

B"H

Parshat Chayei Sarah

Sarah's Judgment and Abraham's Mercy

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

Let us take a deeper look at the holy Name, *Adni* אֲדֹנָי, which we have already seen is the secret of Sarah's 127 years. This Name permutes to spell the word **דינא**, which means "law" in Aramaic and is related to the word **דין**, "judgment," in Hebrew. A central principle in *Halachah* (Judaic law) is that "the law of the kingdom is law [according to the Torah],"¹ which means that in principle, the civil laws of the state are to be followed by the Jews living in it.² In Hebrew this is written: **דינא דמלכותא דינא**.

Thus, Sarah symbolizes the might of the law. Indeed, the numerical value of **שרה** (Sarah) is the same as **דין אמת**, "true justice."³ Amazingly, the *gematria* of Abraham, **אברהם** is **רחם**, which means "mercy." In other words, the union of Abraham and Sarah is akin to adding a measure of mercy even when ruling in legal matters, in true justice.

Yet, we find that in the *Mishnah*⁴ there is a dispute around the topic of mercy as a legal consideration:

In the case of a person who has passed away and left after him [= has monetary liabilities] to a wife, to debtors, and to inheritors, and in addition he has assets in the form of a deposit or a debt owed him by others,

Rabbi Tarfon says: the assets should be given to the weakest of those to whom there are liabilities.

Rabbi Akiva says: mercy does not carry legal weight. Rather, the assets should be given to the inheritors, for all the others [the wife and the debtors] are required to take an oath [to claim what they are owed], but the inheritors do not need to take an oath.

Indeed, Rabbi Akiva's principle that mercy does not carry legal weight only applies once the case has been taken to court. But, before the case is brought to trial, between any two people, there is definitely a need to exercise mercy and compassion in deciding a verdict.

The Hebrew for "court" is **בית דין** (literally, "a house of judgment"). The numerical value of "court" (**בית דין**) is the same as 2 times "Rachel" (**רחל**), alluding to the principle of "the law of the kingdom [Rachel] is law." Likewise, the court is related to Sarah. The Torah says: "And *Havayah* remembered Sarah."⁵ The sages explain that every mention of "And *Havayah*" (instead of merely *Havayah*) refers to God and his Heavenly tribunal.⁶



GALEINAI PUBLICATION SOCIETY

2 Hausner St. • Jerusalem 96431 • tel.: 972.547.533770 • gps@inner.org

This is one of the reasons that we begin the reading of the Torah on *Rosh Hashanah* with this verse, because *Rosh Hashanah* is the Day of Judgment in which God sits on his throne of judgment with His Heavenly court.⁷

Just as the time to exercise mercy is before the case comes to court so mercy is required once a verdict is reached. The Torah forbids the judge from mixing in mercy, an emotion of the heart, during the deliberations that lead to a verdict. The reaching of a verdict in the Talmud is called *גמר דין*, which literally means “the end of judgment,” implying that from that moment and on the court should be merciful.

Amazingly, the value of “the end of judgment” is equal to “Rivkah,” *רבקה = גמר דין*. A true and just verdict is referred to as “true justice” (*דין אמת*, as above) meaning that it will remain steadfast and will be exercised in practice, for everything that is true does not change. Nonetheless, the Torah demands that we sweeten the verdict as much as possible.

It is important to note that in the Talmud, the well-known verse “Love your fellow as yourself,” is explained to mean that the judges, even when finding a person guilty of a crime deserving of capital punishment, must choose the least demeaning form of administering the punishment. In other words, even in the most extreme case, where a person has been found guilty of a crime so heinous that it warrants death, we are still commanded to sweeten the verdict in a way that will not unnecessarily demean the criminal. Thus, the secret of the word “truth” *אמת*, as written in Hebrew, is the letter א (symbolizing mercy⁸) giving life, that is sweetening the letters *מת*, which means “dead,” and symbolize judgment.

