

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Chayei Sarah:** Genesis 24:1-10
Haftarah: I Kings 1:11-14
B'rit Chadasha: I Corinthians 15:39-44

Go to my country, and to my own relatives, and get a wife for my son Yitzchak.
[Genesis 24:4]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 31:10-12

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #2, *T'shuvah* [Return]

V'Avraham zaken ba bayamim – And Avraham waxed old and full of days ... *v'Adonai berach et-Avraham bakol* – and the Holy One blessed Avraham in all things. Genesis 24:1.

Dignitaries from far and near flocked to Hebron to pay their final respects to the first 'woman of virtue' the world had ever known. They came with heads bowed. They eulogized Sarah with great eloquence. As Avraham and Yitzchak made their way to the grave, they a *shura* through which could pass with honor. They comforted the two recently bereaved men as best they could. They placed stones at the head and foot of the grave. Each prayed his culture's equivalent of the *El Maleh Rachamim*². Then they then wiped their eyes, sighed deeply, nodded to Avraham and Yitzchak, and began the long journey back to their respective homes. The venue grew silent. Only two men - the bereaved patriarch of the Covenant and the appointed heir of its promises – remained at the grave. It was time. Silently the grief-stricken father and son leaned against the great stone slab that they had sculpted to fit the entrance to the burial cave. They positioned their shoulders for a great heave. They pushed with all their might. Slowly the slab began to roll down the chiseled track. A few more grunts, and the stone sunk into its assigned resting place with a rumble and a 'thud'. *Rest now, dear wife and mother ... v'zikrona liv'racha* – i.e. and may your memory be a blessing!

Could This Really Be 'Goodbye'?

With the tomb sealed, the to-do list of tasks that Avraham and Yitzchak had committed to perform as a final act of love for Sarah's bodily remains was finally complete. The widower and the motherless son breathed a deep collective sigh.

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² The *El Maleh Rachamim* is a traditional graveside prayer which translates as "God who is full of mercy and dwells on High, provide a true rest on the wings of the Shekinah. And may the holy and pure ones who shine as brightly as the brilliance of the sky to the soul of _____ (name of deceased), who has stepped into eternity. May the Garden of Eden be her resting place. We beseech You, Merciful One, that you would cover her forever with divine wings, and bind her soul up in the bonds of life. May You, O Holy One, be her portion; and may she rest peacefully on her bed. And we say, Amen."

Questions bombarded their minds. What would they do without Sarah? How were they supposed to carry on without the wife and mother, counselor, caretaker, and friend they so dearly loved? Would they really have to go places, meet people, and try to enjoy sunrises and sunsets, lightning storms and rainbows, without her?

As long the tedium of interment protocol was in process Sarah had continued to be the focal point of their every thought, every word, their emotion, and every expenditure of energy. Once the stone slipped into place, however, they realized that they would have to get used to doing things that did not involve – much less revolve around – Sarah. Suddenly they were alone – and it seemed more than they could bear. Suddenly it was real – and they were not prepared for it.

Avraham stood like a statue, staring quizzically at the stone as if were something he was seeing for the first time. It was not that he questioned its integrity. What caused him to stare so intently at the stone was the realization that it constituted a ‘*barrier fixed*’ separating him from his dearest companion. For the first time since he could remember, he could not *see* his princess. He touched the stone. He said the words of a blessing – but with no real *kavanah*. He gathered himself, and tried the words again, slower, and with more intentionality – but with the same results. The words he whispered seemed shallow. He shook his head. Prayers would apparently have to wait. He stepped – or was it stumbled - back about half a step from the entrance to the cave. But he could not bring himself to take his eyes off of that stone. To look away from the stone would be to *leave her*. To walk away would be to go on without her. He was just not ready. He looked for any excuse he could find to stay just a few moments more. He just stood and stared because the realization that he could do nothing more for Sarah was killing him.

Yitzchak considered his options. Should he leave his father alone to sort out his feelings, or say his *final* goodbyes? There were no words. There was no language. He bowed his head and started to walk away in silence. But he only made it a few steps. Then he stopped in his tracks, turned around, and stared at the stone, too. He stared at it a long time. He rubbed his temples. He stroked his beard. He wiped liquid from his eyes. Finally, he walked back to where his father was standing. He placed a hand gently on Avraham’s shoulder – as if to say, ‘*it is time; we have to let her go.*’. The patriarch’s reached upward and patted the back of Yitzchak’s trembling hand. No words were spoken. None were necessary. Avraham shook his head. Yitzchak understood. He knew that it was time for him to go. There were ewes back at Be’er Sheva that were getting ready to lamb. He knew his father was going to be all right. But he also knew him well enough to understand that he was not going anywhere any time soon.

