



# JewishTimes

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**THE BIBLE**

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*Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim*

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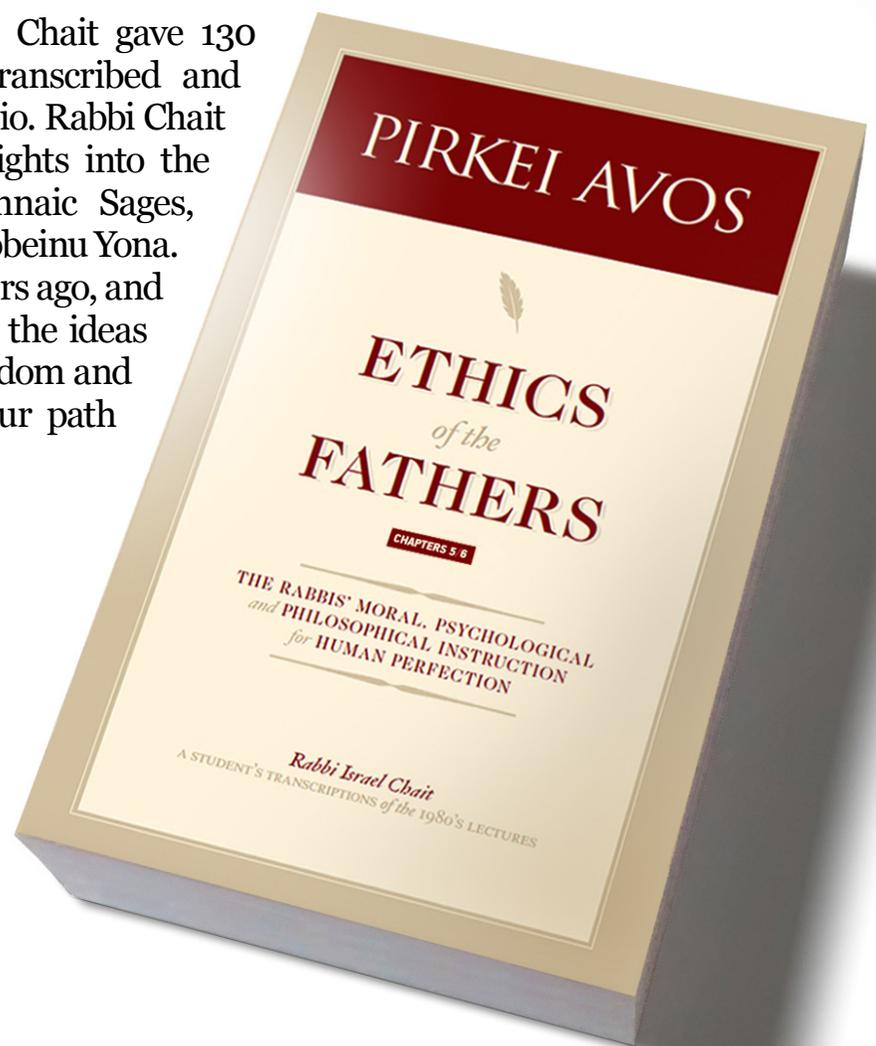
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## PSALMS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



## Fear of God & Speech

"Come, my sons, listen to me; I will teach you what it is to fear the Lord. Who is the man who is eager for life, who desires years of good fortune? Guard your tongue from evil, your lips from deceitful speech" (Psalms 34:12-14)

King David says that fear of God demands a withdrawal from social concerns—speech—which is engaged only in the company of others. Speech is poorly used when used to vent emotions or to impress others. Or, one can act with perfection and not vent his emotions, but contain them. The truly perfected person in fact need not contain his speech, as his energies already flow towards God's wisdom and not towards speech. He is unconcerned with social status gained through boastful talk (an imaginary status at that) or mundane speech.

King David says that one who fears God must first, "Guard his tongue from evil"—he is unconcerned with social life, so his energies are not moving towards the use of his tongue. And "he guards his lips from deceit" as deceit is the act of catering to the self without concern for others. One deceives others—lips—to obtain his goals immorally. Such people care about their pride and success and not about God's will, or his fellow.