Unifying judgment with mercy

On his own, Abraham represents the principle of mercy, of judging with mercy. On her own, Sarah represents the principle of perfect judgment expressed in the legal idiom: “let justice pierce the mountain.” Symbolically, the mountain that judgment needs to pierce is Abraham’s mountain, Mt. Moriah, the Temple Mount, where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac and which he, Abraham, named “the mountain of God.”⁹ Indeed, the piercing that Sarah’s judgment pierces Abraham’s mountain symbolizes the maturation of the *Nukva* through the pierced hole in the backside of *Ze’er Anpin’s* chest, as explained in length in yesterday’s teaching (see also note 8). The union of Abraham and Sarah together is similar to the order in which God united mercy with judgment when creating the world. The sages say that at first, God intended to create the world with the measure of judgment, but he saw that it could not be sustained, so he added, i.e., unified it with the measure of mercy.

GALEINAI PUBLICATION SOCIETY

2 Hausner St. · Jerusalem 96431 · tel.: 972.547.533770 · gps@gpsociety.org

The Hebrew idiom for judging solely with loving-kindness and mercy is **לפנים משורת**, whose numerical value is $1225 = 35^2 = \Delta 49$. 1225 is also the numerical value of **זה** **הדין**, whose numerical value is $1225 = 35^2 = \Delta 49$. 1225 is also the numerical value of **זה שמי לעולם וזה זכרי לדר דר**.

The Hebrew idiom for “let justice pierce the mountain” is **יקוב הדין את ההר**, whose numerical value is 798, or the product of 42 and 19. 42 is the value of **בלהה**, Bilhah, one of Jacob’s wives and also the value of **יוכבד**, Yocheved, Jacob’s granddaughter (and the mother of Moses). 19 is the value of **חווה**, Eve; stressing once more that judgment is related to the feminine aspect and the matriarchs in particular (Eve is the matriarch of all living beings).

When we add the values of these two idioms together hence representing the union of Abraham with Sarah we get 2023, the product of 7 and 17^2 , and the *gematria* of the backside of the word **תורה** (“Torah”): **ת תו תור תורה**, indicating that the Torah is the true union of judgment with mercy.

Arbitration

Let us stress, that as in every union, the result is higher than those things which were unified. The true union of judgment and mercy is not mercy after the verdict, but rather arbitration. The sages say that arbitration is both justice and kindness at the same time, because true arbitration exercised by a Torah sage brings peace between the litigating parties. In Hebrew, the word for arbitration is **פשרה**, which can be read as **פה שרה**, meaning “the mouth of Sarah.” Once Abraham and Sarah have unified and become one, Sarah’s judgment is actually arbitration and Abraham was ordered to follow his wife’s instructions, as she was greater in prophecy than he. Once unified with Abraham, Sarah is described as a good (literally, kosher) woman, who her spouse is commanded by God to listen to.

The sages say that a good woman is one who performs her husband’s will. But in Chassidut it is explained that the word “performs,” in Hebrew **עושה** also means that she “creates” or “rectifies” her husband’s will. The true wisdom of the rectified and good woman is that she is able to influence her husband to follow the path of goodness and justice, as did Sarah for Abraham when she commanded him to send Hagar and Ishmael out of their household. Indeed, in Hebrew the words “a good woman,” are **אשה כשרה**, which can also be read as meaning “a woman like Sarah.”

Abraham’s sweetens Sarah’s judgment

Now let us see how all of the above can be applied to the story of Abraham and Sarah. In last week’s *parshah*, *Vayeira*, Sarah judged truthfully that there was no room for

