

Insights into פרשת חיי-שרה are ipso facto insights into the covenantal community. The Parasha is a biography of the life of Sarah and it is a pattern and paradigm for Jewish History as well as Jewish destiny.

There were 2 covenants between Gd and בני ישראל. The first was the Patriarchal Covenant between Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Gd. The second was the Sinaitic Covenant between Gd and Moses and (again) between Moses and בני ישראל. This included the obligation to repeat the covenant before the death of Moses and upon entry to ארץ ישראל. The focus of the Sinaitic covenant is the commitment to keep the 613 Mitzvot. Our commitment to the Sinaitic covenant can be compared to the contractual obligation through which one can accept upon himself indebtedness to another. Similarly, בני ישראל have accepted the obligation to keep the Mitzvot of Gd.

What is the nature of the Patriarchal Covenant? On the surface it is an enigmatic covenant that contains a single commandment, circumcision. What did this covenant accomplish? What does it demand from the Jew? How is it relevant to us today?

The Torah mentions the Patriarchal Covenant when it mentions the Sinaitic Covenant in פרשת בחוקותי, referring to it as ברית ראשונים. The dual covenant notion is expressed in Mussaf on Rosh Hashonah, as both are mentioned in the blessing of זכרונות. Apparently the 2 covenants are complementary. The Patriarchal Covenant is the background and per-requisite for the establishment of the Sinaitic Covenant. The Sinaitic Covenant relates to human deed and performance. It teaches us how to act in all situations. The Patriarchal Covenant addresses human personality and character as a whole, the essence of the I-awareness, teaching man who he should be. The Sinaitic Covenant teaches man how to act and what to do as a member of the Covenantal Community. The Patriarchal Covenant tells the Jew how to feel as a member of the Covenantal Community, and how to experience being a Jew. It is a wonderful experience to be a Jew, unfortunately not everyone knows how to appreciate this experience.

The covenant was reached with 2 people: man and woman. From the time of creation and their first rendezvous, Gd addressed Himself to both man and woman. Both were created together, only together were they called Adam and endowed with the greatest of gifts, their humanity, צלם אלקים. Human reality is a dual one, that at creation transcended the physiological sex differentiation and extended into the metaphysical level. The very statement of creation, where man and woman were created together and in the image of Gd, contradicts the perverse notion that Judaism ascribes an inferior status to women. At the same time, it also cuts away the false notion that there is no metaphysical distinction between man and woman. Man and woman differ existentially, but they do not differ in terms of values (axiological existence). Both share the image of God, their humanity, צלם אלקים. Gd created a dual existence, man and woman, as they complement each other. The two existential beings together represent one perfect destiny.

This complementary nature and single destiny is the basis of the covenantal community. We can see this through the relationship of Abraham and Sarah. Both were equal parties to the covenant with Gd. Indeed, at times we might be tempted to think that Sarah was the central figure (see Rashi Genesis 21:12 on the verse telling Abraham to listen to the voice of Sarah, that Abraham was on a lower level, in terms of prophecy, than Sarah was).

The definition of the Covenantal Community as requiring both Sarah and Abraham, man and woman, is also seen at the end of פרשת לך לך. Abraham asks Gd to pass the covenant on to Ishmael, resigning himself to remaining childless with Sarah. Gd answers that Sarah, his wife, will bear him a child to be

called Isaac, and this child, the product of both Sarah and Abraham, will be the recipient of the covenant. Ishmael cannot be the recipient of the covenant, because he represented only one side of the Covenantal Community, Abraham, but not Sarah.

Another example is where Gd appears to Abraham and changes his name to indicate he is now the father of a multitude of nations. Gd informs him that the change is effective immediately, from the time of notification. Later, when Gd informs Abraham that Sarah's name has been changed, it is mentioned in terms of having previously been changed. Since the Covenantal Community required both Abraham and Sarah, it was impossible to change the name of one without automatically affecting the name of the other. Sarah's name was changed automatically at the same time Abraham's name was changed. Gd later simply informed Abraham that her name has already been changed as well. Hence their names were changed and they were selected together, and only together, could they achieve covenantal sanctity.

