



November 14, 2020

כז חשוון תשפ"א

Parashat Chaye Sarah חי שרה Genesis 23:1-25:18
Stone – p 106 Hertz – p 80 Etz Hayim - p 127

Haftarah – First Kings 1:1-31
Stone – p 1136 Hertz – p 90 Etz Hayim - p 143

Shabbat ends – 5:31 PM

TRADITIONAL CONGREGATION

Rabbi Seth D Gordon – Rabbi.Gordon@yahoo.com

Rabbi Ephraim Zimand z”l, Emeritus

Marian S. Gordon, Executive Director – tradcong@sbcglobal.net

DAILY SERVICE TIMES—until further notice

Sunday—8:30 AM

Tuesday—6:30 PM

Thursday—7:00 AM

Shabbat—9:30 AM

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Traditional Congregation welcomes new members. If someone you know would like to receive membership information, please contact Chris Brown, Membership VP, at 636-288-5356

On This Week's Torah Portion – Chaye Sarah

This *parashah* contains the single largest narrative unit in the Five Books of Moses: the story of Abraham's servant Eliezer and his mission to find the right wife for Isaac. He sets out to find a woman who is by descent a member of Abraham's family, and by culture not steeped in the local Canaanite ethic; only such a person would be the appropriate woman to become the mother of the next generation of covenant keepers, the second matriarch of the people of Israel.

Somewhat puzzlingly for a Torah that is often laconic in giving over laws and commandments, this telling stretches over sixty-seven verses. This includes Eliezer's own retelling to Rebecca's family of his journey and his encounter with her, which the Torah has already described for us as it happened.

With a touch of irony, one *midrash* rolls its eyes at this expansive and repetitive treatment. Apparently, "the routine conversation of the servants of the patriarchs is more beautiful to the Blessed Holy One than the Torah of their descendants!" In contrast to the repetition of Eliezer's report, "the laws of Shabbat are like mountains hanging on to the Torah text, suspended by a hair's thread." There is only a hint or an extra letter or word in the Torah text pointing to this vast corpus of laws.

So why is there this extended retelling? The answer lies in a different question: What is the Torah's main goal in giving over to us its complex mix of laws, commandments, institutions, history, and personal narratives?

In the nineteenth century, Rabbi Israel Salanter asked this question. Salanter founded the Mussar movement to renew Judaism from within. He drew on the Mussar tradition, a literature going back to biblical times focused on human character development and ethics. This tradition stressed the Torah's implication for personal life, the spiritual meaning and spirit of Jewish observances, and the importance of internalizing one's relationship with God and the virtues prescribed in the Torah.

Salanter said that the Torah's main goal was to develop an ideal human being. In one of his most famous sayings, he stated: "The Torah came to make a *mensch*." Salanter insisted that the Torah was not primarily seeking to train people in religious observances, as important as they are; nor was it adequate religiously to learn the vast, diverse corpus of rabbinic sources. Rather, the Torah sought to create a human ecology. Out of its mix of story, narrative, observances, experiences, guidelines, and community building, a human being would grow. This human would be of good character—ethical, caring, not ego driven to stand out but motivated to be kind and helpful to others. This human would relate to God and therefore be humble and aware of their limitations. This person would be inner-directed—connected to people but not needing to curry favor at the cost of principles or values. The Torah's stories, commandments, wisdom, instructions, and ways of living—all were intended to nurture a good human being—with reverence for God, for fellow human beings, and for life itself.

To Salanter and his students the point of the Rebecca narrative was self-evident and absolutely correct. What should Eliezer be looking for in the woman who would exemplify the teachings of the covenant? What qualities would enable her to transmit them and inspire the next generation to carry on the chain until *tikkun olam* would be achieved? The answer is not physical beauty, not wealth or superior genealogy, not even wisdom or piety. The primary quality to be sought out was kindness and caring, so ingrained that she would respond to a thirsty stranger's request for water to drink. Although she had to work hard to gather sufficient water, she naturally and instinctively volunteered to draw water, again and again, to sate the travel-weary camels and livestock as well. The Torah drives this point home by telling and retelling Eliezer's thinking and considerations.

There are rabbinic commentators that criticize Eliezer's judgement. He should have first checked out Rebecca's family background which he knew was a major concern for Abraham. He should have been concerned that the unknown woman might prove to be haughty or a social climber who arbitrarily or on a whim did this one favor. Indeed, it would be wise to follow up on all the other issues. But given that the Torah is a covenant of ***hesed***—love, caring, human solidarity, striving for a better world, Eliezer had his priorities straight. Having a strong character imbued with kindness, caring, and generosity is the top primary signal of fitness to be a matriarch of this covenant.

Salanter insisted that becoming a *mensch* would not be a casual outcome of Torah study and practice. He called for people to set aside time and energy to develop their character and internalize their values. Reading and analyzing and drawing the lessons of the Torah's stories was as fundamental as mastering its legal literature. He quoted the traditional dictum that "*ma'asei avot, siman la-banim / The acts and experiences of the ancestors [as told in the Torah] are meant to signal and guide their descendants [to live the good life].*" The Torah and talmudic figures should be studied as role models, including learning from their mistakes.