Which Way Does The Grand Redemptive Plan Go From Here?

Until recently Avraham could run rings around any young man or woman in the world. His relationship with the Holy One had empowered him to think great thoughts, to love with a bottomless heart, to speak weighty, atmosphere-shifting words, and to do great, world-changing deeds. For years he has been going places, overcoming challenges, climbing mountains, navigating through dangers, and accomplishing things that would make the world's wildest daredevils and greatest athletes shake their head, say 'it can't be done', and back away. Walking, talking and co-laboring with the Creator of the Universe has kept Avraham's mind and heart inspired and his physical body pulsing with Divine energy. But now ... well, now the wind has been knocked out of him. Now, he doesn't have Sarah's smile to keep him young. Now he is just a widower. Now he has begun to feel, and realize that he is, old. He is old – but supremely blessed. Look, there is the sunset, the sunrise, the dew! Look, there is the bow in the clouds, the lambing season, and the Sabbath! Look, there is Yitzchak! Look, there are the herds and flocks. Look, there are the markets, the strangers waiting to be converted to friends! Old, indeed; but blessed in all things, in all ways. So what is a man to do with all these blessings – and so little time? He knows his blessings – and indeed his days - are 'on the clock'. He knows that the great hourglass of Chayei Avraham will one day run out of sand – and that, before he knows it, he will be with Sarah again on the other side of the stone.

It is time to live again. It is time to carry the great vision forward. It is time to rejoin the Holy One in His Grand Vision of building a counterculture – a kingdom of Heaven-scented society – to walk on earth and offer a more excellent way to all people. It is time to embark on the next phase of the Holy One's Great Plan for the redemption of mankind and for the restoration of Creation to its intended state of Edenic beauty, functionality, harmony, and fruitfulness.

“Do you know what this family needs?”, he thought to himself; “it needs a new matriarch!” Yitzchak has been single - and Sarah's tent devoid of laughter - long enough!”

Important Events Are About to Unfold

Of all the things that are going on in the world today, which are truly important? What is the first essential step to *tikkun olam* - *i.e.* fixing/repairing the present mess in the kosmos? What areas of pursuit hold the potential to shape the future – and change the atmosphere in the world for the better? What endeavors can we be a part of – or participate in – that will really make a difference? What thoughts, emotions, and activities are worth our time, our attention, and our focus – and which will just lead us and others into yet another frustrating episode of trying to

catch the wind with a butterfly net? The answer to these questions may surprise you. From a Kingdom perspective, the truly important things that occur on any given day – those with the longest lasting consequences – do not take place in the public eye. The most significant events that occur in the world are not published in newspapers. The happenings that truly shape the future of the world are likely never going to be discussed on the evening news – or on social media.

Look at today's newspaper headlines. Peruse the trending social media feeds. Listen to the stories about which the talking heads of the television media outlets – and the celebrities of the world - are bantering. In today's world people tend to think that the most important events happening on earth on a given day involve things like nations at or considering going to war, like evil men – or multi-national corporations, or world governments, or political opportunists - plotting against those they hate or whose wealth they envy. They do not see long-term. They do not think cross-generationally. They cannot, in fact, see more than a few short steps down the rocky road of their own self-interest. They cannot see past whatever presently outrages, terrifies, or stirs up the flesh reactions of those they let control their thoughts via the eight most-common cauldrons of social manipulation propaganda³ - namely arts, entertainment, education, philosophy, ideology, product-marketing, popular pseudo-scientific theory, and religious and/or secular humanist dogma. As a result of the mind-control propaganda they are fed daily out of these cauldrons, most people cannot envision anything beyond their preferred organization, institution, movement, or talking-head character's favorite rallying cries, buzzwords, catch-phrases, and bullet-points. The propaganda fountains are so attractive, their siren song is so mesmerizing, and their message is broadcast so loudly that people gradually become oblivious to that which still small Voice of the Creator is saying, and blind to that which the wise, skillful, patient Hand of the Divine Potter is doing. As a result, most people do not even know that the Creator has, and is calling them to participate with Him in, a plan of redemption for our species and restoration for Creation. So, most people imagine that the future of the world is being shaped by things like political, economic, social, and ideological movements - or by things like earthquakes, weather patterns, or epidemics [actual or feared] - or by conspiracies of powerful men, nations and institutions. People thus tend to obsess over political scandals and intrigues, over isolated incidents of terror or outrage, over the rising and falling of economic indicators, over proposed or enacted pieces of legislation, over the incendiary rhetoric of public figures, and over the off-and-on field, off-and-on stage antics of sports heroes and entertainers.