The Torah describes the connection between them in various stories. After Sarah dies, Abraham realizes that with the death of the mother of the Covenantal Community, his mission as father of the Covenantal Community is drawing to a close. All that is left for him is to act out the last part and walk of the historical stage, making way for others to pick up the mantle of father and mother of the Covenantal Community. Abraham survived Sarah by 38 years. Yet, after the death of Sarah the Torah tells us just 2 stories involving Abraham [in relation to his role as father of the Covenantal Community]. The first is the purchase of the burial plot for Sarah, מערת המכפלה, the second is the story of finding a wife for Isaac. Indeed, the latter story is more important in the context of the relationship of Rebekah and Isaac as the next generation of the Covenantal Community. The Torah says that Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of his mother, and she filled the gap left by the death of the mother for of the Covenantal Community. Once again there would be a father and a mother for the Covenantal Community. Abraham has now moved off the center stage for the remaining 38 years of his life, as he has entrusted the destiny of the Covenantal Community to Isaac and Rebekah.

The Torah says that Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and cry for her. Human nature would dictate that one would cry first and then eulogize. Crying is not mourning. Rather it is the spontaneous release of tension to a (usually destructive) surprise. On the other hand, a eulogy is a rational, intellectual performance that requires clarity of mind to evaluate and appraise the loss, and to discover how reality has changed. Abraham suffered a double loss with the death of Sarah. The first was the loss of his wife and partner, who went through thick and thin with him and with whom, together, they met the challenges of life. No one understands the bleak loneliness and destructive nostalgia felt by a surviving mate. Abraham felt that his whole world had been dislocated.

The second sense of loss was the uncertainty of the fate of the Covenantal Community. Abraham knew the secret that the covenant was entrusted to both a man and a woman. Now that the mother of the Covenantal Community had died, would Gd trust him to continue? Perhaps he had sinned and was no longer worthy to be the father of the Covenantal Community. The first thing that Abraham did was to appraise Sarah's contributions to the growth of the Covenantal Community, and to put in place a plan for how to continue without her. After all, Abraham was not alone in this loss. As Rambam writes, that they had brought tens of thousands of followers into the covenant. These people also felt the loss of the mother of their community. First Abraham had to orient himself to the loss of Sarah in terms of the community. Only afterwards could he break down and cry over his loss as an individual.

What was Sarah's assigned role within the Covenantal Community? What kind of a person was she? The first (enigmatic) verse (and Rashi) in the Parasha answers these questions. The repetition of the

word Shana after each digit in the number 127 is strange, as well as the clause at the end of the verse, שני חיי שרה. Rashi quotes the Midrash that the reason for the repetition is to emphasize that when she was 100 she was free of sin as a woman of 20, and as a woman of 20 she was as beautiful as a girl of 7. [Parenthetically, the Rav noted 2 questions here. We know that a woman is punishable from the age of 12, so why was she compared to a woman of 20 in terms of purity from sin, which implies that a woman up to the age of 20 is not liable for her actions. Also, we know that the prime age of beauty for a woman is not 7, but closer to 20. The Rav noted that while he does not like to alter texts, he felt that this Midrash would read better if it was inverted to say that she was as beautiful at the age of 100 as a woman of 20 and as free from sin as a young girl of 7.]

What kind of a life did she lead? What was the essence and substance of her personality? The Torah answers these questions by stressing that indeed Sarah was a unique individual. She was a 7 year old innocent child, with the beauty of a 20 year old girl at the age of 100. Rashi stresses that even though she was ripe in years (100), she was still a young vivacious girl. The whole biography of Sarah can be summed up in these three closing words of the first verse, שני חיי שרה.

The Rav mentioned that he would associate the opening Rashi in פרשת חיי שרה with (Lhavdil) the story of Peter Pan. Peter Pan refused to grow up and take his place in life. However, Sarah did not suffer from a stymied, under developed personality. She was a bold, daring and responsible person who, miraculously, did not allow the maturity of the adult in her to squash her inherent enthusiasm of an innocent child. She grew older and wiser with the passage of time, yet in times of need or crisis the young girl in her came to the fore. Rashi is telling us that the three time periods of a member of the Covenantal Community, childhood, young adulthood and mature older person can coexist simultaneously; they are not mutually exclusive. The paradoxical confluence of all three in an individual is a sign of greatness, necessary for leadership in the Covenantal Community.

There are 4 basic obligations in the life of the Jew. Study of Torah, Faith in Gd, Prayer and the Love of Gd. One studies Torah with his intellect. Not everyone is endowed with the capabilities necessary to study Torah. Intellectual endeavors are esoteric in nature. The more capable one is, the more time he has for study and the pursuit of knowledge and the more knowledge he accumulates. A wise person is called a חכם because intellectual wealth is usually associated with someone who has devoted much time to study, which is typically an older person. Maturity is required for the study of Torah. The immature mind cannot grasp the concepts of study.