Salanter and his students developed special personal development methods. They set up a list of character traits and values needed to be a good human being, qualities such as kindness and responsibility for others, patience, inner tranquillity, self-criticism, perseverance, and energetic pursuit of the good. Some students would concentrate on one quality, one week at a time. During that week, they would make a special effort to track every time the virtue came up and honestly assess to what extent their behavior matched the desired goal. Some formed small circles of friends who evaluated and gave feedback to each other on their traits and values. The point is that it takes awareness and much effort to become a good human being, even with the help of a good tradition. Conversely, without this effort, one can end up observant or learned yet lacking in goodness, fairness, or concern for others.

Salanter insisted that it was worth a lifetime of effort to achieve becoming a good human being and one should try to educate everyone in the community to this goal. Even if I do not succeed in getting others to that level, then it is reward enough if I improve myself—even a little bit.

By modeling ourselves on Rebecca, on Moses, on Ruth, we seek to realize the Torah's primary goal of making a *mensch*. Or as Salanter said on another occasion, "They say that the Maharal [Rabbi Judah Low] of Prague took some clay and fashioned a miraculous Golem to protect the Jewish people. That would be a great miracle. Yet, it is an even greater miracle to take any individual—a limited, flesh and blood, mixed traits human being, and turn them into a *mensch*."

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Yitz Greenberg



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READY – We connect you over the telephone with a community volunteer tutor who is using the same device as you – iPad, Android Tablet, iPhone, Android phone, Apple computer, PC.

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Women's
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Share **HANUKKAH HUGS** this holiday season!

Women's Philanthropy and Jewish Family Services are collecting new, unwrapped gifts for children who are in need.

Everyone has something to give!

- **Adopt a child (ages 2-18), or family of children, to fulfill their Hanukkah wishes**
Please email WP@JFedSTL.org to be paired with a child or family. We will share their Hanukkah Wish Lists with you. Reach out to your friends and family to work together to fulfill this mitzvah!
- **Donate toys, books, gift cards, etc. for our Hanukkah Hugs "Store"**
Your generous donation will be distributed by volunteers to Hanukkah Hugs recipients
- **Donations of Hanukkah wrapping paper, gift bags, cards, and tape are also needed**

Please donate on or before November 30

Gifting is easy and will warm your heart!

The following options are available for gift drop off:

- Shop online at either of the two links below or the store of your choosing and send your gift directly to the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, 12 Millstone Campus Drive, St. Louis, 63146, Attn: Jessica Wax
- Put your gifts in the collection bin at the Jewish Federation of St. Louis.
- If you have a gift donation that you would like picked up from your home, email WP@JFedSTL.org and we can arrange a pick-up.

If you have shopped for a specific child/family please put the identification number on the gifts or bag so we know to whom to distribute it.

Email Women's Philanthropy at WP@JFedSTL.org with any questions.



[**Amazon Registry**](#)

[**Target Registry**](#)

ANNUAL MEETING



Thursday, November 19 7:00 PM

Join us on Zoom to hear highlights of the past year (*yes, there were some!!*) and to vote for our slate of officers.

Advance registration is required.

Contact Marian to register

Join Rabbi Gordon on Zoom!
Something for everyone!



Mondays, 9:00 - 10:00 AM
The history of the Jewish people. Newcomers
are welcome to join us!
[Register here](#)

Wednesdays, 7:00 - 8:00 PM

A look at the weekly Parashah from both traditional rabbinic and midrashic points of view as well as modern historians. Although we would love you to join us for all classes, you can join the lesson for that week's reading. Recommended: the New JPS translation, but feel free to use any translation.
[Register here](#)



The 613 Mitzvot

**Kabbalat Shabbat on
11/13: 3:50 PM**

Fridays, 6:30 - 7:00 PM. (Time varies in fall/winter, check website for current week)

Abbreviated services (including L'cha Dodi; though not Shabbat evening services) and the singing of Zemirot. Benefits include spiritual ones as we enter Shabbat, congregational togetherness before Shabbat, and learning about what we are singing.
[Register here](#)



**KABBALAT
SHABBAT**

Thursdays, 12 - 1:00 PM. Bring your lunch!
More than a "good deed," mitzvah in a deeper and truer sense means, literally, command. Teachings from Sefer ha-Chinuch will be provided; this work numbers the mitzvot as they appear in the Torah, adding rabbinic teachings and the author's own insights. Recommended: Have a translation of the Torah with you.
[Register here](#)



**VIRTUAL LEARNING
WITH
RABBI GORDON**



PRAYER

There is a mystery in human hearts, and though we be encircled by a host
Of those who love us well and are beloved,

To every one of us, from time to time, there comes a sense of utter loneliness.

Our dearest friend is "stranger" to our joy, and cannot realize our bitterness.

"There is no one who really understands, no one to enter into all I feel";

Such is the cry of each of us in turn. We wander in a "solitary way."

No matter what or where our lot may be, each heart, mysterious even to itself,
Must live its inner life in solitude.

And would you know the reason why this is?

It is because God desires our love, in every heart He wishes to be first,

He, therefore, keeps the secret key Himself, to open all its chambers
and to bless

With perfect sympathy and holy peace, each solitary soul which comes to Him.

And when beneath some heavy load you faint,
And say, "I cannot bear this load alone," you say the truth.

God made it purposely so heavy that you must return to Him,

The bitter grief, which "no one understands," conveys a secret message from
the Ruler: Entreating you to come to Him again.

You cannot come too often or too near.

The God of Mercy is infinite in grace, His presence satisfies the longing soul

And those who walk with Him from day to day can never have "a solitary way."

Author Unknown (Adapted)

THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

The influence of each human being on others in this life is a kind of
immortality.

John Quincy Adams