³ *Propaganda* is the most basic form of organizational, institutional, and/or government mind-control. Its most common features are fear mongering, saber-rattling, moralizing, outrage, accusation, political correctness, and *idea-shaming* – *i.e.* the ridicule or condemnation of people who engage in non-conforming thought and speech.

Within a few weeks – if not days, hours, or even minutes – the things over which people are obsessing at any given moment will, of course, be totally forgotten. Something new, and equally temporary in impact, will come along - and off the masses will go, chasing the wind. Whatever will stir up a few moments of empathy or hostility, compassion or outrage, or will excite or incite class, racial, cultural, or ideological bias [if not violence], these are the kind of things upon which the ‘news’ outlets and social media writers always focus. The things that attract the attention of most human beings on the planet are thus seldom if ever anywhere near the most important things happening on earth on the day they occur. Those things that I have mentioned, you see, all belong to the realm of *tachat ha-shemesh* [literally ‘under the sun’]. As the writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, there is nothing really new in the *tachat ha-shemesh* ‘under the sun’ realm. Hence everything in the ‘under the sun’ realm is ‘vanity of vanities’ [a fleeting wisp of wind].

So why do they - and most of us - call the stuff that pours out of the media outlets and off the social media feed ‘news’? Why do people sit entranced before newspapers, magazines, television sets, computers, and smart-phone screens watching it? Why do people get all stressed, and worked up about what so-and-so human being said about so-and-so issue or situation or so-and-so real or imagined problem? It is all folly. It is all chasing the wind. It is the latest Macbethian *tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*⁴.

What then are the truly most important events taking place on earth on a given day, you ask? Ah, Dear Reader, they are things like we will read about in today’s aliyah of Torah. As we prepare to read in today’s aliyah of events that will change the world forever keep in mind that on the day the events we will read about occurred there were probably several wars raging and any number of famines and pestilences threatening. There was probably, somewhere on earth, either an earthquake rumbling, a violent storm brewing or blowing, a forest fire or two burning out of control, and a volcano spouting ash if not lava. There were probably kings and public officials misbehaving, and well-known public figures of all kinds getting caught doing scandalous things. There were probably any number of evil men doing what they do – *i.e.* plotting self-promotion at others’ expense. But Torah looks past all those things to tell us what was going on in the world that was really important, world history making, and destiny shaping.

Private Conversations That Change the World

What truly important event was going on in the world? The answer may surprise you. Far off the public stage, in a tent in the desert near Beersheva, a private conversation that would change the world was taking place between a man and his

⁴ The phrase is borrowed from William Shakespeare’s classic play ‘Macbeth’, Act V, Scene V.

most trusted personal assistant. The man in question was not a king. He was not even a politician. He was neither young nor handsome nor athletic. He was not planning the overthrow of any kingdom. He was not planning to wage any crusade. He was not plotting evil against – or ministry to - anyone. He was a simple shepherd - a stranger in a strange land. While he was by no means poor, he was also not rich by the world's standards. And his only desire was to, before he died, co-labor with the Creator – the greatest *Shadchan* [i.e. matchmaker] the world has ever known - to the *find a matriarch-worthy bride for his son*.

Avraham would clearly need Divine guidance. But since the covenant Word of the Holy One was at stake Avraham had every confidence that Divine guidance would certainly not be withheld. Hence Avraham called his most trusted servant, the one who was in charge of all Avraham's wealth, and said to him:

Yadeicha tachat yerechi

'Place your hand under my thigh⁵.

V'ashbiacha b'Adonai Elohei ha-shamayim v'Elohei ha-aretz

I will bind you by an oath to the Holy One, Lord of heaven and earth,

asher lo-tikach isha livni mibenot ha-Kna'ani

that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites

asher anochi yoshev b'kir'bo

among whom I live.

[Genesis 24:1-3]

Avraham then told the trusted servant most commentators believe to have been Eliezer of Damascus:

Ki el-ar'tzi v'el-moladeti telech

Go to my native land, to my birthplace,

V'lakachta ishah l'veni l'Yitzchak

and obtain a wife for my son Yitzchak.'

This will be the first time in Torah since Genesis 2 when the topic Torah will discuss the selection of a spouse. But please note that the entire 24th chapter of Genesis will be devoted exclusively to this subject.

