Torah Weekly

בס״ד

PARSHAT CHAYEI SARA

1 – 7 November 2026
21 - 27 Cheshvan 5787

***Parsha*: Genesis 23:1-25:18**
***Haftarah:* Kings I 1:1-31**

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Sacred material please do not desecrate

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ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone, No One Forgotten.

Making the Count of Our Days Count

"When you waste a moment, you have killed it in a sense, squandering an irreplaceable opportunity. But when you use the moment properly, filling it with purpose and productivity, it lives on forever."
– The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Many years ago, a product came on the market called "Death Insurance." The problem was that no one wanted to buy a "death insurance" policy. It was a huge flop until someone had the bright idea to change the name from "Death Insurance" to "Life Insurance," a much happier and more optimistic name (even though it was the same thing). That little change, however, turned that product from a dud into a gazillion-dollar business.

Chayei Sarah begins with the death of our matriarch, Sarah. *Chayei Sarah* literally means, however, "the Life of Sarah." So is this a switcheroo—a mere marketing gimmick to uplift us, or is it one of those paradoxical teaching moments?

The Talmud explains how those who are righteous, who fill their days in productive and positive ways, are considered alive when they are dead, while those who bring toxicity and negativity into this world are viewed as dead even while they are alive. So it is quite fitting that following the death of Sarah, we focus on the meaning and influence of her life—who she was and what she accomplished—even though she is no longer living.

Sarah died at the age of 127, and rather than simply tell us that she was 127 years old when she passed, the Torah describes her lifespan in a curious way: "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years." And so, a year is not a year is not a year. (Just think if two hours watching an engrossing show feels the same as two hours sitting through a boring lecture. In one case "time flies," whereas in the other, "time stands still.") Time is relative. It is defined more by its quality than its quantity.

There is a mystical idea that our days on earth will ultimately be comprised of the garments that clothe our soul after we die. These garments are those of "thought," "speech" and "action." The quality of these garments will not be determined by the years of our life, but by the "life in our years." In other words, we stitch together these holy garments from our good deeds (our *mitzvot)* and the moments we create that we endow with the quality of ultimate meaning, and therefore, infinite reality. For example, someone could live to a ripe old age, and yet, sadly, have lived a life of such little significance and substance that his or her soul could be naked or virtually naked in the next world.

Each day of our lives presents us with endless possibilities. We constantly stand at the crossroads of choice. How many times have I thought, "Sorry G-d, I have no time to pray. I am just so busy. Catch you later. Maybe tomorrow?" Thinking I am choosing "reality" (you know, "getting stuff done"), I fritter away many moments of time that at the end of the day evaporate like smoke. It's like consuming empty-calorie junk food instead of nutrient-rich food filled with vitality. I think I am eating, but nutritionally, I'm not. It's OK once in a while, but I certainly wouldn't make a habit of it.

On the other hand, when we consciously embrace our lives moment by moment, cognizant of the power and significance of our choices, mindfully aware of our words and deeds, we can weave together holy garments that will wrap us like a hallowed shawl.

The Hebrew word for sacrifice—namely, the sacrifices that were brought to the Holy Temple—is *korban*. The root of that word is *karev*, which means "close." Hence, we are to understand that the purpose of bringing a sacrifice is to come closer to G-d, and we have opportunities every single moment to actively move towards where we want to be.

The holiest offering that was brought into the Temple, however, was the *ketoret,* the incense offering. The word itself means "to bond" or "to connect." It represents the weaving together of different elements to form one unified entity that does not come undone. It is here that I recognize how I am inextricably linked and interconnected with G-d. While I do my part by "coming close" in my "thought," "speech" and "action," my soul is already there and bonded.

And in so doing—since the soul does not die—it's as if we don't truly die. Sarah physically died. That's the truth. But the opposite was also true. As a woman whose life was alive with the fullness of her choices, Sarah also lived, as death only marked a new form of her life. Sarah embodies the idea that we must not merely count our days, but we must make our days count.

So make the most of every moment. Make your moments holy. Make your moments endure by weaving into them a sacred reality. By understanding the infinite power and potential of each moment, you can stitch together the fabric of your life so that your spiritual loveliness will be there to embrace and clothe your eternal soul. Happy weaving!

Hanna Perlberger

Why We Work So Hard

Abraham was the ultimate workaholic. In his youth, he organized and gave mass lectures on monotheism all across Mesopotamia. He wrote 400 books on the subject. At the age of 75, he moved to the Promised Land and continued his life's mission apace. He set up and managed hospitality inns all over the country, launched a war to free his nephew, fathered a son when he was 86, and circumcised himself at 99. Not one to shirk hard work, he defended the people of Sodom before G-d at 99, and fathered another son at the age of 100. When he was 137, he undertook an arduous three-day journey through the mountains to bind his son Isaac, and when he returned, he found that his wife Sarah had passed away. He immediately purchased a plot for her burial and organized her funeral.

When this was all said and done, you might imagine that Abraham would have opted to rest, but that was not to be. Shortly after the mourning period for Sarah, he launched a complicated campaign to find a bride for Isaac. And here is the most amazing part: after arranging for his son to be married, Abraham remarried and had more children. Abraham was not ready to give up and retire. He had lots of hard work left in him, and rest would need to wait.

I doubt that we can match Abraham's pace, but we can learn a lesson from it. Do you work all year so you can take a vacation in the summer, or do you vacation in the summer to rejuvenate and go back to work? Do you work all day so you can rest in bed at night, or do you rest in bed at night so you can wake up and work in the morning?

