

## Land of Our Legacy Sara Imeinu and Chevron Pure Goodness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

In Parshat Chayei Sarah, Rashi tells us that “all of Sarah’s years were equal in goodness.” This seems hard to understand. How could a woman who was kidnapped twice, who was childless for 90 years, who wandered from place to place, consider all her years good?

“Sarah died in Kiryat Arbah which is Chevron.” On a simple level we might think that Sarah died heartbroken at the news of Yitzchak’s death. But the Chatam Sofer gives us a different interpretation. We know that in order to receive prophecy one must be in a constant state of joy. Sarah was on such an incredible spiritual level that her prophecy was greater than Avraham’s. It cannot be that she died of a broken heart. It appears as if it was an earthly death of Kiryat Arbah, the place of four elements of man – water, fire, dust and wind. But in fact it was an ethereal death of Chevron, of *chibur* (connection) to Hashem. When Sarah heard that Avraham had sacrificed Yitzchak, her joy reached such lofty levels that her physical body could no longer contain her soul.

Chevron is the place where this world and the next world meet. In his eulogy for Sarah, Avraham said, “*Zame'ma sadeh va'tikacheha*.” She contemplated the field and acquired it. Sarah personified the merging of *olam habah* and *olam hazeh*. Everything she did was a means to come closer to Hashem. Everything was for the good if it led to her ultimate goal – cleaving to Hashem. This is what kept her going all the years through all

the hardship she faced. And this is why she was buried in Chevron, the place which personified her life. She passed on this lesson to us. A woman’s mission is to keep in mind that everything she does whether it’s shopping or cleaning or studying Torah is an opportunity to come closer to Hashem.

Chanoch was a shoemaker. As he fashioned his shoes, he would pray that the shoes be made well and that the person who would wear them should find them comfortable. This is how he found grace in the eyes of Hashem. This too is a woman’s purpose. She can find Hashem not only when she is engaged in spiritual matters but when she takes care of her children and works at her job and washes the laundry. Sarah was a master at this. She lived a life of *chibur*. She taught us to take the Kiryat Arba, the four elements within us, the passion, the calmness, the low points and the inspiration and connect it to Hashem. This was the secret of her constant *simcha*.

Before the *kohanim* did the service in the *Beit Hamikdash* they were not allowed to drink wine. In Shir Hashirim the verse says, “*Nagila v'nismacha boch*,” Klal Yisrael tells Hashem, “We will rejoice in You.” The pure joy the *kohen* felt while serving in the *Beit Hamikdash* had to come from deep inside him. There could be no external influences. The Maharal says true *simcha* is *shleimut hanefesh* (wholeness of the soul). The more joy a person has the more *shleimut* he has. “*Ein simcha k'hatarat haseifekot*.” Joy comes from knowing that one is on the right path.

Sarah Imeinu’s path was not an easy one. She had so many ups and downs. But that is what life is about. It is like a heart monitor. When a person is alive and healthy, the lines go up and down. A flat line means death. “*Yerushalayim harim saviv la*.” Mountains surround Jerusalem *Shleimut* comes from scaling the hills and the valleys. It’s transcending the high points and the low points with faith and trust in Hashem. *K'eiv* (pain) is part of life. The question is how we will take it. Will we remain focused on the *k'eiv* or remember that it’s all *k'av* from our merciful Father in heaven.

There are three types of people, the optimist, the pessimist, and the naïve person. The naïve person thinks life will always be smooth. The pessimist views it as dark and miserable. The optimist knows it will be challenging and has confidence that he will overcome it. Sarah Imeinu was the ultimate optimist. Her years were filled with pain and setbacks but they were all equally good as she knew they was bringing her closer to Hashem.

The *yetzer hara* wants us to feel victimized. But the *yetzer tov* says we can change. We’re not locked in. In Shir Hashirim, Hashem says, “*U'lechi lach...*” Go inside yourself, go away from the stigma of society, from the stigma of your family.” You are not a victim. You can create your own life. This was the strength of Sarah Imeinu. Her story could have been a tragic saga. Instead, she turned it into a life that was *kulun shavin l'tova*, that personified faith, joy, and ultimate connection to Hashem.



## Honorable Mentchen When Damaging Information Is Permitted

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

Although under certain circumstances, Jewish law permits us to speak *lashon hara* for a purpose, it never gives us permission to lie or exaggerate. There is a prohibition in the Torah, "Do not stand by your brother's blood." The commentators explain that if someone is being misled you have to proactively help him. *Lashon hara* for a purpose comes up a lot in the world of employment and *shidduchim*. The Torah mandates us to share information that can save someone from harm or significant injury. For example, if you see someone entering a partnership with someone who you know is dishonest, you are required to divulge this information. You should try to help the person, but remember to be fair. Stay away from mentioning anything that is not pertinent to the situation. If a *shidduch* is being suggested and there's a significant flaw that the other person does not know, you're obliged to reveal that information. When trying to verify information, it's fair to ask questions

about character and behavior from someone who has first-hand knowledge. But be sure that the questions are relevant to what you need to know.

