

CHAYEI SARAH חיי שרה



In loving memory of Harav Yitzchak Yoel ben Shlomo Halevi

Volume 34 | #5

14 November 2020
27 (Mar)Cheshvan 5781

Shabbat Mevarechim
Rosh Chodesh Kislev
is on Tuesday

Shabbat ends:

London 5.03pm
Sheffield 5.07pm
Glasgow 5.09pm
Edinburgh 5.04pm
Birmingham 5.08pm
Southport 5.13pm
Jerusalem 5.18pm

Along with thousands around the world, we were stunned and devastated by the passing of our beloved Emeritus Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks רבינו, who taught and inspired us all. We send wishes of comfort to the Sacks family and also extend our condolences to Rabbi Sacks' office teams, past and present. A tribute edition of Daf Hashavua will appear in the next few weeks.

Daf Hashavua

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“Rivka hurried and lowered her jug from upon herself and said, ‘Drink, and I will even water your camels”
(Bereishit 24:46)



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Sidra breakdown

חַיֵּי שָׂרָה

Chayei Sarah

5th Sidra in:

בְּרֵאשִׁית

Bereishit

By Numbers:

105 verses

1,402 words

5,314 letters

Headlines:

**Isaac and
Rebecca**



United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

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Running in the Right Direction

by Rabbi Meir Shindler, Richmond United Synagogue



As the winter deepens and the mornings become dimmer and darker, it becomes progressively more difficult to leap out of bed 'like a lion' and embrace the challenges and opportunities of a new day, unless we have a particularly strong motivation to do so. These motivations may be extraordinarily positive such as an exciting project or study, or they may come out of fear and obligation, such as being on time for work or getting the kids off to school. When we are highly motivated for something, we

feel like we are 'on fire', eager to achieve or attain it straight away. For example, if we all knew that huge sums of money would be available on the streets at some unearthly hour of the morning, we would make sure to set our alarm clocks and not dare hit the snooze button!

One verb that repeats itself in this week's sidra several times is 'ratz' - to run. It is fascinating to observe that this verb always means to run **towards** something. Running away from something is a completely different word in Hebrew - 'noos' (flee). 'Ratz' always denotes running

In loving memory of Chaya Rachel bat Moshe Ben-tzion

Sidra Summary

1st Aliya (Kohen) – Bereishit 23:1-16

Sarah dies aged 127, in Kiryat Arba, also known as Hebron. After eulogising Sarah, Avraham negotiates with the head of the local Hittites, Efron, in order to purchase a burial plot for Sarah, Me'arat (Cave of) Hamachpela. They agree a price of 400 silver shekels.

Point to Consider: In what way does the spelling of Efron's name hint at his greed? (see Rashi to 23:15)

2nd Aliya (Levi) – 23:17-24:9

Avraham buries Sarah. Avraham asks his servant (understood to be) Eliezer to seek a wife for his son Yitzchak, making him take an oath only to select a girl from Avraham's birth town, Charan, rather than from Cana'an. Avraham also insists that Yitzchak's future bride must agree to leave her home to come to the Land of Cana'an (later Israel), rather than Yitzchak going to live in Charan.

with intent and with a goal in mind. It is strikingly close to the Hebrew verb *'ratzah'* - to want something. When we run towards something or someone, this is an external expression of our inner motivations, our wants, of what is important to us in life. It is an excellent indicator of that which makes us tick.

Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, is charged by his master with the task to find Yitzchak a suitable wife. When he spots the potential in Rivka he is overwhelmed with enthusiasm to fulfil Avraham's wishes and he **'runs'** to meet her.

Rivka, being an individual filled with a love of people and a desire to perform acts of altruistic kindness, eagerly **'runs'** to the spring to provide water for this weary traveller and his camels.