Fear of God means one must abandon the ego, and thus, means withdrawal from the tool that people use towards this selfish end: the tongue. ■

# THE BIBLE GOD'S PLAN FOR MAN

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“Rabbi Acha said, ‘More pleasant before God is the patriarchs’ servants’ mundane speech than the Torah of their children, as we find Eliezer’s account (describing his encounter with Rebecca) repeated in the Torah, while many of the most central Torah ideals are only given by way of hints” (Rashi Gen. 24:42 quoting Genesis Rabbah 60:8).

This is truly perplexing. We consider what is most central in the Torah are God’s words. How then can a servant’s words—even a servant of Abraham—be more precious to God? Was not the Torah given for the sake of the commands? How do we approach such a question?

The first step is to note what is being compared, as the quote of Rabbi Acha is one of comparison. We find that “mundane speech” is compared to “Torah”, and “servant” is compared to “patriarchs’ children.” In both comparisons, what generates our questions is that the latter appears obviously more important: Torah outweighs mundane speech and Israelites outweigh servants (in the capacity that Israelites must keep 613 commands unlike servants.)

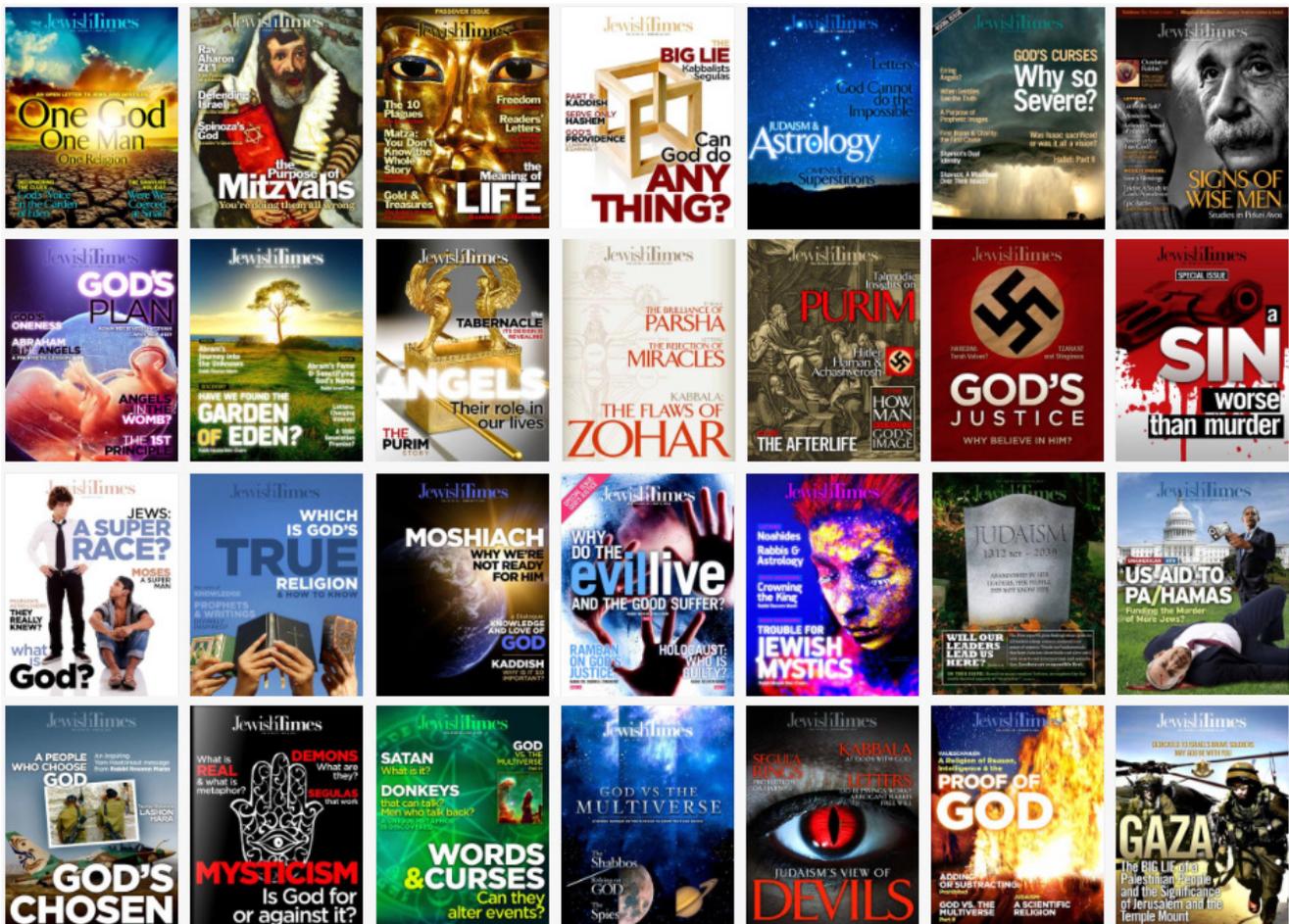
Rabbi Acha is teaching a central lesson. He intends to draw our attention to God’s assessment of personal character. He first teaches that what Torah repeats is for emphasis of its importance. The difference between the patriarchs and ourselves is that they followed God out of an internal realization of God’s truth, with no externally imposed Torah system. Even the speech of the patriarchs’ servants is replete with wisdom and their attachment to God was by no coercion. The Midrash says, “At Sinai, God held the mountain over our heads and He said, ‘Accept the Torah or else, here will be your graves.’” Of course, this Midrash is metaphoric. But it teaches that the event of Sinai carried such clear proof of God’s existence that our acceptance of the Torah was in a manner “coerced,” as if a mountain was suspended over our heads in threat.

