

# INSPIRE



**CHAYEI SARAH 26TH CHESHVAN -14TH NOVEMBER  
SHABBAT MEVORCHIM KISLEV**

## DON'T (ONLY) RELY ON G-D

"G-d helps those who help themselves" Is this statement heresy? Does it deny the hand of G-d in our successes? I recall a conversation with a self-proclaimed atheist who used the expression very cynically, suggesting that his considerable achievements were entirely his own and that G-d had nothing to do with it. I beg to differ. To my mind, "G-d helps those who help themselves" is a perfectly religious statement. What it means is absolutely consistent with traditional Jewish thinking. G-d does indeed help us to accomplish things, but He requires us to help ourselves first. If we just sit back and wait for miracles to happen, we may be disappointed. "G-d will bless you in all that you do," (Deuteronomy 15:18) makes it very clear. Our blessings come from G-d, but we must do. Of course, we believe in miracles—but we mustn't rely on them. The combination of our own hard work and efforts coupled with G-d's blessing is the ideal road to success. The classic analogy is the farmer. He can plough and plant, sow and shvitz from today until tomorrow but if the rains don't come nothing will grow. Conversely, all the rains in the world will not cause anything to grow if the farmer hasn't planted first. After the farmer has done his work and the rains come from above, there will be a plentiful crop. And it's the same story whether we are farmers or shopkeepers, professionals or artisans, employers or employees. There are religious ideologies that frown upon medical intervention when someone is ill. They see it as a lack of faith in the great Healer of all Flesh. In fact, right now in my own community, there is a court case going on because a hospital gave a blood transfusion to a child who was critically ill, but it was against the wishes of the parents who objected on the grounds of their religious beliefs. Judaism maintains that while G-d is indeed the Supreme Healer, He chooses to work through the efforts of trustworthy medical practitioners. This week's Parshah tells of Isaac taking Rebecca as his wife. "And Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother." Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains this to mean more than the obvious. When she entered the tent, it was as if she was Sarah, Isaac's mother. Because Sarah was of such saintly character, she was granted three special miracles. Her Shabbat candles burned the entire week, her dough was particularly blessed, and a heavenly cloud attached itself to her tent. When Sarah died, these blessings disappeared. When Rebecca arrived on the scene, they resumed immediately. In fact, this was a clear sign to Isaac that Rebecca was indeed his soul mate and that the shidduch was made in Heaven. Each of those three miracles, however, required some form of human input first. A candle and fire had to be found, the dough had to be prepared and a tent had to be pitched before G-d would intervene and make those miracles happen. In other words, He does help us but we must help ourselves first. It's a little like the fellow who would make a fervent prayer to G-d every week that he win the lottery. After many months and no jackpot in sight, he lost his faith and patience. In anguished disappointment, he vented his frustration with the Almighty. "Oh, G-d! For months I've been praying to you. Why haven't you helped me win the lottery all this time?" Whereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying, "Because you haven't bought a ticket, dummy!" I wish it were that simple to win lotteries. But the fact is that it is the same in all our endeavors. G-d helps those who help themselves. May we all do our part. Please G-d, He will do His.



# FAITH IN THE FUTURE

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Shabbos ends 5:05pm

He was 137 years old. He had been through two traumatic events involving the people most precious to him in the world. The first involved the son for whom he had waited for a lifetime, Isaac. He and Sarah had given up hope, yet G d told them both that they would have a son together, and it would be he who would continue the covenant. The years passed. Sarah did not conceive. She had grown old, yet G d still insisted they would have a child.

Eventually it came. There was rejoicing. Sarah said: "G d has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." Then came the terrifying moment when G d said to Abraham: "Take your son, your only one, the one you love," and offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham did not dissent, protest or delay. Father and son traveled together, and only at the last moment did the command come from heaven saying, "Stop." How does a father, let alone a son, survive a trauma like that?

Then came Sarah, Abraham's beloved wife, died. She had been his constant companion, sharing the journey with him as they left behind all they knew, their land, their birthplace and their families. Twice she saved Abraham's life by pretending to be his sister. What does a man of 137 do – the Torah calls him "old and advanced in years" – after such a trauma and such a bereavement? We would not be surprised to find that he spent the rest of his days in sadness and memory. He had done what G d had asked of him.