Torah scholarship, indeed scholarship in any field, requires intellectual curiosity and skepticism. The effective student questions everything that the teacher offers him, attempting to refute the lesson in order to achieve a clearer understanding of the topic. The Gemara (Baba Metzia 84a) relates that after the passing of Resh Lakish, the Rabbis sent Rabbi Elazar Ben Pedas to take his place as the study partner of Rav Yochanan. After a while he was sent back. Rav Yochanan explained that Resh Lakish would argue with him and force him to support his positions and opinions. Rabbi Elazar Ben Pedas would agree with Rav Yochanan and would not challenge him intellectually. Rav Yochanan had no use for a passive study partner. Some people become vindictive with old age. However old age that is accompanied with a discriminating skepticism is a very important quality for the study of Torah.

When it comes to prayer, skepticism is an undesirable quality. [The Rav noted that the Jewish people discovered prayer, taught the world how to pray, and unfortunately many of us have forgotten how to pray. The Rav emphasized the importance of the Siddur in the life of the Jew. He related the story of the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Baal HaTanya, who as a young boy in White Russia reached the age where he had to choose where to continue his studies. He was presented with 2 choices. The first,

Vilna, was the center and pinnacle of Talmudic study. The second was the town of Mezeritch, where the Maggid of Mezeritch concentrated on the study of prayer and the Siddur. The Baal HaTanya was an accomplished Talmudist already, but he felt that he knew nothing about the Siddur and how to pray, so he decided to go to Mezeritch.] The adult, with the skeptical mind does not know how to surrender himself in prayer. He does not know how to generate the mood of despair, helplessness, worthlessness necessary for prayer. If a man does not feel himself completely dependent on Gd for his needs, he may not pray. The closer one comes to Gd the more he realizes how insignificant he truly is. Rambam speaks of man's movement towards Gd and with the sudden realization of how worthless he is, that he is someone here today and gone tomorrow, he recoils from Gd. Rambam refers to this experience as 'יראת השם'. This experience is the wellspring of prayer.

The sophisticated intellectual cannot pray. Only a child, the naive person who is capable of complete faith and trust in Gd can pray. An infant has unlimited trust in his mother. King David expresses this concept when he says that he puts his faith in Gd like the weaned child's faith in his mother. A child instinctively feels protected in the arms of his mother, sensing that the mother would never allow any harm to come to him and would do anything to make his life more enjoyable. A child has absolute faith in his mother because she has never lied to or disappointed him. This same absolute, child-like faith in Gd is required for prayer. In theological terms, faith cannot be applied to man. Faith is absolute, complete reliance without reservation that he will never be betrayed or disappointed. To have faith in man would contradict the statement of King David, **כל האדם כוזב**, all men lie. One can have confidence in man, but it is blasphemous to have faith in man.

Faith requires of the faithful the willingness from time to time to suspend his judgment, to surrender body and mind to Gd. Faith sometimes requires irrational actions without providing an explanation for the action. The inner child's ability to surrender judgment is required for the intellectual adult to surrender himself to God and pray.

The ability to suspend judgment was required of Abraham at the Akeida. Gd had decreed that it was prohibited to murder another human being, including the abomination of human sacrifice. One who commits such an act is punishable with death. Abraham had spent much of his adult life debating the priests who practiced human sacrifice, attempting to convince them to stop this horrible practice that contradicts the very essence of humanity. Abraham built altars, but he never sacrificed anything on them, with the exception of the ram on Mount Moriah after the Akeida. Suddenly, Gd commands Abraham to offer a human sacrifice. In this context, it was not important who he was to sacrifice, but rather that he was to offer a human sacrifice at all. Abraham could have protested to Gd, how could he do the very thing that he had devoted so much of his energy and time to discredit and prevent! How could he suspend his humanity and offer a human sacrifice? Abraham never protested to Gd. He suspended his judgment and humanity in order to fulfill the will of Gd. Abraham acted as a child, showing complete faith in Gd.

Gd does not ask us to make the same leap of faith that He required of Abraham. All we are asked to do is to accept the Torah and the Mitzvot without trying to rationalize each Mitzvah. We have no right to rationalize the Mitzvot, our obligation is to accept and follow, and like Abraham. show our complete faith in Gd. It takes a great deal of Chutzpa to rationalize the Mitzvot, to make them fit in our view and mood of the minute.

Rambam writes that Abraham deduced that Gd was the guiding force behind creation (**הלכות עבודה** (**זרה פרק א**). Rambam describes Abraham as an intellectual giant who overcame the foolishness of the idolaters that surrounded him to recognize Gd. Yet this intellectual giant was capable of suspending his

judgment when he had to faithfully serve Gd. Abraham was also the first person to pray to Gd, because he was the first who was capable of suspending his intellect to express his complete reliance and child-like faith in Gd. He was able to view himself as dust and ashes when praying to Gd. He acted the same way when called to perform the Akeida. The Torah teaches us that man must be ready to act as both an adult and child, and to switch between them at a moments notice.

