel to strike Pharaoh, the ramifications of her initiative offered Divine Protection to the Jewish women during the period of bondage in Egypt for 210 years.

Chazal: There is a principle, "The actions/experiences of the Patriarchs are a sign for the children." Meaning, the actions of the Patriarchs set in motion and establish future events that the Jewish people will experience and of which they will be the beneficiaries.

Midrash: The Jewish women, who were in Egypt for a period of 210 years, were not defiled by their Egyptian

masters. The *Midrash* explains that the Jewish women in Egypt remained pure in the merit of *Sarah* our Matriarch. *Sarah*, our Matriarch was taken by Pharaoh who wished to make her his queen. She could have succumbed to the allure of the prestige and glory of becoming the queen of the most advanced civilization. However, because of her dimension of devout piety, she would not consider it for a moment. Thus, the Jewish women in Egypt merited Divine Protection and therefore the pedigree of the Jewish people was not put in jeopardy.

Torah: As a result of the sin of *Baal Peor*, there 24,000 casualties that died in a plague. Because of this loss, G-d said that a census of the Jewish people must be taken to determine their number. When the *Torah* refers to the families of the tribes that were counted, it adds the letters "hey" and "yud" to their names.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "The nations of the world were disgracing the families of the Jewish people. They had said, 'How could you deceive the world by claiming that you are pure? It is something that is obviously impossible. If the Egyptians controlled and dominated the bodies of the Jewish males in bondage, is it not logical to say that they defiled their women? G-d therefore associated His Name "Yud and Hey" with the tribes to attest to the fact that they are pure and were not fathered by their Egyptian masters."

It was because of this pedigree of the Jewish people that they were the only nation qualified to receive the *Torah* at Sinai. All this was only possible because *Sarah*, our Matriarch chose to not allow herself to be defiled. Despite the fact that being taken by Pharaoh was a difficult moment at the time in *Sarah's* life, its consequence addressed and allowed the purpose of existence to be actualized, which was the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai. Before *Sarah's* passing, she had perceived all of the goodness in her life.

Sarah had requested of *Avraham* to take *Hagar* as a wife in order for her to merit children through her. Ultimately, *Hagar* and *Ishmael* were driven from *Avraham's* home because of *Ishmael's* subtle negative influence on *Yitzchak*. *Ishmael* fathered twelve tribes.

Chazal: The twelve tribes of *Ishmael* correspond to the twelve tribes of the Jewish people, who are quantified as "the tribes of G-d." Despite the fact that events surrounding *Hagar* and *Ishmael* were difficult and painful, *Sarah* understood and appreciated the necessity of having a counter balance to the Jewish

people. Sarah's faith in G-d went beyond trusting that is good, but rather she perceived the actual goodness that G-d had brought upon her.

The Obstacle to Spiritual Ascent

Chazal: The words of the *Torah* are concise and specific. Many fundamental laws are drawn from a single letter of a word that is contained within the *Torah*. Nevertheless, the narrative of *Eliezer's* mission regarding locating the appropriate wife for *Yitzchak* is repeated multiple times.

Rashi citing the *Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: "Rav *Acha* says, 'We learn from the repetition of the narrative of *Eliezer* that the ordinary speech of the servants of the Patriarchs are more beautiful (to G-d) than the *Torah* of the children.'" Evidently, since there is nothing that is superfluous in the *Torah*, there is a profound lesson to be learned and applied from the narrative of *Eliezer*.

The *Torah* identifies *Eliezer*, the servant of *Avraham*, as "Damesek *Eliezer* – *Eliezer* from Damascus." The *Gemara* in Tractate *Yomah* explains that the *Torah* is not informing us of *Eliezer's* origin, that he came from the city of Damascus, but rather the term "Damesek" is an acronym that connotes – "He drew from the wellspring of *Torah* of his master (*Avraham*)." Meaning, all the *Torah* that *Avraham* had learned was transmitted to his servant *Eliezer*.

As a result of becoming a repository and disseminator of his master's teachings, *Eliezer* radiated a holiness that had a semblance of his master's. The *Midrash* tells us that when *Eliezer* had arrived at the home of *Besuel* to negotiate for the hand of *Rivka*, on behalf of *Avraham*, they had mistakenly believed that he was *Avraham*. In addition to *Eliezer's* spiritual dimension, *Avraham* had fully entrusted *Eliezer* with all of his wealth to be the guardian of his fortune. *Eliezer's* dimension as a person in the spiritual and material realm was outstanding and unique.

Despite his dimension of being and capacity, *Eliezer's* name, within the context of locating a wife for *Yitzchak*, is not mentioned. When *Eliezer* beseeched G-d to succeed in his mission of finding the appropriate wife for *Yitzchak*, it was only for the sake of kindness with his master of *Avraham*. As it states, "Do a kindness for my master *Avraham*." Although he possessed exceptional personal spiritual worth capability, he had no self-interest in succeeding. All *Eliezer* wanted was to succeed for the sake of *Avraham*. When he presented himself to

Besuel, the father of *Rivka*, he identified himself as "I am the servant of *Avraham*." He did not identify himself by name. Despite his level of accomplishment and renown, he was fully negated to his master *Avraham*.