Not exactly the stuff of newspaper headlines or nightly news shows, is it? But whatever else was going on in the world on that day – whatever economic

⁵ The phrase our English Bibles translate as 'under my thigh' is an idiomatic expression for a very serious oath [see also the oath issued in Genesis 47:29]. According to Hebrew idiom, children issue from the 'thigh' of the father (Genesis 46:26, Exodus 1:5, Judges 8:30); hence, 'under my thigh' is regarded by Hebrews as a polite way of referring to a male's procreative organ. According to tradition, what Avraham required of his servant was to place his hand *near the holy sign of the covenant* – i.e. near the circumcision site. (Saadia; cf. Abarbanel).

indicators were rising and falling, and whatever political intrigues were occurring – all that is long since forgotten – gone the way of all things *tachat ha-shemesh* [*i.e.* under the sun]. Meanwhile the world has been changed forever – and has been made a vastly different place – by reason of the private conversation that took place in that tent between and old shepherd and his trusted servant.

Avraham Deals With the Issues of Advancing Age

Our Torah reading for the day lets us know that the death of his beloved wife Sarah caused Avraham to do some serious thinking about his own mortality. The *aliyah* begins by telling us:

V'Avraham zaken ba bayamim

And Avraham was old, well advanced in years,

v'Adonai berach et-Avraham b'kol

and the Holy One had blessed Abraham with everything.

[Genesis 24:1]

We are not told that Avraham was *senile*, or *decrepit*, or *invalid*. He was none of those things. He was just facing the fact that he was *not going to be around this physical world forever*. Oh Avraham's mind was still sharp as a tack. His body and spirit were both still strong enough. But with Sarah's passing the reality suddenly hit home that the sand in his hourglass of life was succumbing to the pull of gravity at an alarming pace. He had lived 137 years; how many years could he have left? And what did he want to be the legacy he left behind for Yitzchak – and the world?

The recognition of the inevitability of diminishing health and death do different things to different people. Some people go into *deep depression* and become sullen and reclusive; others buy sports cars, go to rock concerts, start eyeing younger women [or men as the case may be] and try desperately to lay hold of the mirage of one last set of 'glory days'.

Some people just go with the flow and keep on doing whatever they've been doing for years; others spend a fortune on nip and tuck procedures and try to make believe that aging is only a state of mind. Some parents feel driven to micromanage their children's lives out of a desperate attempt to hold onto a sense of importance; others mentally write their children off as failures and ingrates, ignore them as much as possible, and dote on grandchildren. But Avraham is not just any man. He is the earthly partner in an eternal covenant with the Creator of the Universe. When he realized he had more days on earth behind him than in front of him his focus turned to one thing and one alone: the promises the Holy One had given to him.

Of Prophetic Promises ... and the Sometimes-Painful Processes Associated With Them

Beginning with the first sweet *Lech Lecha* of Genesis 12:1 the Holy One has been making amazing prophetic promise after amazing prophetic promise to Avraham. The Creator of the Universe has promised a very ordinary man that he would have descendants as numerous as the sands on the shore and the stars in the heavens⁶. All he had thus far on that promise was a down payment in the form of Yitzchak. Other than that the only grains of sand he was currently seeing were the ones seemingly flying through the fulcrum of his life's hourglass.

The Holy One had also promised Avraham that the numerous descendants he would father would one day possess all the land then known as Kena'an. All he had received thus far on that promise was the deed to an exorbitantly priced field near Hebron, in a cave of which he had laid Sarah's remains.

The Holy One had further promised Avraham that through the multitude of descendants he would have all the peoples of the world would be blessed. How would that occur? What exactly would that look like? When would he – or his son – or his children's children's children – start to see it unfold in real time?

The Timely Process of Preparing the 'Runway' for the Promises of the Kingdom

Receiving and embracing promises from the Holy One – or anyone for that matter – constitutes merely the first step of a long journey. It is the delicious *bon voyage* moment of one who is about to embark on a great pilgrimage. Receiving and embracing promises opens a new horizon to one's vision and a new door of upgraded desire to one's heart. The real test of faith comes afterward - in daily surrendering to and cooperating with the process that comes with the promise. The real test of faith is – in response to a promise of the Holy One – to prepare the prophetic runway for its fulfillment. That means changing one's thoughts, attitudes, opinions, conversations, reaction patterns, defense mechanisms and behaviors – in such a way as to be ready to receive and flow in the Kingdom Purpose as soon as the Kingdom Promise is fulfilled. With every Kingdom Promise comes a prophetic voice crying in the Wilderness areas of our lives, proclaiming:

***Prepare the way of the Holy One;
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley must be exalted, and every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places must be made straight, and the rough places made smooth.***

⁶ Genesis 22:17: "... ***I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.***"

Then the glory of the Holy One will be revealed.