Lavan, Rivka's avaricious brother, **'runs'** to greet Eliezer and offer him hospitality. Here, however, the verse indicates that this enthusiasm was not borne out of any genuine sense of magnanimity, but rather: 'and it came to pass when the nose-ring and bracelets were seen on the hands

It is our task to analyse our priorities and to condition ourselves to run after those things that are important in life.

of his sister... ' (Bereishit 24:30, see Rashi's commentary). Lavan knows wealth when he sees it and is so motivated by the possibility of his own economic advancement, he hastily scampers off to welcome this new stranger.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746) in his book of ethics, *Mesillat Yesharim* (Path of the Just, Chapter 8), writes that the method by which we acquire the trait of eagerness, particularly with regard to meaningful spiritual endeavours, is to undergo an internal paradigm shift by contemplating all the wonderful things God does for us. Nevertheless, he

acknowledges that for many people, their physical external demeanour - slow, slothful and lacking in energy and drive - can be a huge barrier to achieving that state of being 'on fire', a person with real purpose. For such a person, he advises to wilfully quicken his or her physical movements; to bound, to jump and to run; since 'outer movements awaken inner ones' (Chapter 7).

It is our task to analyse our priorities and to condition ourselves to run after those things that are important in life.



3rd Aliya (Shlishi) – 24:10-26

Eliezer sets out on his journey, with ten camels and presents from Avraham. Towards the evening, Eliezer arrives at a well, close to his destination, where he rests the camels. He prays to God to show him a clear sign of the identity of Yitzchak's future bride: the young lady who would offer water to Eliezer and his camels. As he finishes his prayer, Rivkah appears, with a jug on her shoulder, from which, after drawing water from the well, she gives Eliezer to drink. She then draws water for all of his camels to drink. Eliezer gives her jewellery and asks her who she is. Rivkah relates that she is the daughter of Betuel, Avraham's nephew. She grants Eliezer his request for a place to sleep.

4th Aliya (Revi'i) – 24:27-52

Eliezer is amazed that his prayers were answered so quickly and exclaims thanks to God. Rivkah runs home to tell her family what has happened. On seeing Eliezer's

gifts to Rivkah, her brother Lavan runs out to greet him and welcomes him in. Eliezer introduces himself and recounts the story of his journey. He asks permission to take Rivkah as a wife for Yitzchak. Lavan and Betuel agree.

5th Aliya (Chamishi) – 24:53-67

Eliezer gives more jewellery, as well as gold and silver vessels, to Rivkah. He gives her family delicious fruit (Rashi). They eat and drink together, and Eliezer stays overnight. The next morning, Lavan and his mother ask for Rivkah to stay with them longer before leaving. Eliezer is insistent and Rivkah agrees to go immediately. Rivkah meets Yitzchak in the Negev, where he brings her into his mother Sarah's tent.

6th Aliya (Shishi) – 25:1-11

Avraham marries Ketura, whom the Midrash identifies as Hagar. Their descendants are listed. Avraham dies,

In this next, abridged extract from, 'If Only My People...Zionism in my life', published in 1984, Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits z'l (1921-99) describes the initial impact of the Yom Kippur War of 1973 on British Jewry in particular. It is presented as a longer article than usual to avoid interrupting the flow of the writing. We thank the Jakobovits family for permission to reproduce this material.

The Yom Kippur War – From Ecstasy to Agony

by Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits z'l



By the turn of the decade, the euphoria of the Six Day war had evaporated. So had the short spell of spiritual reawakening, to be replaced by a creeping growth of crass materialism, ethnic strife between the privileged and the under-privileged, and political complacency under the imaginary shelter of invincibility. This was shaken neither by the enervating War of Attrition, nor by the ascendancy of the PLO in spectacular acts of terrorism and obscene receptions accorded by the United Nations.

