

SHABBAT LASHEM

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KOBI WEINER | BOGER DVAR TORAH | SHEVET NE'EMAN

PARASHAT CHAYEI SARAH | ISSUE 05

Volume 24
Issue 05

November 11
Cheshvan 22
5778

Shabbat
Times

London
In: 16:04
Out: 17:07

Manchester
In: 16:01
Out: 17:07

Leeds
In: 15:57
Out: 17:03

Oxford
In: 16:03
Out: 17:09

Cambridge
In: 15:57
Out: 17:03

Bristol
In: 16:09
Out: 17:16

Birmingham
In: 16:03
Out: 17:07

Jerusalem
In: 16:02
Out: 17:32

Parashat Chayei Sarah includes two kinds of tefilla or interactions with God. The first is when Eliezer, Avraham's servant and on his way to find a wife for Yitzchak, reaches out to God for guidance in his task. However his way of talking to God is uncomfortably direct, perhaps even chutzpadik and is not really a model of tefilla that is familiar to us today. Eliezer tells God to accept the following arrangement: If he asks a girl to let him drink, and she offers to water his camels also, then that girl must be the right person for Yitzchak. Eliezer's form of prayer - 'If I do X, and Y happens, then I know God wants me to do Z, is alien to us, and is even what Rambam classes as Divination - the conditioning of our actions on signs that we made for ourselves. The Mishnah Torah even explicitly cites Eliezer as an example of this issuer. However, the Torah makes clear to us that Eliezer's prayer was answered immediately, and his reaction to this was to be "משתאה לה", which Rashi explains as meaning he was 'astonished and confused' at the outcome of his supplication. Perhaps Eliezer was in fact unsure of his task and in his prayer sought affirmation from God that he was there to support him. This would explain him being astonished and confused at such a quick outcome, and why he excitedly told Rivka's family the entire story of his communication with God, and its successful result.

The other example of interaction with God comes later on in the same Perek, and is not as explicit as the earlier case. As Eliezer brings Rivka to meet Yitzchak, the Torah relates: "And Yitzchak went out לְשׁוֹחַ in the field

toward evening". The meaning of the term לְשׁוֹחַ is not clear and a matter of dispute. Ibn Ezra and others suggest it means he was walking amongst the bushes, giving an impression of being in isolation in nature. The more common interpretation, cited by Rashi, relates לְשׁוֹחַ to שִׁיחָה, 'a conversation' and says that Yitzchak was conversing with God. Some translations combine the two ideas and use the term 'to meditate'. Importantly though, the commentaries are telling us that Yitzchak interacted with God, not in a formalistic way but on personal, private terms. Based on this pasuk, the Gemara in Berachot 26a teaches that Yitzchak implemented Mincha in Jewish prayer.

To be honest, neither of the formats of prayer demonstrated in the Parasha are recognisable when compared to most tefilla today. That is not to say our modern prayer isn't and cannot be meaningful, but our default format is prescriptive and ritualistic. Although we cannot condition our love of God on a response from God, like Eliezer, it's alright to be direct with God and desire some affirmation that God is with us. And although it's often necessary to daven communally, like Yitzchak, we can try and make our prayer personal and spontaneous. Regular tefilla is something I sometimes find difficult to connect to, and when a chanich asks me on machane why they should say tefillot they don't find meaning in, I struggle to answer.

Parashat Chayei Sarah presents us with two alternative ways of interacting with God, two ways that we can try and use to reinvigorate our relationship with God.



RAV AHARON HERSKOVITZ | RAV SHALIACH

At the beginning of this week's parsha, as Avraham attempts to procure a burial place for Sarah, he speaks to the local תחם, saying (Bereishit 23:4): גר ותושב אנכי עמכם, "I am a stranger and a resident among you." Many of the commentaries discuss the fact that the two words Avraham uses to describe himself are opposites. For example, Rashi quoting the Midrash Rabbah says "If you would like I will be a גר, but if not, I will act as a resident and take the burial site by right." The Ramban views this as a transition Avraham has made "I am a stranger from another land and did not inherit a burial place from my fathers in this land, and now I am a resident amongst you..."

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ז"ל points out that though these two words of גר ותושב, stranger and resident, are often contradictory (and are interpreted as such by the commentaries), in the context of Avraham's speech it seems that they go hand in hand: Avraham can state that he is both a stranger and a resident. Rav Lichtenstein points out that this contrast is something that is more clearly felt by Jews living in the diaspora. In the various countries in which Jews live, there is a certain sense of belonging: we are brought up with certain aspects of the local culture, proudly participate in civic and national spheres, and have our adopted countries be an integral part of our identity. We state proudly: we are תושבים, we are residents, connected to the goings-on in our country. However, there is also a certain feeling of זרות וגרות, of being a stranger, of being different and not completely fitting in as part of the national fabric. This feeling is central in ensuring that we maintain our unique identity as part of Am Yisrael.

