

In the previous portion, Vayeira, we read about the birth of Isaac in his parents' old age, and the story of the "binding" of Isaac.

Aliyah #1

We learn that Sarah, Isaac's mother, has passed away at the age of 127. Rashi (the foremost biblical commentator) comments on the words used by the Torah to describe her age: that at 100, she was as free of sin as a 20-year-old, and at 20, she was as beautiful as a girl of seven.

This *aliyah* then gives a detailed account of Abraham purchasing the Cave of Machpaila in Chevron, from Efron, the leader of the Sons of Chait tribe. He pays full price: 400 silver shekels. It is interesting to note that the Cave of Machpaila, the site of the Holy Temple bought by King David, and the city of Shechem, bought by Jacob and later used to bury Josef, were all paid for, yet all are contested today.

Aliyah #2

Abraham realized that Issac, who was now 37 years old, should be getting married. At the very end of the previous portion, in the *maftir* reading, some genealogical information was given including the birth of Rebecca, who was to be Isaac's future wife. In this *aliyah*, Abraham sends his servant Eliezer back to Charan, where Abraham's family lived, to find a wife for Isaac. Eliezer leaves for Charan with ten camels loaded with jewelry and gifts.

Aliyah #3

Eliezer arrives in Charan and waits outside the city by the well of water. He

prays to G-d that his mission of finding a wife for Isaac should be quickly successful. He asks for a sign: he will ask a girl for a drink of water, and if she is the right girl to marry Isaac, she will answer, "Of course, and I will also give your camels water." Even before he finishes speaking, a young lady approaches and he asks for a drink, and she says, "Of course," and offers also to give water to his camels! She even turns out to be from the right family. She is the daughter of Abraham's nephew, Betuel.

Aliyah #4

When Eliezer finds Rebecca with such ease, he says "Thank G-d!" Rebecca runs to tell her family about this man by the well, and her brother, Laban, goes out to greet Eliezer. He then invited Eliezer to spend the night. (He has ulterior motives; he didn't fail to notice that Eliezer had plenty of jewels that might be used as payment for the hospitality.) Eliezer accepts and goes and meets Isaac's future in-laws. He tells them all that has transpired, leading him to meet Rebecca, and they agree to the match.

Aliyah #5

Eliezer and Rebecca's family celebrate with a feast (during which, the Midrash tells us, Betuel tries to poison Eliezer so that he can steal his riches, but ends up poisoning himself instead). In the morning, Eliezer asks that he be allowed to return immediately to Abraham with Rebecca, but her family wants to hold her for another year. In the end they ask Rebecca what she wants to do. This Rashi says, teaches us that a woman can't get married against her will.

Eliezer and Rebecca return and find Isaac praying in a field as it was getting to be evening. (Our sages say that this was the invention of the afternoon prayer.) This is the first time Rebecca sees Isaac, and she is very impressed with him.

The wedding takes place and Isaac takes Rebecca to his mother Sarah's tent. When Sarah lived, this tent had three constant blessings: the candles burned from Shabbat to Shabbat, the *challah* dough was blessed, and the cloud of the *Shechina* (divine presence) rested over the tent. Now, when Rebecca enters the tent, these three blessings return. Incidentally, these three blessings correspond to the three special mitzvot given to Jewish women: lighting Shabbat candles, taking *challah* (or, more generally, keeping a kosher home), and *Taharas Hamishpacha*, the laws of family purity, which guard the spiritual and physical health of the family.

Aliyah #6

Abraham remarries. His new wife's name is Keturah, but Rashi says she is actually the original Hagar whom he was married to before. Later in this *aliyah*, Abraham passes away at the age of 175, and Isaac and Ishmael bury their father in the Cave of Machpaila where his wife Sarah, and the first couple, Adam and Eve, are also buried.

Aliyah #7

Because Ishmael has repented and has participated in Abraham's burial, the Midrash says that he was rewarded by having his genealogy described in the last *aliyah*. ☞

Dedicated to  
Yehudah Aharon Bernath  
in honour of his 18th birthday  
by his family

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In loving memory of Eliezer Aharon ben (yibadel l'chaim tovim) Mordechai Reuven. May his memory be a blessing.