Then the Yom Kippur War burst upon us. Only ten months earlier, I had heard Defence Minister Moshe Dayan in a 'briefing' to a British JPA (it was then still the Joint Palestine Appeal) mission. He assured us, citing comparative statistics on planes and tanks, that Israel was now militarily so superior that the Arabs would no longer dare to attack. Alas, the 'impregnable' fortifications on the Golan Heights and of the Bar Lev Line along the Suez Canal collapsed almost overnight. For

the first time in thirty years, fears of an imminent holocaust were openly expressed as the Syrian armies, having stormed through the defences of the Galilee, threatened the whole north of Israel. The 'ideal borders' of 'Greater Israel' had proved far more vulnerable than the 'indefensible borders' of little Israel in 1967 – a lesson which I never forgot in my subsequent thinking.

The heavy pall of gloom cast over the Jewish community was further aggravated by the growing bias against Israel almost everywhere in the world, no doubt not unconnected with the oil embargo now imposed by the Arabs, leading to the catastrophic rise in oil prices which was to signal the near-strangulation of the world's economy. Even the eventual triumph of the Israeli army in pushing back the Egyptians and Syrians far in to their own territory and threatening both their capitals could not relieve the despondency among Jews everywhere as news of the fearful loss of life and limb sank in. The contrast in Jewish as well as world reaction to the heady days following the Six Day

War could not have been greater in every respect. I hopefully described this contrast at President Katzir's seminar on World Jewry and the State of Israel on 6 July 1975, in the following terms:

Such are the unfathomable mysteries of Providence and Jewish history that the 1967 and the 1973 wars may yet reverse the hitherto-accepted roles in their effect on the consummation of the Jewish purpose. In retrospect, one wonders whether the Six Day War, with all its ecstasy, may not have induced one of the most calamitous recessions of the Jewish spirit in our annals. Political and military attitudes apart, it bred an inflated sense of over-confidence, an immobility of mind, a feeling of complacency, a disdain for the outside world, and an extravagant taste for high living which spilled over into a moral pollution of the national character once distinguished by faith, integrity, selflessness, idealism and frugality. The Yom Kippur War, on the other hand, its heartbreak notwithstanding, may well yet release invaluable spiritual energies and in a mighty burst of power redirect

In memory of Yehuda ben Yaakov HaCohen

aged 175. He is buried by Yitzchak and Yishmael, also in Me'arat Hamachpela, next to Sarah.

7th Aliya (Shevi'i) – 25:12-18

Yishmael's descendants are listed. He dies, aged 137.



our destiny to its historic orbit.

Anglo-Jewry again sprang into feverish activity. An emergency appeal once more yielded an unprecedented response, and blood-donation centres were set up at two of our leading London synagogues – I asked to sanction their operation during the Festival of Succot into which the war had dragged.

Of course, the commitment to Israel was undiminished, and the efforts in its support and defence were greatly intensified. During the war I had joined a Board of Deputies delegation to the Foreign Secretary to plead for greater sympathy by Britain and in particular for the release of urgently needed tank spare-parts. Lord Janner, leading the delegation, literally wept as he presented the agony of Israel's predicament; his tears were scantily rewarded.

The new mood of self-questioning and reappraisal emboldened me, too, to search aloud for the causes of Israel's ailments and the prescription to heal them. I gave two lectures

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critically analysing our predicament, one in Hebrew to a prestigious Tel Aviv forum during a visit in November which had taken me to the newly occupied positions in Syria far beyond the Golan Heights and within sight of Damascus, the other before an audience of rabbis and communal leaders in London at the end of January. I expressed my conviction that the convulsive changes in Jewish fortunes and prospects precipitated by the Yom Kippur War represented above all a profound spiritual crisis of

momentous proportions, stressing that among the salutary effects of the war were a greater unity between Israel and the Diaspora than ever before, and the intense soul-searching which had replaced the past inclination to self-righteousness and sole reliance on military power.