[Isaiah 40:3(b)-5(a)]

Think of a young man's promise of marriage to his beloved. Immediately upon hearing the promise and accepting the proposal, everything about the young woman to whom the promise was made begins to change. Her life-focus changes – and her life changes with it. She starts a process of becoming first a *bride-in-waiting*, then a *bride*, then a *wife* and *helpmeet*, then an *eishet chayil*, then a *mother*, and ultimately a *matriarch* of a whole new DNA strand.

Promises – particularly the glorious prophetic promises of the Holy One - are wonderful to hear. Between the promise's publication and its fulfillment, however, lies a great sea of challenge and adventure. Seeing a promise through to fulfillment involves a process of co-laboring and partnership with the one who made the promise. First, we have to be made ready to serve as good stewards of that which is promised; and then the environment around us has to be made ready for the subject matter of the promise not only to appear, but to survive, to mature, and to flourish. Avraham therefore focused his passion, his efforts, and his resources from that day forward on something very unusual. Instead of taking steps to assure his own comfort or pleasure in his old age, he determined in his heart to lay the foundation for the generations the Holy One had promised would surely come. If all nations would be blessed through his descendants, someone besides his aged self was going to need to get busy making descendants.

The Prophetic Matriarch Quest Is On!

Sarah's death left the Covenant family with a gaping hole in it. What is a Covenant Family without its matriarch? It quickly dawned on Avraham therefore that his son Yitzchak needed to take a bride. Oh, not just any bride, mind you. What Yitzchak needed to find was more than a pretty face, an alluring shape, functioning ovaries, and a fertile womb who would cook his meals, share his bed, and nurse his babies. Girls meeting that description could all be found in Kena'an – and can still be found in virtually every city, village and tent in the world. What Yitzchak, as a son of the Covenant, needed to find was something exquisitely more valuable and rare. He needed to come face to face with – and capture the heart of - the one chosen for him by the Holy One to be His *ezer-kenegdo* [*i.e.* helpmeet]. After all, in order to further the Grand Redemptive Plan of the Holy One for mankind and for Creation generations of Avraham's descendants that had been promised but were yet unborn were going to need a true matriarch like unto Sarah. And so our dear friend Avraham Avinu - now a seasoned veteran of many pilgrimages – decided to set about on yet another great odyssey of faith. This time his quest would be to find the appointed *eishet chayil* the Holy One had in mind for his son. Somewhere out there in Avraham's world, he suddenly realized, was a one-in-a-million girl whose

worth would prove to be far greater than rubies. Somewhere, in some remote village, the Holy One had been designing, maturing, and preparing an *ishah* for Yitzchak – a lion-hearted, lamb-acting young woman who could be trusted not only to do good and not evil to Yitzchak all the days of his life, but to do it all joyfully, caught up in a flood of great, abiding, obstacle-overcoming, bondage-breaking, destiny-shaping love.

Avraham was not interested in finding merely an attractive woman with whom Yitzchak could pleurably procreate. He set his sights on finding and procuring for Yitzchak - at whatever cost it took - a *2nd generation matriarch* of the Covenant. The woman who would birth and nurture the next generation of covenant seed would have to be a wise and powerfully gifted yet humble and pure vessel who would see the pearl of great price and sell all she had to buy the field, and would then surrender all for the joy of the privilege of receiving, cherishing, nurturing, training up and guiding to maturity the supernatural seed of the Creator of the Universe as well as the physical, natural seed of Yitzchak, son of Avraham. Where – and how – could Avraham possibly find such a woman?

Eishet chayil mi yimtza [A brave, talented, strong, virtuous woman, who can find?]

Why all the Focus on Weddings and Marriage?

The story of mankind in the Bible begins and ends with a wedding. In Genesis the Holy One brought Adam and Chava together. In Revelation the Holy One brings Messiah Yeshua and His Bride (whose existence is undeniable, although her precise *identity* is highly controversial) under the Chuppah (wedding canopy) to pledge their troth. The books of Exodus, Song of Solomon, and Hosea all have marriage as their theme. The Torah was given as a *shitre eyrusin* – a vow spoken at a ceremony of betrothal (the meeting at Mt. Sinai). Yeshua first manifested His messianic authority *at a wedding* (in Cana of Galilee), and two of His most powerful parables were wedding parables.

In Genesis 2:18 the Holy One decreed:

It is not good [Heb. *tov*, a source or fountain of good and blessing; that which is not only good/delightful for a moment, but is capable of reproducing good over and over again, forever]
for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

Later, inspired by the Breath of the Holy One, *Shlomo* [Solomon] would echo these words, writing:

He who finds a wife finds what is good [Heb. *tov*, a source or fountain of good and blessing; that which is not only good for a moment, but is capable of reproducing good over and over again, forever]

*and receives favor [Heb. **ratzon**, a source or fountain of pleasure] **from the Holy One.**"*
[Proverbs 18:22]

There is something *tov* about an *ishah*, Dear Reader. Let's try to find out just what that might be.