Not so the patriarchs. They arrived at a knowledge and service of God on their own. This is much more precious to God. The Megilla reads, “They arose and accepted that which they already accepted” referring to the Jews’ re-acceptance of the Torah out of love, as opposed to their Sinai acceptance out of fear. Again, we are pointed to the concept that adherence to God has levels. Greater than one who is commanded, is one who arrives at the truth using his mind. True, there is a statement of the Rabbis, “One commanded is greater than one who is not,” but this does not mean greater in every way. Rabbi Israel Chait

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explained this to mean that when one is commanded, he must fight the additional rebelliousness against obligations. One with no obligations, but observes Torah, is great. But such a person has not conquered his rebellious instincts. However, this is a different question than our topic concerning Eliezer: adherence to God without coercion.

“More pleasant before God is the patriarchs’ servants’ mundane speech than the Torah of their children” teaches that love supersedes fear. Our ultimate goal in life is not to follow God based on fear, but rather, on love of God: the free will attachment to God through our awe of His wisdom. With no coercion, and unlike the idolatrous cultures of that era, the patriarchs and their servants followed reality and not imagination, they followed the design of natural law, psychology and all else God created. They understood God’s will that all these laws exist, and they adhered to them of their own choice. This supersedes the Jew who was coerced at Sinai, and today through Torah.

Thus, Torah was unnecessary during the first 2448 years of mankind. God designed man to live properly using his mind alone, expressed in the lives of the patriarchs and matriarchs. Only after mankind corrupted themselves through imagination and fantasy through idolatrous practice, was Torah necessary to combat all those false ideas that arose, and also provide man a jumpstart towards human perfection. The patriarchs discovered the Torah’s ideals using intellect alone, explaining why the rabbis say “the patriarchs observed Torah.” Of course, they could not observe Torah in a literal sense, since many laws are based on future events like Passover, so they could not celebrate Passover. And they could not observe tzitzis or tefillin, as these were not yet in existence. But the patriarchs followed the primary principles of Passover (monotheism) and tefillin (God’s unity). Thus, as they functioned perfect naturally without an imposed Torah system, Rabbi Acha teaches that they were more perfected than us. This is precisely why God’s Torah includes—and commences with—the lives of the patriarchs: they are models of how man achieved perfection based on his design alone. They reflect God’s perfect design of man, who, with intellect alone, could arrive at the best life.

Eliezer’s mundane speech and actions embodied perfection. He first prayed to God for assistance in finding a wife for Isaac. He asked for the proper values: a woman who was generous and

didn’t merely respond to one’s request alone, but one who examined man’s (Eliezer’s) need and proactively watered his camels as well. When he saw God responding, he thanked God.

Genesis 24:46 reads: “I inquired of her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ And she said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.’ And I put the ring on her nose and the bands on her arms.” But in fact, Eliezer placed the jewelry on Rivka before asking of her lineage, as Rashi teaches he trusted God was helping him. However, with his psychological awareness, he reversed the order (saying he gave the jewelry only after learning Rivka’s lineage) when retelling the event to Lavan and Bethuel, for they would question Eliezer’s judgement. Rashi writes: “He did this in order that they should not catch him by his own words and say, ‘How could you give her anything when you did not yet know who she was!’” That might ruin his plan. Thus, Eliezer anticipated his steps.