Yet he could hardly say that G d's promises had been fulfilled. Seven times he had been promised the land of Canaan, yet when Sarah died he owned not one square-inch of it, not even a place in which to bury his wife. G d had promised him many children, a great nation, many nations, as many as the grains of sand in the sea-shore and the stars in the sky. Yet he had only one son of the covenant, Isaac, whom he had almost lost, and who was still unmarried at the age of thirty-seven. Abraham had every reason to sit and grieve.

Yet he did not. In one of the most extraordinary sequences of words in the Torah, his grief is described in a mere five Hebrew words: in English, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." Then immediately we read, "And Abraham rose from his grief."

From then on, he engaged in a flurry of activity with two aims in mind: first to buy a plot of land in which to bury Sarah, second to find a wife for his son. Note that these correspond precisely to the two Divine blessings: of land and descendants. Abraham did not wait for G d to act. He understood one of the profoundest truths of Judaism: that G d is waiting for us to act.

How did Abraham overcome the trauma and the grief? How do you survive almost losing your child and actually losing your life-partner and still have the energy to keep going? What gave Abraham his resilience, his ability to survive, his spirit intact?

I learned the answer from the people who became my mentors in moral courage, namely the Holocaust survivors I had the privilege to know. How, I wondered, did they keep going, knowing what they knew, seeing what they saw? We know that the British and American soldiers who liberated the camps never forgot what they witnessed. According to Niall Fergusson's new biography of Henry Kissinger, who entered the camps as an American soldier, the sight that met his eyes transformed his life. If this was true of those who merely saw Bergen-Belsen and the other camps, how almost infinitely more so, those who lived there and saw so many die there. Yet the survivors I knew had the most tenacious hold on life. I wanted to understand how they kept going.

Eventually I discovered. Most of them did not talk about the past, even to their marriage partners, even to their children. Instead they set about creating a new life in a new land. They learned its language and customs. They found work. They built careers. They married and had children. Having lost their own families, the survivors became an extended family to one another. They looked forward not back. First they built a future. Only then – sometimes forty or fifty years later – did they speak about the past. That was when they told their story, first to their families, then to the world. First you have to build a future. Only then can you mourn the past.

Two people in the Torah looked most of them did not talk about the past back, one explicitly, the other by implication. Noah, the most righteous man of his generation, ended his life by making wine and becoming drunk. The Torah does not say why but we can guess.

He had lost an entire world. While he and his family were safe on board the ark, everyone else – all his contemporaries – had drowned. It is not hard to imagine this righteous man overwhelmed by grief as he replayed in his mind all that had happened, wondering whether he might have done something to save more lives or avert the catastrophe.

Lot's wife, against the instruction of the angels, actually did look back as the cities of the plain disappeared under fire and brimstone and the anger of G d. Immediately she was turned into a pillar of salt, the Torah's graphic description of a woman so overwhelmed by shock and grief as to be unable to move on.

It is the background of these two stories that helps us understand Abraham after the death of Sarah. He set the precedent: first build the future, and only then can you mourn the past. If you reverse the order, you will be held captive by the past. You will be unable to move on. You will become like Lot's wife.

Something of this deep truth drove the work of one of the most remarkable survivors of the Holocaust, the psychotherapist Viktor Frankl. Frankl lived through Auschwitz, dedicating himself to giving other prisoners the will to live. He tells the story in several books, most famously in *Man's Search for Meaning*. He did this by finding for each of them a task that was calling to them, something they had not yet done but that only they could do. In effect, he gave them a future. This allowed them to survive the present and turn their minds away from the past.

Frankl lived his teachings. After the liberation of Auschwitz he built a school of psychotherapy called Logotherapy, based on the human search for meaning. It was almost an inversion of the work of Freud. Freudian psychoanalysis had encouraged people to think about their very early past. Frankl taught people to build a future, or more precisely, to hear the future calling to them. Like Abraham, Frankl lived a long and good life, gaining worldwide recognition and dying at the age of 92.

Abraham heard the future calling to him. Sarah had died. Isaac was unmarried. Abraham had neither land nor grandchildren. He did not cry out, in anger or anguish, to G d. Instead, he heard the still, small voice saying: The next step depends on you. You must create a future that I will fill with My spirit. That is how Abraham survived the shock and grief. G d forbid that we experience any of this, but if we do, this is how to survive.

We are not here by accident G d enters our lives as a call from the future. It is as if we hear him beckoning to us from the far horizon of time, urging us to take a journey and undertake a task that, in ways we cannot fully understand, we were created for. That is the meaning of the word vocation, literally "a calling," a mission, a task to which we are summoned.