What a Son of the Covenant Needs

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as "wife" is *ishah*⁷. This is the feminine form of *ish* [husband]. *Ish* and *ishah* are more than just generic descriptions of a male and female of the human species. *Ish* is a Hebrew pictograph of someone bearing the Holy One's [i.e. *alef*'s] *manifest, active Presence* [i.e. *shin*]; *Ishah* is a Hebrew pictograph of the Holy One's [i.e. *alef*'s] *manifest, active Presence* [i.e. *shin*] being revealed and made visible to the world [i.e. *hey*].

As Genesis 2 makes clear there is an intimate connection between an *ish* [the man who bears the Holy One's Radiant Presence] and the *ishah* [the woman who makes the *Radiant Presence of the Holy One* manifest and visible to the world] who is to be his wife. To be an *ishah* the woman must bring out and perfectly reflect the image of the Holy One – those aspects of the Holy One's own glory - which the Holy One placed in the man she marries. For Genesis 2:22-24 states:

*The Holy One God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept;
and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.
He made the rib, which the Holy One God had taken from Adam,
into a woman [ishah], and brought her to Adam.*

*Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.
She will be called **ishah**, because she was taken out of **ish** [man]."*

*Therefore an **ish** will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his **ishah**,
and they will be **l'basar echad** [for one flesh].*

Much as the moon catches and reflects the light of the sun so a wife who is truly an *ishah* will draw out of her *ish* [husband] the Godly light that is in him, will bask in that light, and will cause that light to be broadcast into the darkness of the world.

What Does the Holy One Have to Do With It?

Our society does not understand and therefore cannot - and does not - teach our children the value and preciousness of the God-ordained and God-centered union between *ish* and *ishah* that the Holy One instituted marriage to be. Our society has relegated marriage to the domain of *civil law*. We have bought the Serpentine notion that a license and a ceremony is what makes a marriage. We have, in so doing, swallowed a frothing cup of cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. What is much worse, we have fallen hook, line, and sinker for the even more blasphemous Serpentine

⁷ *Ishah* is *alef, shin, hey*. Strong's Hebrew word #802, it is pronounced *ish-shaw'*.

suggestion that what marriage is at its essence is a status conferred by society on people who seek societal recognition and a criterion for eligibility for favorable tax treatment and insurance benefits, as opposed to what it really is, namely a holy covenant designed, attended and jealously protected by the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

That is why in our society marriage ‘licenses’ are the province of secular court clerks. It’s just a matter of filling out a few forms and paying the requisite fees. That is why in our society wedding ‘ceremonies’ are performed by State-approved actors who may or may not even know the Holy One. You want to exchange rings and say vows in front of a clergyman? Fine. You want it done quick and easy by a Justice of the Peace? Sure. You want to say, ‘I do’ and kiss in front of a ship’s captain? Why not? It is just paperwork, pomp, and circumstance, right?

A License, a Ceremony, and a Kiss Does Not A Marriage Make

Wrong! Marriage is not a social status conferred by civil authorities. Neither is marriage an eligibility-criterion for tax credits, insurance benefits and leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act. Marriage is a Covenant. It is a partnership with the Creator of the Universe.

The truth is that only through consistent immersion in Torah can one get a glimpse of, and begin to appreciate, the beauty and majesty and spiritual meaning of the union of an *ish* husband and an *ishah* wife. Torah is all about what marriage is all about – namely, catching the rays of, basking in, and reflecting into the world around us, the glory of the Holy One.

Alas the divorce from the Torah of the Holy One that has been promoted by much of the organized church, by reform synagogues, and by our secular society has made God-ordained and centered marriage (and, consequently, God-ordained and centered family life and child-rearing) the most dramatic casualty of our age.

Most of our weddings in the 21st Century – be they in secular society, in the church, or in the reform synagogue – are simply not *tov* for meaningful kind of marriage. Divorce, infidelity, and dissatisfaction are everywhere. Our society has come to consider such things normal. After all, since we are no more than animals (according to conventional wisdom) we should be *expected* to behave like animals, following our appetites rather than abstract covenantal commitments. Or so society teaches.

The Torah Way – The Creator’s Plan

But Torah teaches *another way*, Beloved. Torah teaches that the covenant bonding of a man and a woman is *tov*. Parsha *Chayei Sarah* teaches that human men and

women who *sh'ma* the Holy One are Divinely empowered - and indeed Divinely led - to *tov* marriages. So let's see what Torah has to say!