Call Home

How you treat others is how G-d treats you. How you forgive them is how He forgives you. How you see them is how He sees you.

When you show empathy for the plight of another human being, G-d takes empathy in your plight.

When others slight you and you ignore the call to vengeance that burns inside, G-d erases all memory of your failures toward Him. When you see the image of G-d in another human being, then the image of G-d becomes revealed within you.

From the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Imagine when "pay phones" were just making their debut. A child approaches this newfangled contraption intent on phoning home to tell his parents his whereabouts.

Again and again he tries, but nothing happens. Until, at last, a kind stranger explains that by putting money in the right place, the connection will be made, and he can in this way contact his parents. With a sigh of relief the child tries the suggestion, he deposits the coin and is able to successfully phone home.

Now, change the props and the reason for the call home in the above scenario. Ready? The child is each one of us and the parent is G-d. The phone call is prayer -- whether a formal invocation from the prayer book or a spontaneous "Help me, L-rd!" And the charity box is where the coin should be put

in order to make a clear connection.

Of course, it doesn't have to be a coin dropped into a charity box at all. It can be any *mitzva* that involves interacting positively with another person. The point is to be helpful, kind, and merciful toward another person before asking G-d to act similarly toward us.

There is a story about a great rabbi who was having problems with his "divine communication." Early one morning he was approached by a merchant for an interest-free loan. The rabbi promised to take care of it immediately following the morning prayers. On his way to the synagogue, though, the rabbi realized that the merchant needed the money to go to the market that day. So, he quickly returned home for the money, found the merchant and gave him the loan. Not surprisingly, that day's spiritual communi-

cations had no "static."

In the prayer book compiled by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad movement, it says: It is proper to say before prayer, "I hereby take upon myself to fulfill the *mitzva* -- 'Love your fellowman as yourself.'" The previous Lubavitcher Rebbe explained this custom by saying that the fulfillment of this *mitzva* is the entry-gate through which a person can pass to stand before G-d to pray. And because of that love toward another, the person's prayer is accepted.

Give and take is the key to communication and the success of any relationship. It's ungrateful to expect to constantly receive from G-d without giving in return. But, G-d prefers that we pay our debt of gratitude by helping others. So, before your next call "home," reach out and touch someone. ☞

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Candle Lighting

Ottawa  
November 21, 2003 at 4:10pm  
Shabbat ends  
Sat. at 5:17pm  
Torah Portion: Chayei Sara

Insights into the weekly Torah portion,  
adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe



This week's Torah portion, *Chayei Sara*, contains an account of the first marriage mentioned in the Torah. This marriage, between Isaac and Rebecca, affected and is a lesson for the Jewish people as a whole, and indeed the future of the entire nation which was to follow.

In a spiritual sense, this union between the two progenitors of the Jewish nation, symbolizes the relationship between the two components of each individual -- the body and the soul. Rebecca was from Charan, a place which was primarily materialistic. Isaac, on the other hand, symbolizes the spiritual dimension, as he had already been consecrated as a "perfect offering" by his willingness to be sacrificed upon the altar. Their marriage epitomized the unity between these two contradictory concepts.

A Jew's soul, even when


enclothed in a physical body, is totally at one with G-d, for it is "an actual part of G-d." The mission for which it is sent down into this corporeal world is to bring about a change in the material realm, elevating physical objects by performing *mitzvot*. This unity of the spiritual and the physical is achieved when the light of the soul is reflected within the body, and the body becomes nullified to the demands of the soul.

Ultimately, the unity achieved between body and soul should extend to the point that it is obvious that all of a person's activities are performed by both in tandem. Afterwards, this unity should be extended into the world at large, so as to encompass every dimension of existence in the entire world.

In this manner, the Jew acts as G-d's emissary, transforming the world into a dwelling place for G-dliness. Thus, the Jew becomes an extension of G-dliness, in the same way that an emissary shares a single

purpose and a single identity with the one who sent him on his mission.

The ultimate goal of this unity between the spiritual and the physical is the Era of Redemption, when this unity will be open and apparent. Our task as Jews is to hasten this process by doing mitzvot and studying Torah, for it was the giving of the Torah which allowed for the possibility of such unity. Prior to the Torah's revelation on Mount Sinai, spirituality and physicality, body and soul, were two distinct entities which could not merge. When Moshiach comes, may it be speedily in our day, the unity achieved through our Torah service will be revealed in the world at large and the union between body and soul will be consummated.