Eliezer also displayed confidence and no desperation. And he gave an ultimatum, for Eliezer said, “And now, if you mean to treat my master with true kindness, tell me; and if not,

tell me also, that I may turn right or left” (Ibid. 24:49). Eliezer said he would find another wife elsewhere if Lavan and Bethuel prevented Rivka from marrying Isaac. Although valuing Rivka’s perfection, Eliezer displayed no apparent need for Rivka per se, which gave him the upper hand, and his ultimatum left them no time to think, both contributing to his desired outcome. This is why Eliezer said these words.

The reason for Eliezer’s lengthy recount of the event finding Rivka, was to impress upon Lavan and Bethuel that God orchestrated this. His plan worked and they both said, “The matter was decreed by God; we cannot speak to you bad or good” (Ibid 24:50).

There is more to Eliezer’s words, but Rabbi Acha’s message is clear: Eliezer’s words are repeated in Torah to teach how a wise person follows God and prays to Him, and how he works with man using psychology and examination of all issues. He operates within the providential, natural and psychological laws God created and finds success naturally, and through God’s intervention. The patriarchs and their servants used intellect alone to arrive at human perfection.

God’s creations are perfect. Torah guides the masses, while few individuals then and now attain perfection even without Torah, using intellect. ■

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PARSHA



# Love & Marriage Which Comes First?

Rabbi Reuven Mann

**T**week's parsha, Chaye Sarah, commences with the death of Sarah. This marks the end of an era in Jewish history, the period of the Avot (Patriarchs and Matriarchs). Avraham and Sarah worked together to teach mankind the fundamental beliefs and behaviors of a "godlike" existence.

Avraham "called out" in the name of Hashem, the G-d of the universe. It was essential for people to repudiate the worship of the false deities they concocted through their imagination.

However, it was not sufficient to only recognize the real G-d. Our relationship with the Creator must transform us into a person who seeks to emulate the divine ways of justice, compassion, and kindness. If an ostensibly "pious" individual displays cruelty and predatory behavior, we must question the validity of his "religiosity."

Avraham and Sarah sought to establish the foundations of a special people who would enter into a Covenant with Hashem to become a "light unto the nations" and a source of true ideas and elevated behavior.

Sarah was not just Avraham's wife, but a matriarchal leader in her own right. She was a role model who inspired women to join the Abrahamic movement. She was the tzanua

(modest one) par excellence. She assiduously avoided the public arena, refusing to abandon the tent of her privacy, even to have a face-to-face visit with angels.

In the scale of Jewish ideals, none is higher than tzniut (modesty). Its outward manifestation is expressed in one's attire, but it penetrates to the innermost recesses of the heart.

A truly modest person has no need of or desire for fame and admiration. He has cultivated an intense love of G-d and performance of the "good" in general. Such a pure love of Hashem and eagerness to serve Him provides a profound feeling of happiness and removes any need for human attention. Few people completely attain this exalted state. But Sarah Imeinu (our Mother) was ba'ohel (in the tent). She is the role model for men and women who seek to base their service of G-d on the authentic principles of modesty.

The first period in our nation's development culminates in Sarah's passing. Although Avraham survived her by 38 years, the initial era of the Patriarchs essentially ended with the death of Sarah.

In reading about Sarah's burial, we can't help but notice the absence of any mention

of her son, Yitzchak. Was he at the funeral? Did he eulogize her? Did he engage in intense mourning?

Yet the account of Sarah's death is followed by the search for a wife for Yitzchak, which is recounted in excruciating detail. Why must we know the numerous particulars surrounding Eliezer's discovery of Rivka, the methods he used to persuade her and to secure her family's consent to leave her homeland and marry Yitzchak?

Of particular interest is the special "test" Eliezer devised to determine who was the right one. It would be the maiden who would accede to his request for a bit to drink but then, of her own accord, volunteer to water all his camels.

Eliezer's requirement indicates that he was searching for someone who embodied what the Prophet Micah referred to as "love of chesed" (lovingkindness). Not just the performance of kindness, but the love of it.