As today's aliyah begins Avraham, the father of all who *sh'ma* the Word of the Holy One, is "*old and well advanced in years*", and has just buried his beloved wife, Sarah. Her remains are the first to lie in state, awaiting resurrection, in the bowels of the cave at Machpelah, near Hevron. And yet, Torah tells us that Avraham was "*blessed in every way*".

Sarah had been for Avraham *tov* - a spring, or fountain of blessing and good. But the fountain was now spent. And as Avraham looked upon the blessing of the Holy One on his life, he looked also at Yitzchak, Sarah's son - and saw that Yitzchak, though in his thirties, was "alone".

At this point Avraham received another revelation from the Holy One. He suddenly knew that while he might enjoy having Yitzchak all to himself, Yitzchak's solitude was not *tov* - not a spring or fountain of good and blessing. The Holy One had made Yitzchak, and had ordained that Yitzchak would need something. Yitzchak did not need a substitute mother to play Wendy while he acted like Peter Pan. He did not need cute young "babe" or a childish "crush" to play Annette Funicello while he acted like Frankie Avalon. Yitzchak did not need a temptress, a tigress, a dominatrix, or a shrew. Avraham knew what he needed. He needed a woman who would be something much, much more. He needed an *ishah* – *someone a lot like Sarah*.

Where to – and Not to - Look For Matriarch Material

One of the most important things a young man who is seriously interested in finding an *ishah* has to understand is WHERE HE MOST DEFINITELY DOES **NOT** WANT TO LOOK FOR A WIFE. Pearls are not found in pig wallows.

Avraham knew, upon looking around at the corrupt society of the Kena'anim, that though many young women there were bright and talented, and a large number were probably very alluring not just any woman would be *tov* for Yitzchak. Hence, Avraham started the whole *ishah*-search process by telling his servant:

V'ashbiacha b'Adonai Elohei ha-shamayim v'Elohei ha-aretz asher lo-tikach

And I will bind you by an oath to the Holy One, Lord of heaven and earth, that you not take

ishah liv'ni mibenot ha-Kena'ani asher anochi yoshev bekir'bo

a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell.

[Genesis 24:3]

Why no Kena'ani bride for Yitzchak? There were, I am sure, many attractive and eligible young ladies in Kena'an from which to choose. And since Yitzchak stood

to inherit all Avraham's considerable riches there would certainly have been no lack of interest. Why not just stage a 'who wants to marry a millionaire' competition?

Because Yitzchak is a carrier of the glory and the seed of the Holy One. Yitzchak's need was not therefore primarily physical but *spiritual*. For one whose purpose in life is to *sh'ma* the Holy One and '***teach his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Holy One, by doing what is right and just***'⁸ the only suitable wife is a "*wife of noble character*" as described in Proverbs 31.

The fact is that Yitzchak's destiny did not include - and could be endangered by - a wife from among the Kena'ani - however beautiful, enticing, or intelligent he might find the women of that land. "*If only Yitzchak could find a wife like Sarah in her youth ...*" Avraham must have thought. Such thoughts, of course, came from the very Throne of the Holy One. So, Avraham called his most trusted servant⁹ (whom Talmudic sources declare to be Eliezer although the text does not mention his name) and sets in motion the chain of supernatural events that would culminate (in tomorrow's aliyah) in the marriage of Yitzchak and *Rivkah* [Rebecca], daughter of Betu'el, and granddaughter of Avraham's brother Nachor.

Here are the words with which Torah records Avraham's instructions to his trusted servant regarding the task of finding an *ishah* for Yitzchak:

Adonai Elohei ha-shamayim asher l'kachani mibeyt avi
Adonai, the Holy One of heaven, took me away from my father's house
ume'erezt moladeti v'asher diber-li v'asher nish'ba-li l'emor
and the land of my birth. He spoke to me and made an oath.

L'zar'acha eten et ha-arezt hazot
To your offspring I will give this land.'

hu yishlach mal'acho lefaneycha
'He will send His angel before you

v'lakachta ishah liveni misham
and you will indeed find a wife there for my son.

zot rak et-beni lo t'shev shamah
... but [no matter what] do not take my son back there!'

⁸ As described in Genesis 18:19 this is the essential reason for which Avraham [and those who succeed to his covenant with the Holy One] was chosen by the Holy One.

⁹ According to Talmudic tradition, this anonymous servant was Elazar, mentioned by Avram in Genesis 15:2. See Targum Yonatan; Yoma28b; Rashi.

But ... Rivkah?