As the children of Isaac and Rebecca, every dimension of our existence should therefore be permeated by the awareness of this Divine mission, to make this world a proper dwelling place for G-d. 

Memo from G-d

To: You  
Date: Today  
From: The Boss  
Subject: Yourself  
Reference: Life

I am G-d!

Today I will be handling all of your problems. Please remember that I do not need your help. If life happens to deliver a situation to you that you cannot handle, do not attempt to resolve it. Kindly put it in the SFGTD (Something For G-d To Do) box.

It will be addressed in My time, not yours. Once the matter is placed into the box, do not hold on to it.

If you find yourself stuck in traffic; don't despair. There are people in this world for whom driving is an unheard of privilege.

Should you have a bad day at work; think of the man who has been out of work for years.

Should you despair over a relationship gone bad; think of the person who has never known what it's like to love and to be loved in return.

Should you grieve the passing of another weekend; think of the person in dire straits, working twelve hours a day, six days a week to feed her children.


Should your car break down, leaving you miles away from assistance; think of the paraplegic who would love the opportu-

nity to take that walk.

Should you notice a new gray hair in the mirror; think of the patient that is receiving chemo therapy who wishes he/she had hair to examine.

Should you find yourself at a loss and pondering what is life all about, asking what is my purpose? Be thankful. There are those who didn't live long enough to get the opportunity.

Should you find yourself the victim of other people's bitterness, ignorance, smallness or insecurities; remember, things could be worse. You could be them!

Should you decide to show this to a friend; you might brighten someone's day! Which means you are a great friend! 

Ask the Rabbi

Dear Rabbi Berger,

What is a Jew? Can a Jew lose his or her Jewishness?

-Frank C.  
Yankton, SD


Dear Frank,

All peoples of the world know who they are -- they're forthright about it. Koreans are Koreans, Norwegians are Norwegians, and Hyphenated-Americans are Hyphenated-Americans. But what are Jews? "Who -- or what -- am I?" is a question every Jew has asked at least once in his or her lifetime. And sadly, they have reason to, because instead of definitions, they have doubt. Is being Jewish a race? Religion? Tradition? Ethnicity? Nationality? Geographic origin? None of the above?

Here's what a Jew is: a Jew is a spiritual state of being. A Jew is any human being who has a Jewish soul (i.e., one who has a

Jewish mother or converted to Judaism in accordance with proper Jewish law), regardless of his or her race, lifestyle or professed religion. You can be as hip as Jerry Seinfeld, as religious as Moses, as left-wing as Shimon Peres or as conservative as your uncle Irving -- you're still Jewish. You could be an environmentalist, an industrialist, a fundamentalist -- you're still Jewish. You could try as hard as you can to be just like your neighbors -- you're still Jewish. You could "convert" to Christianity, or run off to India to "become" Buddhist -- you're still Jewish. You could even become an anti-Semite -- you're still Jewish. (Shocking but true, Jews have done that too -- ever hear of Bobby Fischer?) You could be Caucasian, French, Hispanic, Irish, Norwegian; whatever. No matter who you are or what you do, if you've got that Jewish soul, you're Jewish. And nothing you do or decide to be can destroy that Jewish soul.

So if you are Jewish, be proud of it!

Rabbi M. Berger 

Everyone Needs to Laugh Sometimes

At the Henry Street Hebrew School, Mr. Goldblatt, a new teacher, after finishing that day's lesson plan, asked the students if they had any questions they'd like to ask.

"Mr. Goldblatt," announced little Joey. "There's something I can't figure out."

"What's that Joey?" asked Mr. Goldblatt.

"Well according to the Bible, the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, right?"

"Right" "And the Children of Israel beat up the Phillistines, right?"

"Er - right."

"And the children of Israel built the Temple, right?"

"Again you're right."

"And the Children of Israel fought the Egyptians, and the Children of Israel fought the Romans, and the Children of Israel were always doing something important, right?"

"All that is right too," agreed Mr. Goldblatt. "So what's your question?"

"What I wanna know is this," asked Joey, "What were the grown-ups doing all that time?" 