

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yaakov ben Yisroel Yitzchak, Jack Fefer. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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27 CHESHVAN

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH

Till Death Do Us Part

The Talmud (*Kiddushin* 2a) delineates three procedures for the formation of a marriage. One of these deeds is for a man to give an item of value to a woman. The Gemara derives this action from a similarity in the wording of two *pesukim*: The Torah uses the Hebrew term *kichah* ("taking" or "acquiring") to describe marriage (*Shemos* 2:1) as well as to describe Avraham Avinu's purchase of Efron's field in *Parshas Chayei Sarah*: "I have given the money for the field; take it from me" (*Bereishis* 23:13). In essence, the Torah derives the laws of marriage from the purchase of a burial plot.

By drawing a link between marriage and burial, the Torah clearly seeks to teach us something. Ignoring the humorous connotations that spring to mind, what is the real message the Torah is trying to teach us?

One of the more serious societal ills of

our time is the fundamental misunderstanding of what a marriage is supposed to be. Our "modern" world views marriage as a partnership between two individuals. In other words, similar to a business relationship, a marriage is when two individuals agree to form a partnership in which each individual can achieve more than if they were on their own. The issue with this vision is that as soon as one of the partners feels that the relationship is no longer beneficial to their personal interests the immediate knee jerk reaction is to dissolve the marriage.

The Torah, however, views marriage not as a partnership but rather as an everlasting merger. In a merger two entities become one. As a single entity, each part looks out for the interest of the relationship in its entirety—not individual interests.



This explains why the laws of marriage are associated with the purchase of a burial plot. After all, why is it that a husband and wife are supposed to be buried together? After a married couple has lived together happily for an entire lifetime, doesn't the death of one spouse sever the relationship? The answer, of course, is that it does not. Since marriage is an eternal relationship, a married couple remains together even after their deaths, buried side by side.

In order to demonstrate the true nature of marriage, the Torah derives its laws from a place that indicates its eternal character: the purchase of a burial plot for the "first couple" Avraham Avinu and his wife, Sarah.

Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha* we have an allusion to the custom of lighting candles on Friday night (Rashi on 24:67). Rabbi Edward Davis of Young Israel of Hollywood describes the power of this custom with the following anecdote:

Back in the mid-nineties, a Jewish advertising executive in New York

came up with an idea: what if the New York Times – considered the world's most prestigious newspaper – listed the weekly Shabbat candle lighting time each week? Sure, someone would have to pay for the space, but imagine the Jewish awareness and pride that might result from such a prominent mention of the Jewish Shabbat each week! He got in touch with a Jewish philanthropist and sold him on the

idea. It cost almost two thousand dollars a week, but he did it. And for the next five years, each Friday, Jews around the world would see "Jewish Women: Shabbat candle lighting time this Friday is..." Eventually the philanthropist had to cut back on a number of his projects. In June 1999 the little Shabbat notice stopped appearing in the Friday edition of the Times. From that week on it never appeared again, except once.

Resentment and Delinquency

Avraham expired and died at a good old age, elderly and sated, and he was gathered unto his people. Yitzchak and Yishmael, his sons, buried him in the Cave of Machpelah (Bereishis 25:8-9).

From here we see that Yishmael repented, for he let Yitzchak go before him (Rashi ad loc).

Rashi's description of Yishmael's *teshuvah* is puzzling. According to Rashi (21:9), Yishmael sinned by engaging in the most grievous transgressions: idolatry, immorality, and murder. How was it that a display of deference to Yitzchak served as an atonement for those sins?

Targum Yonason Ben Uziel (22:1) recounts the conversation between Yishmael and Yitzchak which led up to the test of the *akeidah*. In it, it is clear that Yishmael believed that he, as the older son, would be the rightful heir to Avraham Aveinu and his legacy. In fact, when Hashem reveals to Avraham that Yitzchak is to be his successor and the progenitor of the Jewish people Avraham exclaims, "If only Yishmael would live before You!" (17:18). Avraham indicates that he considered it a reasonable possibility that Yishmael might have been his spiritual heir.

Indeed, when the angels come to visit Avraham we find Yishmael rushing to and fro and preparing food for their visitors – even though Yishmael, like Avraham himself, had been circumcised only three days earlier.

Since it was reasonable to assume that Yishmael would ultimately succeed Avraham, it also stands to reason that Avraham spent years giving over the message to his son that he would ultimately be his successor. Yishmael undoubtedly felt that he was destined to take his father's place – but then Yitzchak was born, and all of his hopes

were dashed. Suddenly, he was shunted aside in favor of the new arrival and, in his rage and frustration over being displaced, Yishmael descended into the abyss of sin. Indeed, the Torah mentions Yishmael's sins in the same *possuk* (21:9) as his relationship with Yitzchak, indicating that his aberrant behavior stemmed from a single cause: his resentment at being replaced as his father's heir.

Although the sins Yishmael committed were the three cardinal transgressions of the Torah, he was not driven by a warped ideology or a lust for immorality. The Torah describes his sins with the word *metzachek*, which literally means "mocking." While this word is an allusion to each of the three cardinal sins, it also indicates the root cause of Yishmael's transgression: He denigrated the Torah's values and its morals became cheap in his eyes as a result of his anger at being replaced by Yitzchak.

One of the principles of *teshuvah* is that a person's actions are often driven by underlying issues – when those issues are addressed, many problematic behaviors are easily fixed. At some point, Yishmael became aware that his own sins were being driven by his ire at losing his position to Yitzchak, and he remedied that by treating Yitzchak with respect. Thus, Yishmael's *teshuvah* addressed the root cause of his sins, rather than merely the actions, which were only

symptoms of an underlying resentment. This is why the act of according Yitzchak respect was considered a full-fledged act of repentance.

Did You Know Continued

On January 1, 2000, the NY Times ran a Millennium Edition, a special issue that featured three front pages. One had the news from January 1, 1900. The second was the actual news of the day, January 1, 2000. And then they had a third front page, projecting future events of January 1, 2100. This fictional page included things like a welcome to Cuba, the fifty-first state, a discussion of whether robots should be allowed to vote, and so on. But in addition to the fascinating articles, there was one more thing: at the bottom of the Year 2100 front page was the candle lighting time in New York, for January 1, 2100. Nobody paid for it; it was just put in by the Times. The production manager of the New York Times, an Irish Catholic, was asked about it. His answer was right on the mark, and it speaks to the eternity of our people and to the power of Jewish ritual: "We don't know what will happen in the year 2100, it is impossible to predict the future. But of one thing you can be certain: that in the year 2100 Jewish women will be lighting Shabbos candles."



4000 Alton Road
Miami Beach, FL 33140

To dedicate an issue of Insights please email:
info@talmudicu.edu
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