Moshe is never identified or quantified by the *Torah* or *Chazal* as "the most devout or pious Jew" who ever lived, but rather, as "the most humble man on the face of the earth." The basis for *Moshe's* unparalleled dimension of spirituality was due to the fact that he was completely negated and nullified to G-d, his Master. He is identified by G-d as "Moshe, My servant, " just as *Eliezer* had presented himself as "the servant of *Avraham*."

It was because of this level of negation that *Moshe* merited that G-d should speak to him in a wakestate at a level of face to face. His total being was thus spiritualized. In order for one to appreciate and revere the *Torah* for its unlimited dimension of spirituality and to fulfill its *mitzvos* in the most meticulous manner, one must negate himself to G-d. This prerequisite is vital to succeed in the observance of the *Torah* and its acquisition.

This is the reason the narrative of *Eliezer* is repeated a number of times in the *Torah*. It is for us to understand how the subject of a master must negate himself to him, despite the individual's accomplishments and ability. Identically, in order to succeed in the service of G-d, one must negate himself to his Maker. Only then will he perform the *Torah* selflessly and meticulously. It is therefore sufficient for the laws of the *Torah* to be alluded to through inference and not necessarily being explicit.

Avraham's Choice not to Circumcise Himself (from *Vayeira*)

Chazal: *Avraham*, our Patriarch observed the entire *Torah* including all of the rabbinic fences that would be legislated in the future.

Brisker Rav: "If *Avraham*, our Patriarch observed the entire *Torah* before it was given to the Jewish people at Sinai, why did he not circumcise himself before the age of 99? Why did he wait until G-d commanded him to do so?"

Brisker Rav based on the *Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin*: "Greater is the one who is commanded and performs (the *mitzvah*), than the one who is not commanded and performs (the *mitzvah*)." Since *Avraham* knew through his prophetic vision in the future that he would be commanded to circumcise himself by G-d, he waited

until that moment to fulfill the *mitzvah* as one who was commanded to do so.

Mishna in Tractate *Nidarim*: If one makes a vow, that one who is not circumcised could not benefit from him, the vow also includes Arabs, who are also circumcised. The *Mishna* explains that if an Arab who is circumcised would benefit from the one who made the vow, the Jew would be in violation of his vow because the verse refers to all gentiles as “those who have a foreskin on the heart (*arlei lev*).” Although the foreskin may have been removed from the external part of the body, the non-Jew is still considered to be uncircumcised due to his classification of “*arlei lev*” – the one with a blocked heart.

Avraham was not qualified to father *Yitzchak* until he was circumcised at the age of 99. *Sarah*, our Matriarch, could not conceive until she became 89 years old. Why was this so? It was because *Avraham* was not sufficiently spiritually advanced to be the one to father the future patriarch of the Jewish people. *Avraham*, upon becoming circumcised, G-d added the letter “*hey*” to the name *Avram*, in order to transform it to the name “*Avraham*” (with the letter “*hey*”).

Chazal: The numerical value of the name “*Avraham*” is 248 (*RAMACH*). There are 248 limbs in the human body. By have the letter “*hey*” added to his name, it indicated that *Avraham* became one who was in full control of his entire being.

Chazal: The first word of the *Torah* alludes the objective of Creation. Creation was for the sake of the *Torah* and for the sake of the Jewish people to fulfill it. In the portion of *Bereishis*, the *Torah* states regarding creation, “*B’heebaram* – When they were created...”

Midrash: The letters contained within the word “*B’heebaram*” are the same as “*Avraham*” when they are re-arranged. This alludes to the fact that the world was created for the sake of “*Avraham*” who was one who had full control over his being. *Avraham* became in total control over his being only after he was circumcised, which followed his name being changed.

Avraham chose not to circumcise himself because he understood that in order to be fully affected by the circumcision, he needed to have full control over his being, which could only come about through a spiritual transformation. This occurred when I G-d added the letter “*hey*” to his name. He understood that the circumcision itself was a physical act that has spiritual ramifications; however, it is only effective if he is sufficiently spiritually advanced. Thus, the reason *Avraham* did not circumcise himself before the age of 99 was not because of the principle stated in the *Gemara* “Greater is the one who is commanded...” but rather he understood that if he had circumcised himself before the proper time, it would be purely external, as the circumcision of a non-Jew. He would remain as one with “a foreskin on the heart.”

The explanation of the *Brisker Rav* can also be complimented by this understanding. It is true that *Avraham* did not circumcise himself until he was commanded to do so by G-d because it would have a greater effect to do so as one who is commanded rather than as one who was not commanded. *Avraham* understood that if G-d did not command him to circumcise himself, it was an indication that he was not sufficiently spiritually developed.

Torah: *Sarah* was informed that she was going to have a child. Why did she need to be informed? If *Sarah* would become pregnant, she would know that she was going to have a child. *Sforno* explains that by informing *Sarah* in advance that she was going to conceive, her level of joy would be great. This joy would cause that the spiritual development of *Yitzchak* would more complete.

Throughout our prayers we continuously declare how joyous and fortunate we are to have been chosen by G-d to be His people. We say how elated we are that we have been chosen to follow the path of truth and goodness and that the portion that we have been given is not comparable to any other. If one were to truly experience that joy, it would have an unlimited effect on his spirituality. However, if one merely recites the words and does not feel the joy, it will not have any impact.



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