GALEINAI PUBLICATION SOCIETY

2 Hausner St. · Jerusalem 96431 · tel.: 972.547.533770 · gps@gpsociety.org

Ishmael in Abraham's household. This was true judgment. She demanded that Abraham cast Hagar and Ishmael out of their home. Abraham found this too difficult. After all, Ishmael was his son too and this contradicted his natural feeling of compassion and mercy. But, the Almighty called out to Abraham and commanded him: "Everything that Sarah tells you, you must listen to her voice."¹⁰ Abraham proceeded to do as Sarah commanded him, but first "Abraham woke early in the morning; he took bread and a skin of water. He gave them to Hagar; he placed them on her shoulder; and the boy, and he sent her away." Reading this verse, the sages teach that Abraham's household was merciful.¹¹ How is it possible that providing Hagar with bread and water alone shows mercy? The commentaries on the Midrash answer that God did not command Abraham to give Hagar or Yishmael anything at all. The just verdict was that they should be sent away without anything. But, Abraham showed mercy after the verdict was given and cushioned its execution by providing them with enough food to get to the nearest city, Be'er Sheva. Indeed, as the *Seforno* says, from the words "he sent her away," we learn that he even escorted them on their way (it was Hagar who later got lost).

The Arizal explains the following about the relationship between Sarah and Hagar:¹²

Know that Sarah and Hagar correspond to the brain and its membranes, and just as the membranes precede the brain, so Hagar gave birth before Sarah.... Indeed, the gematria of Hagar [הגֵר] is 208, the same as the *gematria* of Isaac [יִצְחָק], both of them represent judgment. For the membranes are harsh judgments. The ancient kings [the *sefirot* of the World of Chaos] died because they were not sweetened and they were from the root of evil, from Cain. Thus, Sarah placed an evil eye on Hagar's [first] pregnancy and she miscarried, because that child was only from the aspect of evil.... Sarah wanted to sweeten [Hagar's second pregnancy] with goodness and to augment the good and submit the evil, and so Abraham told her: "[Here is your maidservant,] do with her whatever you see to be good," and the stress here is on the "good." This was the reason that Sarah tormented Hagar, in order to submit the evil in her and to strengthen the good. And this is also why the angel told Hagar, "Return to your mistress and be tormented by her."

We see from the Arizal's explanation that even in the pregnancy of Ishmael, it was Abraham's mercy that was able to sweeten the harsh judgment that was part of Sarah's character. While at first Sarah had cast an evil eye on Hagar causing her to miscarry, the second time, thanks to Abraham's merciful nature, she was able to use the harsh judgments in a constructive way so as to rectify Hagar (at least to some extent).

(Based on the Daily Dvar Torah from Monday, 18th Cheshvan, 5768 – October 30, 2007)

¹. *Baba Kama* 113b. This principle was stated by Shmu'el, one of the greatest of the first generation Talmudic scholars in Babylon.

2. According to many authorities, this general principle only applies outside the Land of Israel.

3. See *Avot* 3:16. In *Sanhedrin* 7a we find: "Every judge who rules by true justice brings the Divine Presence to dwell in the Jewish people..." The verb "dwell," *בשרה*, in Hebrew derives from the same etymological source as the letters of "Sarah," *שרה*.

4. *Ketubot* 9:2.

5. Genesis 21:1.

6. *Shemot Rabbah* 12:4.

7. See also <http://www.inner.org/parshah/deuteronomy/nitzavim/nitzavim-68.php>.

8. The only *ס* in the names of the *sefirot* appears in "beauty," *תפארת* (*tiferet*). It is its middle letter. Since beauty corresponds to the torso, the middle letter corresponds to the midpoint of the torso. From the backside of the exact middle of the torso, the feminine *partzuf*, the *Nukva*, which is all judgment, begins to mature, as explained in length in yesterday's teaching. Thus, the *ס* of mercy comes to give life to the *Nukva*, who is described as "her feet descend into death" (Proverbs 5:5).

9. Genesis 22:14.

10. *Ibid.* 21:12.

11. *Bereisheet Rabbah* 53:13.

12. *Sha'ar Hapsukim, Lech Lecha*. Rashi (on *Bereisheet Rabbah* 53:13) recounts a similar event. Sarah placed an evil eye on Ishmael causing him as a 27 year old man to look frail and small as a three year old. By giving Hagar bread and water, Abraham blessed Ishmael with the power to grow strong and survive.