Because we sink into bed at night with a true sigh of relief and wake up in the morning with a long groan of unhappiness, we erroneously think that we are happier at rest than at work. But that isn't true. When we are fully engaged, overcoming challenges, dealing with crises and making progress, we are vibrant, alive and abuzz. When we are relaxed and at rest, we grow indolent and sluggish.

We enjoy the moment of transition from frenetic pace to rest, which is why we sigh with relief when we crawl into bed, settle into a vacation, or light Shabbat candles on Friday night. But overall, we are happiest when we are at work. It doesn't feel that way while we are at it, but in retrospect we can admit that we are at our best when we are wholly focused and fully engaged.

This is because G-d didn't create man to relax, but to be purposeful. When we are pursuing a goal and accomplishing a purpose, we feel in sync with our essence. Being at rest is not natural to us. While we enjoy the break for a little while, we soon yearn for a return to work. Because at work, we are in "giving mode": we contribute to the universe, to society and to life. When we are at rest, we are in "receiving mode": we receive from the universe and from life. We feel more fulfilled when we're contributing than when we're receiving because we are, at heart, purpose-driven. It is how G-d made us.

The other day I went for a hike along the river with a geologist, who kindly explained the historical and geological features of the river. I had always known that the water flows more quickly over the boulders, but I never knew how these riffles are formed.

He explained that flood activity moves boulders from one section of the river to the next, creating a deeper pool where the rocks were removed and a shallower section where the rocks are deposited. The buildup of rocks forms a lip that the water must overcome, and the slope is often steeper in the riffle than in the pool. Thus, the water is more turbulent in the steep, shallow riffle than in the deep, flat pool.

My friend explained that if water had its way, river slopes would descend continually and gradually, forming one long pool of deep, calm waters. But since this rarely happens, nature compensates with an alternating series of pools and riffles. This is one area where I think he is mistaken. I believe that rivers, just like humans, should have riffles and pools.

G-d created the world for humans, as indicated by the fact that humans were the last species that He created. Since the world was created for us, nature should, and does, reflect us.

Humans cannot maintain a continual pace of hard work. We must stop on occasion to relax and rejuvenate. But we cannot relax for long; at some point we grow restless and search for something to do. The calm pools in the river represent our periods of rest, and the riffles represent our periods of hard work. Just as we must toggle back and forth, and cannot maintain a continual presence in either sphere, so it is with nature.

When sitting near rivers, I usually seek out the riffles. That is where I can hear the rush of water and watch the river wash over and around the boulders. The riffles convey excitement and purpose, whereas the pools convey calm. We need both. Calm waters run deep, just as times of relaxation are conducive to deep thought and serious reflection. But the shallow riffle is where the river shows its awesome power, just as we display our ingenuity and resourcefulness when we encounter the challenges and difficulties in the riffles of life.

I always thought that the purpose of the riffle was to feed the pools, but my friend taught me that the opposite is true. The pools are formed to create the riffles. The rivers are just like us. We, too, don't work in order to rest. We rest in order to work, because only at work can we discover our true selves.

Abraham surely rested from time to time, but he clearly required less rest than most. What we can learn from Abraham is that rest is overrated. The best condition in life is the exuberance of hard work. That is when we come alive. That is when we are most fully human. That is when we most reflect our Creator. He made us for a purpose. Our task is to find that purpose and pursue it. If at times we must rest, it is to gather strength for more work. Our rest invigorates us for the challenges that lie ahead.

May we find the strength to complete our tasks, the creativity to overcome our challenges, and the wisdom to appreciate the vibrancy that such trials bring.

Simcha Levenberg

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, November 1, 2026
21 Cheshvan, 5787

Passing of R. David Ibn Zimra (1574)
R. David ibn Zimra, known by the acronym Radvaz, was a great rabbi and scholar who led the Jewish communities of Egypt and Safed for sixty years. Radvaz was held in high esteem by his contemporaries, and is the author of 3000 responsa, covering a vast array of topics.

Monday, November 2, 2026
22 Cheshvan, 5787

Lisbon Earthquake (1755)
A great earthquake struck Lisbon, Portugal, destroying much of the city including the courthouse of the Inquisition.

Tuesday, November 3, 2026
23 Cheshvan, 5787

Hasmonean Holiday (137 BCE)
In Talmudic times, Cheshvan 23 was commemorated as the day on which the stones of the altar which were defiled by the Greeks were removed from the Holy Temple.

Wednesday, November 4, 2026
24 Cheshvan, 5787

Passing of R. Avraham Azulai (1643)
R. Avraham was a famous kabbalist who resided Hebron, Jerusalem, and Gaza. He authored *Chesed L'Avraham* and was the great-grandfather of R. Chaim Yosef David Azulai (the Chida).
R. Avraham's signature had the appearance of a ship, to commemorate the time when the ship he was traveling on capsized along with all his possessions, and he was miraculously saved (*Shem Hagedolim*).

Thursday, November 5, 2026
25 Cheshvan, 5787

Passing of R. Efraim Eliezer Yolles (1988)
R. Efraim Eliezer was an influential rabbi in Philadelphia who enjoyed a close relationship with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, with whom he corresponded regularly. He would often pay a visit to the Rebbe in conjunction with Sukkot, Passover, and/or Shavuot, quoting the Talmudic passage, "One must greet his teacher during the holiday."

Friday, November 6, 2026
26 Cheshvan, 5787

Passing of R. Refael of Hamburg (1803)
R. Refael was the chief rabbi of the three sister cities of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek in Germany for twenty-three years. These three important Jewish centers were known as *AHU*, after their Hebrew abbreviations, and were the residence of many famous scholars and personalities, such as R. Jonathan Eibeschutz, R. Tzvi Ashkenazi, R. Jacob Emden, and Glueckel Hameln.