We will in future studies find out that Rivkah, the *ishah* that is about to be chosen, is ... well ... *far from perfect*. We will also discover that she and Yitzchak are going to *disagree very strongly* on a lot of things. Surprise, surprise. Perfection is not what a *tov* marriage is all about. And strong disagreements are not reason enough to chunk it all – much less a reason to settle for the first pretty Kena’ani girl to come along.

But, we must ask, since Rivkah was not perfect (any more than the daughters of Kena’an, in whose midst Yitzchak was living were perfect), and since Yitzchak and Rivkah’s marriage was certainly not without conflict and discord, why did the Holy One go to so much trouble to arrange for Rivkah of all people to become Yitzchak’s *ishah*? Why couldn’t the Holy One just ‘fix’ whatever was wrong with whatever girl Yitzchak picked out for himself?

This whole *marriage-ordained-in-Heaven* thing is a mystery, isn’t it, Beloved? Ah, but the aliyot for today and tomorrow provide the clues to this mystery - if we just know how to look. There really is, you see, something unique about Rivkah that qualifies her not only as a perfect *match* for Yitzchak – but also as a matriarch for people of the Holy One. Do you know what that unique something is? Hold that thought for tomorrow. Right now I think I hear a song!

*Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match;
Find me a find, catch me a catch ...*

Oh well, you know the rest of *that* story, don’t you?

Questions for Today’s Study

1. What do you think Torah means when it says in verse 1 of chapter 24 that even in the midst of his grief over his beloved *ishah*, Sarah, the Holy One had “*blessed Avraham in every way*”?
2. In today’s aliyah Avraham decides to seek a wife for his son Yitzchak. The course of events that follows on the heels of this decision will be used by the Holy One to bring to Sarah’s tent the next matriarch of Israel.

[A] Who did Avraham employ as a *shadchan* [matchmaker]?

[B] Why do you think Avraham did not just let Yitzchak (now in approaching 40 years of age) find his own wife?

[C] What instructions did Avraham give his servant concerning the woman who would be Yitzchak’s wife?

[D] Why did Avraham not want the servant to take Yitzchak with him to look for a wife?

- [E] Where did Avraham send the servant to look for a bride for Yitzchak?
[F] What did the servant take with him on the journey, and why?

3. In today's *Chayei Sarah* haftarah the question is who would be king after David. Would Adoniyah be king? Would Shlomo? Would either? The Holy One had decided the issue long ago, and His will would be done. But it did not look that way as we start today's aliyah.

Adoniyah, David's oldest living son, has declared himself king and has held a coronation ceremony with his supporters - including, impressively enough, the priest *Aviatar* (descendant of Itamar, son of Aharon). It certainly *looks* official, doesn't it? But wait! The Holy One has a plan to deal with Adoniyah. The Holy One has a plan that will result in the coronation of the man He has ordained to lead His people. Enter *Natan* [Nathan] the prophet and *Bat-sheva* [Bathsheba], mother of Shlomo [Solomon], stage right.

*Then Natan spoke to Bat-Sheva the mother of Shlomo,
saying, "Haven't you heard that Adoniyah the son of Chaggit reigns,
and David our lord doesn't know it?
Now therefore come, please let me give you counsel,
that you may save your own life and the life of your son Shlomo.
Go and get you in to king David, and tell him,
'Didn't you, my lord, king, swear to your handmaid,
saying, 'Assuredly Shlomo your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne?'
Why then does Adoniyah reign?'
Behold, while you yet talk there with the king,
I also will come in after you, and confirm your words.*

[A] Who according to the word of the Holy One through Nathan was to approach David first?

[B] What was this person to say to David?

[C] Who, according to Nathan's plan, would approach David next?

[D] What was this second person to say to David?

4. In today's reading from Shaul's letter to the talmidim in Corinth Shaul continues his explanation of the "mystery" of death and resurrection. Shaul contrasts different types of physical matter in Creation, and indicates that resurrected human beings are of a different type of physical matter than anything we know on "this side" of resurrection.

*All flesh is not the same flesh,
but there is one flesh of men, another flesh of animals,
another of fish, and another of birds.
There are also celestial bodies, and terrestrial bodies;
but the glory of the celestial differs from that of the terrestrial.
There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon,
and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.*

*So also is the resurrection of the dead.
It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.
It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory.
It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.
It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.
There is a natural body and there is also a spiritual body.*

What *four transformations* will happen to our bodies in the resurrection?

*May you be blessed of the Holy One in every way.
May you be the Bride selected for the promised Son.
May you be raised incorruptible, glorious, in power, and in His Spirit.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 31:10-12

*Who can find a worthy woman
For her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband trusts in her.
He will have no lack of gain.
She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.*