Both Abraham and Sarah, the founders of the Covenantal Community, exhibited maturity and child-like behavior when called upon to do so. The Torah expects a member of the Covenantal Community to fight as a young man for his ideals, like Abraham did when called upon to save his nephew. Abraham was at least 75 years old at that time, probably older, yet he acted as a young warrior when it was time to fight and went into battle without hesitation. When Abraham studied the skies of Mesopotamia in search of Gd he acted as a wise old man. When he prayed, he did so with the complete faith of a young child. And when called upon to fight, he did so as a young and vigorous man.

What is the covenantal personality as defined by the patriarchs and matriarchs? One trait is the existential dialectic with which he/she is burdened, having an awareness of greatness as well as helplessness, of courage and self doubt. The three-fold personality that is so indicative of the Covenantal Community, that of child, youth and old person, is expressed in the opening verse of the Parasha, שני חיי שרה, the biography of Sarah. These three traits combined to form the essence of the covenantal personality as exhibited by the patriarchs and matriarchs.

In addition to the covenantal personality, the Patriarchal Covenant has also created a concept of covenant historical destiny that is distinct from historical experience. The covenant bestowed upon בני ישראל a destiny distinct from other historical processes in 2 ways: 1) causal determination and 2) dialectic covenantal destiny.

The main distinction between universal historical and covenantal dynamics lies in their view of the causality of events. Universal historical dynamics is based on the premise that an event in the present is caused by an event in the past. Event A begets event B. It is based on a mechanical notion of causality. The covenantal event should be placed in a different causal context, that of teleology or purpose. The covenant dynamic is sustained by the covenantal promise and the drive to attain a goal that temporarily lies outside the reach of the community.

Let us examine the relationship between the Jew and ארץ ישראל. The whole ארץ ישראל experience, including that of the state and the political pressures that it faces, cannot be explained in normal historical mechanistic terms. Rather it is a covenantal event. The commitment of the Jew to the land is not based on events that happened in the past as much as on a promise of a miraculous future when the divine promise will be fulfilled. In covenantal history, the future is responsible for the past. Covenantal events cannot be explained in terms of normal historical categories. You cannot explain in normal psychological terms the commitment of the Jew to ארץ ישראל. It is an irrational, yet unconditionally strong, commitment based on the covenantal promise.

The covenant has created a new concept of destiny. The word destiny conveys a notion of destination. The historical experience of the Jew is not based on the point of departure, but rather his destination towards which he is driving. The destination of the Jew is the ultimate eschatological redemption of the universe that will occur with the coming of the Messiah. The covenant is the force behind this destiny.

However, historical destiny can also be characterized by another trait, which is the contradiction of our historical experience. There has never been a period in history where the Jew lived a completely

covenantal existence. From the beginning of our history, Jews have always lived among non-Jews. Abraham lived among the Hittites. He dealt with them in economic matters. The modern Jew is certainly entangled and integrated into the general society. Consequently we also share the universal historical experience as well. We have no right to tell society that societal ills like pollution, famine and disease are problems owned by the rest of society. These problems apply to the Covenantal Community as well. The Jew, as a member of humanity, as someone endowed with **צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים**, must contribute his part to the benefit of mankind, regardless of the terrible treatment accorded him throughout the ages. The patriarchs and matriarchs were buried together with Adam and Eve, the parents of all of humanity, in order to show that there is no gap between the Jew and the rest of humanity. There is no contradiction between laws based on human dignity of **צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים**, and laws based on the sanctity of the Covenantal Community. The Covenantal Community adds additional responsibilities on the Jew beyond those he already has based on his humanity.

The non-Jewish world finds it difficult to understand this duality and therefore view us as an enigmatic people. For example, they view our commitment to **אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל** as irrational because they do not comprehend the nature of the covenantal commitment that is the foundation upon which this attachment is based. The extra commitment that the Jew has that they do not share or understand creates existential tension between the Jew and non-Jew. Abraham described this tension when he instructed Eliezer and Ishmael to sit here while he and Isaac travel on to another point. The Jew and non-Jew have common cause up to the point of **פה**, "here". However the Jew has an additional commitment beyond that of society. He cannot remain "here" as Abraham said. He must go further, to **כה**, to fulfill his additional covenantal commitment and destiny. This tension is worth enduring in order to be the maintainers of the destiny and legacy of Abraham.

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