We are not here by accident. We are here because G d wanted us to be, and because there is a task we were meant to fulfill. Discovering what that is, is not easy, and often takes many years and false starts. But for each of us there is something G d is calling on us to do, a future not yet made that awaits our making. It is future-orientation that defines Judaism as a faith, as I explain in the last chapter of my book, *Future Tense*.

So much of the anger, hatred and resentments of this world are brought about by people obsessed by the past and who, like Lot's

## PARSHA SUMMARY

Sarah dies at age 127 and is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron, which Abraham purchases from Ephron the Hittite for four hundred shekels of silver.

Abraham's servant Eliezer is sent, laden with gifts, to Charan, to find a wife for Isaac. At the village well, Eliezer asks G-d for a sign: when the maidens come to the well, he will ask for some water to drink; the woman who will offer to give his camels to drink as well shall be the one destined for his master's son.

Rebecca, the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel, appears at the well and passes the "test." Eliezer is invited to their home, where he repeats the story of the day's events. Rebecca returns with Eliezer to the land of Canaan, where they encounter Isaac praying in the field. Isaac marries Rebecca, loves her, and is comforted over the loss of his mother.

Abraham takes a new wife, Keturah (Hagar), and fathers six additional sons, but Isaac is designated as his only heir. Abraham dies at age 175 and is buried beside Sarah by his two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

## HAFTORAH SUMMARY

This week's haftorah describes an aging King David, echoing this week's Torah reading, which mentions that "Abraham was old, advanced in days."

King David was aging, and he was perpetually cold. A young maiden, Abishag of Shunam, was recruited to serve and provide warmth for the elderly monarch.

Seeing his father advancing in age, Adoniah, one of King David's sons, seized the opportunity to prepare the ground for his ascension to his father's throne upon the latter's passing – despite King David's express wishes that his son Solomon succeed him. Adoniah recruited two influential individuals – the High Priest and the commander of David's armies – both of whom had fallen out of David's good graces, to champion his cause. He arranged to be transported in a chariot with fifty people running before him, and invited a number of his sympathizers to a festive party where he publicizing his royal ambitions.

The prophet Nathan encouraged Bat Sheva, mother of Solomon, to approach King David and plead with him to reaffirm his choice of Solomon as his successor. This she did, mentioning Adoniah's recent actions of which the king had been unaware. Nathan later joined the Bat Sheva and the king to express support for Bat Sheva's request. King David acceded to their request: "Indeed," he told Bat Sheva, "as I swore to you by the Lord God of Israel saying, 'Surely Solomon, your son, shall reign after me and he shall sit on my throne in my stead,' surely, so will I swear this day."

## WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

**Green Gillian Father Yosef ben Shmuel 28 Cheshvan**  
**Wolfryd Colin Mother Tzivia bas Yosef Zendle 28 Cheshvan**  
**Perry Mylene Father Mordechai ben Ephraim Fischel 30 Cheshvan**  
**Glassar Harry Mother Chaya Leah bas Zvi HaLevi 1 Kislev**  
**Osborne Kay Mother 1 Kislev**  
**Sugarman Paul Father 2 Kislev**  
**Trainis Avril Mother in law Motla Chaya bas Zvi Shaul 2 Kislev**  
**Davis Richard Father Binyamin ben Mordecai 3 Kislev**  
**Glassar Jessie Mother 3 Kislev**  
**Lorraine Sandra Father HaRev hoshea Yehuda ben Yaakov Yoseph 3 Kislev**

## JEWISH HUMOUR

Two men from Chelm were watching the 11:00 news featuring a story about a guy jumping off of a bridge. Chaim says to Yankel "I bet you \$10 he doesn't jump." Yankel says okay, "I bet you \$10 he does." They watch the rest of the broadcast. The guy jumps so Yankel goes to give Chaim the money. Chaim says "I can't take your money, I saw the 10 O'clock news and they showed the same story." Yankel says "So did I but I didn't think he would jump again!!!"

## RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

**I do not breathe, but I run and jump. I do not eat, but I swim and stretch. I do not drink, but I sleep and stand. I do not think, but I grow and play. I do not see, but you see me every day. What am I?**

**Answer for last week  
Taxi Driver**

## STORY TIME

A powerful true story of Jewish heroism.

Rabbi Yosef Wallis, director of Arachim of Israel, talks to Project Witness about his father, