

Weekly Shiur

13 Cheshvan 5773

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(Notes taken during the shiur by Moshe Genuth. Not reviewed by Harav Ginsburgh)

We are here in honor of the yahrzeit of Rachel Imeinu. The parashah this week is about Sarah, and given that we should live with the times, as the Alter Rebbe taught, we should see what Sarah and Rachel have in common. Both Rachel and Sarah sacrificed themselves for the Jewish people. Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin and Sarah passed away during the Akeida, while she passed away, because of her passing, Isaac was saved, also because he was a soul from the feminine side of reality who had no power to live in the world, to be sustained and thanks to Sarah's self sacrifice he received a new soul during the Akeidah, a masculine soul who could marry and give birth to Jacob. So both Rachel and Sarah passed away in self-sacrifice, Rachel giving birth to the twelfth tribe, Benjamin, completing Jacob. Sarah and Rachel were both barren and the fact that they merited having children in the end was a miracle.

Everything follows the beginning, the first barren woman was Sarah, ותהי שרי עקרה אין, ליה ולד, she was barren without child, from the very first time we meet her, the first Jewish woman is barren. The verse doesn't just say that she was barren, but that she was also without child. The sages explain that this means that she had no "child-bearing organ," she has no possibility of having children because he had no womb. So the fact that she gave birth is a double miracle. She gave birth to Isaac twice, once physically when she was 90 and then again spiritually when she was 127.

The first chapter of Hallel, with which we praise Hashem for the miracle of redeeming us from Egypt, ends with the verse, "The mistress of the house, the mother of the children is joyous, Haleluyah" (מושיבי עקרת הבית אם הבנים שמחה הללויה). The phrase here, עקרת הבית, is not סמיכות, the way we mean it today. Today we would probably think to translate this phrase as, "the mistress of the house." But, actually the word עקרת here stands by itself, just as there are other words like, ממלכת (kingdom), etc. Here it means that she is "the barren woman," meaning that this should be translated as, "The barren woman in the house is set down, the mother of the children is joyous." God sets her down and gives her children. He makes her a home.

Let's see a few beautiful gematriot. We said that עקרת is a singular form appearing only once in the entire Tanach. Its value is 770, a very important number especially for Lubavitcher's. But, we know that 770 is also פרצת, You shall spread forth. What does it mean that a girl "spreads forth?" It means having many children. There are four corners

to the world and they correspond to Jacob's four wives, this verse "You shall spread forth" was said about Jacob, and each wife had on average 3 children. This verb root also appears in reference to Peretz, Yehudah's son from whom the Mashiach comes. Indeed, 770 also equals "Beit Mashiach" (בית משיח). So this is very fitting. To have children is to make a house, and what kind of house? The house of Mashiach. With every child the woman should have a feeling that she is about to give birth, that she is sacrificing herself in order to bring into the world another spark of Mashiach.

Giving birth is more meaningful when a woman was first barren. In Chassidut, there is an explanation for why all the great women in Judaism were barren. Sarah who was the first barren woman includes them all. Then it says that Rebbeccah was barren, then Rachel, then Channah (Samuel's mother). There is one other woman about whom it says she was barren, the wife of Mano'ach, Samson's mother. By her the word "barren" (עקרה) even appears twice, apparently she was more barren than usual. She merited having a son who was the Mashiach from the world of Chaos. We know that the Messianic formula is lights of chaos in rectified vessels. Samson had the most lights of chaos, but he didn't have enough rectified vessels. When the Philistines captured him, they took him so that he would "play before them," meaning that he was displayed in their stadium. The Arizal says that to play before them (וישחק) is actually related to Isaac. His name appears in this form 4 times in the Tanach. So there is a connection between Isaac and Samson, and apparently there is a connection between all four men who were born after bareness. Why were these women barren?

One of the explanations the Rebbe gives is that lights of chaos are the feeling of "running" (רצוא) in the soul, like the fiery angels that are running and returning. If there is too much running it causes the soul to depart from the body. Still, every Jew has a true yearning only for Hashem, to be included only within God, especially a righteous woman. There is a verse that reads, למען יזמרך כבוד ולא ידום. The Zohar says that the little light below is always yearning for the large light above. Like the woman who is always yearning for her husband (ואל אישך תשוקתך). She has a tremendous yearning to be included and swallowed upon within the Divine, and because of this experience of constantly running to Hashem, she cannot give birth. But, there was not enough "return" (שוב). That is why the pasuk in Tehilim says, מושיבי עקרת הבית, the barren woman is returned, made to sit down, to return to her source. Like the Zohar says, as much as the little flame is yearning to reach above it has to settle down and connect below too. Who is her son? The Mashiach! Who was the first joyous person, Isaac (יצחק). Abraham too laughed (out of his faith) that he would have a son at 100 years of age. To laugh is the true expression of great joy in the soul. So God told him to name his son Isaac, meaning "he shall laugh,"

so clearly Isaac's essence is laughter and joy. Indeed he is the embodiment of "the mother of the children is joyous." The first Jewish child, Isaac, is the one that all the other children should come after, in every home, the first son should bring joy and laughter. That is the Mashiach. In Proverbs it says that, "A wise son will make his father joyful" (בן חכם ישמח אב) and the word ישמח has the same letters as Mashiach (משיח). At first Isaac's soul was drawn only from his mother, as it says, And behold a son to Sarah your wife (and not to Abraham). But, at the Akeidah he also received a soul from his father's masculine side.

This is the first introduction, that every first born child should be Isaac, he should be able to take these lights of chaos and place them into rectified vessels, i.e., Torah and mitzvot. To fill the world with light, with love of Am Yisrael so that the light reach all four corners of the world. Abraham was also a Messianic figure, but because of Isaac's joy, Abraham realized that the true Messianic figure was his son. That is why it says that in the future when the Mashiach comes he will call Isaac "our father," not Abraham and not Jacob. We have to understand the special essence that Isaac has that places him in this special status for the Mashiach.

Let's return to Abraham's beginnings. Two parashot in the Torah are dedicated to his story, Lech lecha and Vayeira: Walking and God revealing Himself to Abraham. The Tzemach Tzedek once cried about why God revealed himself to Abraham and not to us. The main part of Vayeira is God revealing himself at Har Hamoriyah, where we perform the mitzvah of coming to see God. Just as God comes to see us there, we come to see Him, and thus, God comes to reveal Himself. This is described at the end of Vayeira, the entire parashah is related to sight, and the end is that Abraham named the place "Hashem will be seen...." The parashah begins with Hashem revealing himself to him. So Abraham has 2 special senses: walking and sight. There are 12 senses as described in Sefer Yetzirah and these are 2 of the 12. The senses follow an order of the tribes. Walking is the third, corresponding to the month of Sivan and walking is the fourth, corresponding to Tamuz. And here we see that in the Torah they are in the same exact order, Lech lecha being the 3rd parashah and Vayeira the 4th. We have to understand how these 2 senses relate to one another. It is walking in order to see. Seeing Godliness causes joy. There are two souls that are very connected: Abraham and Aharon, both are called men of loving-kindness. But, Abraham is a lower level of love, worldly love while Aharon is higher love, אהבה רבה, greater love. Aharon is of course Abraham's descendant.

The most important verse in Lech lecha, is ויסע אברם הלוך ונסוע הגגבה. Avram went forth to the south. God tells him to go, and when he comes to Eretz Yisrael you might think that he's arrived and that's it. But, no, Abraham understands that God's command is for him