In Israel, this dialectic does not exist, with Jews being able to feel a part of national life without inherent contradictions between different parts of their identity. Jews can participate in local and national events and feel no contradiction with their identity as Jews- נהפוך הוא - the opposite is true!- participation in these spheres is a deep expression of being part of Am Yisrael.

Rav Lichtenstein goes on to explain that this dialectic between גר ותושב is also meant to be a part of our spiritual and religious lives. We need to be connected to physical reality, to be a part of this world. As mentioned in previous weeks' divrei Torah, part of our religious mission in this world is לעבדה ולשמרה, to work and guard it. However, we stand at danger at being overly involved, of focusing solely on this world and what occurs in it, of feeling utterly and completely like תושבים, like residents. We need to be able to balance this out with a feeling of זרות and גרות, of being a stranger and not being completely at home in this world. To realise that this world is not our sole focus, but that we need to have our gaze focused upward. Just as Hashem states that God is focused on this world and the Beit HaMikdash specifically, והיו עיני ולבי שם כל הימים, "And My eyes and heart will be there always" (Melachim 1 9:3), so too must we say the same about our focus on the heavens and spiritual matters והיו עיני ולבי שם כל הימים. This feeling of strangerhood in this world is necessary to help propel us to spiritual and religious growth.

Shabbat Shalom to all.

COMMUNITY UPDATES

BALFOUR 100 LIST

This past week we marked 100 years since the Balfour Declaration. To mark this event, The Jewish News and The Jewish Agency for Israel UK in association with the UJIA put together a list of British Olim whose efforts we celebrate and a list of British Olim whose lives we commemorate.

We at Bnei Akiva stand in gratitude for all that our Bogrim have contributed to Israel. Across this list of 100 Olim, you will find 22 Bogrim of Bnei Akiva who must be held as an inspiration to us all. On this list we also remember Esther Cailingold, Yehuda Avner, Asher Kaufman, Marc Weinberg and our founder Arieh Handler.

For centuries, Jews looked forward to a return to our native homeland and 100 years ago, was the first time that a Nation State supported Jewish self determination within Israel. This landmark event, should

be celebrated as a time where the dreams of the Zionist revolutionaries slowly turned into realities.

EVENTS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Full details of all our events are available on our Facebook page, or call the Bayit on 020 8209 1319 to speak to one of the team.

Winter Machane applications close on the 14th November.

To apply contact hannah@bauk.org
Shabbat Bogrim is the 24rd and 25th of November. Cost: £15.00. At: Stoke-on-Trent. With a special program for Balfour 100. **For more information contact hannah@bauk.org.**

Pictured: Bogrim hit the phones for our annual Winter Machane phone around! Thanks to all the bogrim that helped out!



DVAR HALACHA: WEEKLY QUESTION

Feel free to email rav@bauk.org with any question you want answered!

Question: I will soon be travelling to Israel for a week, and wanted to know what to do in Shemoneh Esrei. In Israel they've begun saying ותן טל ומטר לברכה (asking for rain), but in England we only begin doing so on December 4th or 5th (depending on the year). What should I say in my Shemoneh Esrei? Can I be a chazzan?

Answer: There are a few different opinions regarding whether a traveller is supposed to follow the custom in Eretz Yisrael or in Chutz La'aretz. The first opinion is that their prayer needs to follow their own personal need. In other words, if a person's family is in England he should follow the custom of England even though he is

currently in Israel. The second opinion is that the deciding factor is how long a person intends to be away. If she is in Eretz Yisrael for a year, she should follow the local custom, but if she's only going for a visit she should follow the custom in England. The last opinion is that the deciding factor is a person's location on the 7th day of Cheshvan (when ותן טל ומטר לברכה begins to be said in Eretz Yisrael).

According to all of these opinions, a person travelling to Israel now for a short period of time should follow the custom of chutz la'aretz and continue to say ותן ברכה even when in Israel. There is a dispute amongst poskim as to whether such a person can act as a shaliach tzibbur, but even those who allow him to act as chazzan agree that in the חזרת הש"ץ he should say ותן טל ומטר לברכה, as is the local custom.

WINTER MACHANE 5778

Tafkidim applications for Machane 5778 are now open!

Applications for chanichim are now available!

Dates: 21-28 of December 2017

(precamp for Madrichim starts the 17th)

For more information, applications and brochures please contact Hannah Denby:

02082091319 ext2 | camps@bauk.org