Rumors as a rule are never positive. They often end up turning into lies. If you spread a false rumor, it is a violation of *motzi shem ra*, which is worse than *lashon hara*. The Talmud says that a person is not obligated to forgive *motzi shem ra*. Saying, "I didn't know that it wasn't true," is not a valid defense. It's as if you get drunk and get in a car and hurt someone. You can't say afterwards, "I didn't mean to do it." Someone who spreads rumors also violates the prohibition of, "*Lo sisa shema shav*." Do not carry false reports.

Destroying someone's reputation is one of the worst form of *lashon hara*. It is almost impossible to make amends. The Chofetz Chaim relates a classic example of a person who

spoke *lashon hara* about his rabbi. After some time feelings of guilt overcame him and he confessed. He asked the rabbi how he could rectify his mistake. The rabbi said, "Take a pillow of feathers. Go atop a hill and release the feathers. Then try and gather them up."

Henry Ford, one of the wealthiest people in America, was a rabid anti-Semite. He spread rumors that the Jews wanted to wreak havoc on the world and that they wanted to destroy every religion except for Judaism. Lucy Davidowitz wrote in her book, *The War against the Jews*, "The antisemitism propagated in the U.S. after the First World War brought more damage to the European Jews than to the American Jews. The restriction of immigration prevented thousands of Jews from entering America when it was a difference of life and death." Ford's false rumors cost the European Jews their lives.

## Parshat Vayishlach Timna's Trajectory

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

At the end of Parshat Vayishlach, we are told that Eisav settled on Mt. Seir. The Torah tells us his lineage, which includes two brief verses about Timna. Chazal ask why is it significant for the Torah to tell us about Timna? The commentators explain that she desired to join the family of Avraham. She approached the *Avot* to convert, but was rejected. However, she was so intent on joining Avraham's family that she asked Elifaz if she could become his concubine. She deemed it better to become a concubine in the family of the *Avot* than to be a princess of any other nation. Timna was rewarded for her good intentions. The Torah mentions her name twice to teach us the significance of actions that one takes to connect to Hashem.

Mesilat Yesharim states that Hashem rewards a person even for the most minor *mitzvah* because "Hashem does not withhold the reward of any creature." Even a *mitzvah* with an ulterior motive, such as giving charity in order to be admired, will still be rewarded if the giver also intended to do a good deed. We can imagine how much greater the reward will

be for even a small act with good intentions. With all that we know of the greatness of Avraham Avinu, ask Rav Shraga Grossfarb, did we need a non-Jewish woman wanting to marry into the family, to make us realize his greatness? Unfortunately, despite our merit, we still feel a pull from the nations around us. During the time of Chanukah, many Jews were drawn to the culture of the Hellenists. If we look at the extent to which our monthly expenses include frivolous items purchased under the influence of the culture around us we can see that we too have been affected. The Torah goes out of its way to tell us about Timna to teach us that if the nations can see the greatness of the Jewish people, then we should appreciate our own legacy and stay away from the cultures of the nations.

Rav Bergman points out that Timna's *yirat shamayim* led her to want to connect with the family of Avraham Avinu. However, the patriarchs realized that, like Eisav, Timna held herself to be on a superior level, almost perfect. On the one hand she had tremendous spirituality, but on the other hand she was arrogant. Timna's lack of humility was so

entrenched that our forefathers calculated that she would not be able to take in the Torah's teachings to become part of the Jewish people.

The *Avot* could see that if they accepted Timna there would be very negative consequences for the Jewish people. They were right. In fact, Amalek came from her. They were the first to attack *Klal Yisrael* and cool off the halo of awe surrounding them. This *chutzpah* came from Timna. The Sichot Musar explains that Amalek's father Elifaz also signified this dichotomy of *yirat shamayim* and *chutzpah*. Elifaz was the only one of Eisav's children who had studied Torah under his grandfather, while at the same time learning the corrupt ways of his father. When he was sent to kill Yaakov he was torn by the disparate teachings of his grandfather Yitzchak and his father Eisav. When light fuels darkness the most paradoxical behaviors will ensue, creating a new dimension of evil known as Amalek. Amalek inherited that fusion of good and bad to the point where there was no longer clarity between what was right and wrong.