to always be walking, always be in motion. That is why the story of Abraham's travels ends with his continuing to go forth to the south. He is constantly pushing towards more and more loving-kindness (which corresponds with the south) so he is always pushing to reach Aharon's level of loving-kindness. The letters of Aharon spell נראה, to see, "In your light we shall see light." There is another central verse in Lech lecha which states that Abraham was the first believer. Up to Abraham there was no one who fully had faith in God. We are all his descendants. As it says, תשורי מראש אמנה, which means "You shall see from the heights of faith." The sense of sight derives from the sense of walking. To merit seeing Godliness, to see the redemption, that depends on opening our eyes to see that Mashiach is coming, all from the power of faith that Abraham gives us. Abraham was also sterile, and God promised him that he would have children and he had faith in God, והאמן בה' ויחשבה לו צדקה. This is a tremendous message for every Jew, that there are things that we want very much, like a woman who wants to get married, but it doesn't happen. Even if something takes time, in the end it will come, as the sages say, סוף הכבוד לבוא. Why does it tarry? Just like God made the Patriarchs and Matriarchs barren, to get them to pray to him, God yearns for the prayers of tzadikim. As we'll explain, first God wants us to have faith, and from faith we will have joy. After the barren woman gives birth, she is filled with joy, but in order to give birth in the first place, she needs to have joy. Joy is the key to redemption, to the good thing coming. The joy comes from believing that the good will come, think good and it will be good. "With joy" are also the letters of "thought" so all thought should be filled with joy and through this good joyful thought, she becomes pregnant. Who was the first believer? Abraham! We said that this is a message for everyone. I want to get married, that is my purpose, but I should know that if it's not happening, it's for a good reason. It's ok to be frustrated, that is the nature of a believer, that he believes there is a higher purpose and he's frustrated that it hasn't happened yet. But, you must have faith that it will happen.

Let's look at these two verses from Lech lecha. The first is that Abraham is in high gear, walking to and fro. Then the second verse is that he believes in God, and God considers it a charity. With every passing day, there is less natural ability for Abraham to give birth, still, he believes God. That he had faith in God, God considered it as if he was giving Him charity. Faith is the charity that a Jew gives God. In Hebrew, the first verse has 5 words and 22 letters, just as the Torah has 22 letters. The second verse (והאמן) (בי-הוה ויחשבה לו צדקה) also has 5 words and 22 letters (thanks to the fact that "He believed," והאמן, does not have a yud). This stresses that the Torah is connecting these two verses. They are like a match made in heaven. Let's see another sign of this connection. The first words in each verse are the main verb in each. They are ויסע – Abraham is travelling, and

in the second verse, והאמן (the same letters as אמונה, faith). Together they equal 146 plus 102, or 248, Abraham (אברהם). This is a beautiful allusion the Torah uses to tell us about Abraham. When these two verses were happening his name was still Avram, but his essence is that he travels and he has faith. If we add the final two words from each verse, הנגבה (to the south) and צדקה (charity), their sum becomes 512, twice the value of אהרן (Aharon), again alluding to Abraham striving for Aharon's level of love. When we add the ויסע and צדקה, we get Moshe (משה). Give to the wise and they will grow wiser, there are many other phenomena here. That both verses have 5 words is like the fingers on our two hands, like the Two Tablets.

The point here is that first one has to travel, and from that we come to faith and joy. The sign of someone who is a true believer is that he is already joyful now. And from that you come to merit God's revelation. The second verse of Vayeira reads, וישא את עיניו וירא שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו. The verb "He saw" (וירא) appears twice, the first indicating sight, the second understanding, that the first time he saw the three men, and the second time Abraham understood that they were not approaching (because he was ill after his circumcision). The end of Vayeira contains 5 "sights," the verb to see appears 5 times. The Akeidah begins with the same words as Lech lecha, and says take you beloved son Isaac and Lech lecha [go] to the land of Moriyah." When Abraham starts travelling he sees the place God meant from afar (מרחוק). This word, "from afar" appears in Jeremiah in an important verse about love, מרחוק ה' נראה לי ואהבת עולם אהבתיך משכתיך חסד. To be from afar is like giving advice from afar, from a distant place that cannot be understood. The continuation is עוד אבנך ונבנית בתולת ישראל... רחל מבכה על בניה מאנה להנחם על בניה כי איננו... כי יש שכר לגבולם. לפעולתך ויש תקוה לאחרייתך ושבנו בנים לגבולם. You have to believe, just as you believe and have joy, it will happen more quickly. This whole chapter in Jeremiah though begins with seeing God from afar. How do the sages explain this phrase, seeing from afar. Rashi says that Abraham recognized that this was the right place, because he saw a cloud tied to the mountain. That cloud was the cloud of Aharon, like the clouds of glory (ענני הכבוד). Aharon is also related with pregnancy (הריון). This phrase, "A cloud tied on the mountain" (ענן קשור על ההר) is equal to the values of the names of all 4 Matriarchs. Leah was also barren, but God opened her womb because she was despised. To fill the bareness as it were, Chanah had to be barren. This cloud that Abraham sees from afar is actually a sign of God's tremendous love for them, even though it doesn't seem like that at the time. The second sight is when Isaac asks his father what they will sacrifice and Abraham says, God will show Him, the lamb to be sacrificed, my son, hinting that his son is actually the sacrifice. Rashi says that to see here is in the sense of choosing, God will choose a sacrifice. The Arizal says that the initials of השה לעולה בני, are Abel (הבל). This