For the first time I expressed views explicitly which I had previously only hinted at. I spelt out the fallacy of secular Zionism in fostering the illusion that Jewish Statehood would solve the Jewish problem and eliminate anti-Semitism; I expressed the realisation that Israel had neither a claim nor the ability to prevail if it surrendered its unique spiritual purpose; I stressed the need to separate religion from politics if Judaism and the Jewish State were to be united; I underlined the challenge to religious leaders to promote our people's moral regeneration, to interpret current events in the light of Jewish teachings, and to be ready to make territorial concessions if true peace could thereby be secured; and I stated the need to fight for Jewish survival by resisting the evils of ignorance and assimilation with the same grim determination as the attacks of Israel's enemies in battle. My plea with all its criticisms was well received, though it contained all the opinions which were later to cause such a furor. Indeed, on re-reading my speeches in the wake of the Yom Kippur War - and I delivered many in a similar vein in Britain and Israel as well as in America – I find that I added or changed nothing of substance on fundamentals in the years to come, as the expositions of these opinions in the following chapters will show.

In memory of Yisrael Shmuel ben Yirmaya Yehoshuah

Haftarah

This section of the Book of Melachim (Kings) relates the attempt by Adoniyah, the older son of King David, to establish himself as David's successor. Queen Batsheva

and Natan the Prophet manage to foil this plot, by warning King David, who reasserts his younger son Shlomo's (Solomon) right to succeed him.

Sigd ሰግድ

By Rabbi Gideon Sylvester, The US's Israel Rabbi



One of the highlights of my year is the annual Israeli-British Bar and Batmitzvah programme, when teenagers from many United Synagogue communities come to Israel to celebrate their coming of age with their peers from Ethiopian families in Kiriath Bialik near Haifa.

Our teenagers spend a year preparing for their trip. They correspond with their Israeli-Ethiopian pen-pals and learn about Ethiopian Jewish culture, while the Ethiopian families learn about Anglo Jewry. Then in a programme created by our partners in the UJIA, British participants fly to Israel to meet their new friends. They sample traditional Ethiopian cuisine and explore Ethiopian culture as well as touring, studying and having fun with their new friends from Kiriath Bialik. The trip culminates in a moving joint Bar/Batmitzvah service at which I officiate together with the Chief Rabbi of the Ethiopian communities. This uplifting event is followed by celebrations with Ethiopian-style dancing.

As our British teenagers learn about Ethiopian Jewish culture, they encounter Sigd, a holiday which is unique to that community. Sigd takes place fifty days after Yom Kippur (Sunday 15th November this year). Its origins are a little obscure. It marks the covenant between God and the Jewish



people, but it may also have been a sixth or fifteenth century response to Christian persecution in which Jewish leaders prayed for their communities' safety.

The word Sigd means 'prostration' and the day starts solemnly. Many observe it as a fast, a kind of extension to Yom Kippur in which they repent not just for personal sins but for those of the community. In Ethiopia, they would climb a mountain, representing Mount Sinai, look out towards Jerusalem and read from the Torah. Then, they would pray and blow the shofar before breaking their fast with feasting and revelry. In this way, they maintained their faith and their dream of one day returning to Israel.

Since the airlifts of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in the 1980's and 90's, some of their traditions have been adopted by Israelis. In 2008, Sigd was declared a

national holiday and all Israeli schools now learn about it. Sigd celebrations, led by the Ethiopian elders carrying colourful umbrellas and dressed in white robes and tallit, take place at the Western Wall, sometimes in the presence of the President of the State of Israel and one of the Chief Rabbis.

For me, Sigd is a moment to reflect on how Ethiopian Jews, who were cut off from the rest of Jewry for thousands of years, maintained their connection to Judaism. It's also a time to celebrate the fact that those who climbed the mountains in Ethiopia and looked out on the Promised Land now live here, practicing their traditions and sharing their culture with other Jews.

We look forward to a post-covid world when we can bring British, Israeli and Ethiopian Jews together again. Perhaps we will even celebrate Sigd together; next year in Jerusalem!



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