Yitzchak's wife would assume the role of the second Matriarch. Thus, she had to be on the highest possible moral level. Her perfection of character was also essential for her relationship with Yitzchak to blossom and endure. For neither Yitzchak nor Rivka could be attracted to "just anyone."

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

The Torah attests that Yitzchak “brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and she became his wife and he loved her, and Yitzchak was consoled after his mother.” (24:15). Why must we know about Yitzchak’s inner feelings? Is this not a glimpse into his private emotions, which the Torah generally avoids?

I believe that this information is vital to the story. We can only imagine the great love between Sarah and her miraculous son and child of old age. Yitzchak’s image of Sarah was one of supreme wisdom, compassion, and kindness, someone in whose company it was a joy to be. Her death created a void in Yitzchak’s life that left him empty and unable to be comforted. Commenting on the fact that his marriage allowed him to be “comforted” for the loss of his mother the Radak states that the Torah mentions that “she became his wife and he loved her” because he had excessive love for her because “he saw good things in her and tzniut like that of his mother”. And he was consoled “after he had been mourning for her and even though three years had passed since Sara’s death when Yitzchak married Rivka he was still in mourning but was comforted by Rivka who was good like his mother”.

Eliezer was keenly cognizant of what was at stake when he devised his “test” and prayed for divine assistance. He sought someone whose love of chesed was reminiscent of Sarah, who would gracefully enter her tent and take her place. Yitzchak’s great love of his mother could now be attached to

Rivka, and he could find consolation for her loss.

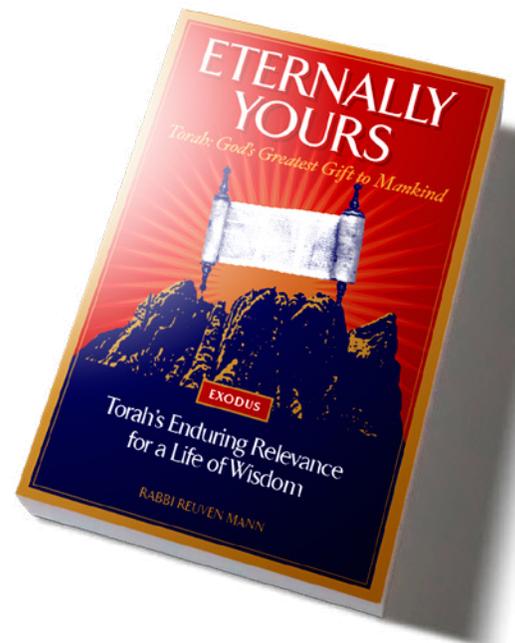
The Torah does not mention whether Yitzchak participated in Sarah’s burial. We should assume that he did, but that itself would not have conveyed the true extent of his mourning for his incomparable mother. The story of the search for Yitzchak’s wife follows Sarah’s burial because it reveals the full impact of her death upon her son.

There was only one person out there who could fill Sarah’s shoes and attract Yitzchak’s love. And there was only one Being who could make the arrangements for two righteous people so seeming far apart to be brought together. May we always search for the right things, and may Hashem assist us in our endeavors.

Shabbat shalom. ■

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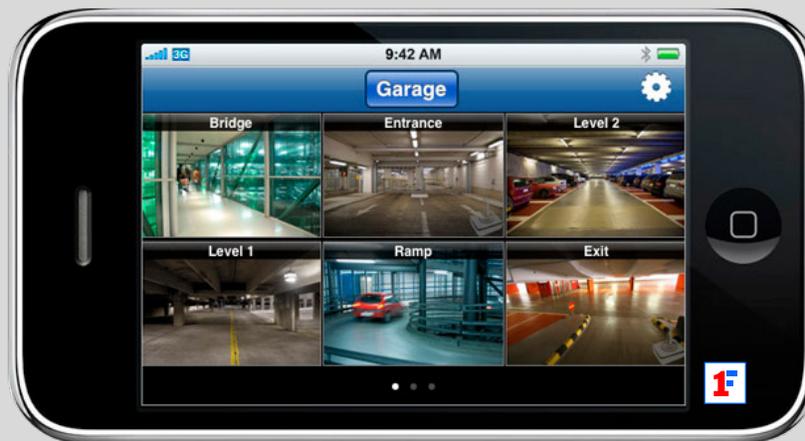
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