is to rectify Abel's sin. What sin did Abel commit? Cain committed a sin in action, but Abel committed a sin in thought: when God accepted his sacrifice, he looked into the Divine Presence without fear or awe. Sometimes to rectify you do the opposite, that is why Moshe RABbeinu who is Abel's reincarnation, when the Divine Presence showed itself to him, he looked away. There are opinions that this was not a good thing, too bad that he didn't look into the Divine Presence. The same type of rectification was performed by Isaac, who when he was on the altar, about to be sacrificed, he stared into the heavens into the Divine Presence, but he did this with humility. Abel did this in an improper way, without good intentions, while Isaac looked into it with such self-sacrifice that his soul left his body. The third sight is when Abraham looks up (after being stopped from sacrificing Isaac) and sees a ram. He saw that there could be a good exchange for Isaac, he really was meaning to sacrifice Isaac, something that was absolutely against his nature, but since he overcame his nature, it was now difficult for Abraham to go away without doing anything. The verse says, "another ram" (אֵיל אַחֵר), as explained in Chassidut (Rashi says that it means, after, meaning after the angel spoke to Abraham stopping him from sacrificing Isaac). Abraham freed this ram from the bush he was stuck in and sacrificed him. The sages say that this ram so wanted to be sacrificed that it ran towards Abraham, but the Satan came and confused things, causing the ram to get stuck in bushes. This is the sight corresponding to tiferet (beauty). In the next verse come the final two sights that we mentioned earlier, "Abraham called the place God will see (from the side of netzach), as it will be said today, that on the mountain, God will be seen (from the side of hod).

So after the parashah begins with 3 sights. There is once in the Tanach a verse where the word "faith" appears in the sense of "right," אִם תֵּאֱמָרוּ. We see that the more Abraham travels to the right (south) the more he believes. Rachel's son (who was born on the 11th of Cheshvan) was called by his father Jacob, the son of the right (בֶּן יְמִינִי), the only son born in the land of Israel. So much faith that his mother sacrificed herself for him. It says that Rachel in the beginning was joyful, that is why Jacob fell in love with her, because she smiled. Leah too was beautiful but she cried a lot. A man, as it says in Chassidut, doesn't like a crying woman, he likes someone who is joyous. Really Rachel should receive a lot of children, but she is barren because of her yearning for God, all so that in the end she can give birth to Joseph. So again, right and faith are related. That Abraham was travelling to and fro to the south, isn't he "right" enough? Even before coming to Eretz Yisrael he is described as the Ivri (Hebrew) meaning that he is on one side and the entire world is on the other. Abraham is already very right-wing, he becomes more and more extremely to the right. There are a number of explanations. One is that Abraham wants

to connect to God, not because of reason, but because of simple faith. As Rabbi Sa'adyah Ga'on says, that everyday we should be aware of God more and more, to the point where we feel that yesterday we didn't know him at all. As much is awareness is understanding, one should strive to cancel out the new understanding and remain connected with God directly and earnestly. The mind is the chayah in the soul and faith is the yechidah. So with every day, Abraham has a new left, a new understanding, and so every day he has to travel further south, further to the right, to cancel this new understanding and just connect with God earnestly. Abraham began to know God through his mind, when he was 3 years old. He started with a logical argument about who God is: Not the sun, not the moon, etc. Until suddenly God revealed Himself to him, the master of the palace suddenly revealed Himself to him. His initial awareness was based on research, on logic. But, he wanted that in the end his connection with the Almighty be based entirely on faith. In Chassidic history, BST is Abraham. The BST once had to cross a river and he used a holy Name to do that. This is practical Kabbalah, and then his entire life he regretted this act, and repented for it. At the end of his life, there was a chance to repent it fully, with a similar situation. Sometimes to rectify is to redo something with the right intent (like Isaac looking into the Divine Presence). And the BST passed the river with only earnest faith in God, without any holy Names, etc. Earnest faith in Hashem is actually the mother of the children is joyous (the initial letters of this phrase, אַם הַבָּנִים שְׂמֵחָה, is "woman," אִשָּׁה, and the average value of each letters in "woman" is 102, the value of "faith." The entire verse equals 7 times "woman"). To pass a river with a holy Name is to grasp (לְהַשִּׁיג) Hashem, there is nothing wrong with that in and of itself, that is the left side. But, Abraham is constantly travelling to the south, to the right. Abraham and Sarah are constantly travelling away from the left and to the right.

The Akeidah is actually the zenith, the highest point of Abraham's travels to the south, to the right, to simple faith. Whenever a person is travelling from where he was it is in order to come closer to somewhere else. Abraham is constantly travelling from his origin in reason to where there is only faith. But, this is the small-mindedness of the tzadik, who like a ba'al teshuvah who has to run away from those things that are negative. But, once the tzadik is mature, with mature mindedness, he continues to travel to the south, but he takes the place that he came from with him in the best possible way. He can inter-include within his destination, his origin. He can use Chassidic language, include his understanding of God (the left) within his earnest faith in God (his right). Being able to include these together is the secret of the Akeidah, a paradox. Isaac is the left, Ima, the mother principle, and Abraham is of course the right. The secret of the

Akeidah is to include the left in the right, as the Zohar says. Not that the right run away, but rather that it can include the left within the right, within itself. When this is successful, then Isaac gets a new soul that comes from an even higher place than the root of Abraham.

How better can we explain this type of inclusion. Joy (שמחה) is equal to סוד י-הוה ליראיו. This is the secret of joy. One of the deepest secrets of the Torah is the Akeidah, the very high point of all his trials. Even his travelling to and fro (נסע) is related to “travelling.” Abraham goes from trial to trial until he comes to the greatest trial, the Akeidah. During the trial, he still thinks he needs to slaughter Isaac, the left, the mind. But, God says no. You have to include the left in yourself to the point where you realize that his source is higher than yours. Even before Abraham began travelling to the south, to and fro, the Torah says: ויעתק משם ההרה מקדם לבית אל, He transported from there to the mountain, east of Beit El.” The word “mountain” used in this case (ההרה) indicates clarity. And then he built another altar. The first altar Abraham built was in honor of the revelation of the infinite light that God revealed to him, to revelations. But, the second altar was in honor of the essence, God’s essence that cannot be revealed. This is the level of Atik, supernal pleasure, which in Kabbalah is called Atik. This is the only form in which this word appears in the Torah, twice by Abraham and then with Isaac. By Abraham to transport is to aim higher, but by Isaac it is to seek a lower place to dig another well. So Abraham transports above and Isaac below. What is Atik’s essence? As it says, there is no left in Atik, it is all right. There are no harsh judgments there. Abraham is constantly travelling away from harsh judgments, which come along with mindfulness, with reason. These judgments cause contraction and Abraham wants to reveal God’s essence, where there are no contractions. So you read about Atik and you might think that the left, Isaac is only a bother, so you should slaughter him. But, this is obviously not the meaning, rather that “it is all right,” meaning that even the left has become right, even the mind is now all about faith. And when the mind becomes faith, it is even more faith than faith, like someone who was extreme left and becomes extreme right—he becomes even more right than the people who were always on the right. Now, why does the word, ויעתק, he transported, appear twice. For Abraham it means that he transports himself to the right, to leave the left behind. But the transport, ויעתק, associated with Isaac is about the word כולא, “it is all” (כולא ימינא). He is digging into the כולא, the all. This is like the difference between the yud and the hei, the difference between the right and the left, the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. While Abraham is laughing out of faith, Sarah is laughing out of the mind’s doubt, but in the end her laughter is higher than Abraham’s. At its root, your laughter is the laughter of Mashiach. Why did she laugh, because it’s

hard to believe that she will indeed have a child. She looked at reality with the principle that God created reality without any help from below, but from that moment on, He decided that whatever new thing would come into the world would be the result of an awakening from below. And, she had no more ability to awaken anything from below, she no longer had the way of women. She was just old. She reached the revelation of Atika in Ima. But, God answered, is anything wondrous for God. Indeed there is such a principle, but God can make an exception to this rule. The phrase, כעת חיה, appears only by Isaac and by the Shunamite woman who gave birth to Habbakuk, the prophet who placed the entire Torah on one single principle. וצדיק באמונתו יחיה, the tzadik lives on faith. All is right. Even the left is right. And the left becomes more right than the right.

We'll end with this message, that one should always be travelling south, to more and more faith, to reach more loving-kindness, more love of Am Yisrael, less הקפדות on people, more revelation and less contraction. To have faith and from that joy, and from this the mother of the children is joyous. Emunah (faith) begins with the letters of "mother" (אם). The point though in the end is to reach the Akeidah where Isaac is bound above the two trees. It says that Abraham built an altar and then placed tree (wood) on it, then he placed Isaac above the wood (trees). These are three levels. The first is that each of us must build an altar where we burn the animal soul, the toil of clarification (עבודת הבירורים). The trees, plural, refers to the two trees, alluding to the two unifications, the higher and lower, which symbolize the toil of unification (עבודת היחודים). To unify still requires two things that are unified, like a bride and groom. But, to bind Isaac you have to reach above the toil of unification, only through the keter that is entirely above the mind can you reach this. Clarification is in the midot, unification is in the mind, but Binding is the work that is in the super-conscious, above reason, where the mind cannot reach. At first Abraham didn't want to sacrifice Isaac, then he turned himself upside down and went to do it. So he had to switch once more, upside down again. What is the explanation for this? Isaac is the judgments that are in the world of Emanation, that has only a connection with God's unity and oneness. We need the left in order to have details, to be able to address every particular detail. Just as the redemption has to reach every single Jew. In order to be able to address every person, we need a rectified left, like Isaac. Isaac is a number of different levels of judgment, but all in the world of Emanation. As it says, קח נא את בנך יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק, the word יחידך your only one, is Isaac, his judgments in keter, then אשר אהבת is his aspect in Ima, and then את יצחק is how he is in and of himself, but this is all in Emanation. The other ram is gevurah, judgments as they appear in the three lower worlds, which at first wants to run to Abraham to have him sacrifice them. But the Satan confuses it all, so that it seems that he is stuck in his

left-mindedness. This left is really interested in being sacrificed in order to be included within the holiness of Abraham, but the Satan, the external policies, what holds the left from the outside tries to entangle the left so that it can't do what it really wants to. Still Abraham is able to bring him out and sacrifice him instead of Isaac, making him into "another ram," more gevurot that are rectified.

Before Sarah gave birth, she had a yud in her name and was called Sarai. Then God exchanged it for a hei. She had nullification which caused her to be barren, because her bitul, her nullification was too much "running." She had to come to natural consciousness, where the nullification is done in such a way that it can give birth below, it has return to it. The two hei's that come out of Sarah's yud, they are two portions of joy, related to hei. It says that Isaac plus Habbakuk equals Mashiach the son of David (משיח בן דוד). But, first there is Abraham, the father of many nations. So may we merit rectified faith. In order to be a counselor, you have to be able to see each person as a separate person, see the details. To see the person coming to you as he is and not as you see him.

One of the most important topics in the Rebbe Rashab's teachings is around the power of sight. There is a verse in Tehilim that reads, תחשכנה עיניהם מראות, that the wicked's eyes fall dark. What they see causes them to lose their sight, while what the tzadikim see lifts them up and makes them see more. Sight is an essential sense whereby all the powers of the soul appear through sight and are drawn in through sight. There is a process in Chassidut called קביעה רצונית. Four stages: the first is that I have to believe in something, then I have to want something to happen, then I can take it through my mind, ensuring that I have the right picture of what the thing I want is really like, finally I can open my eyes and see the object of what I wanted.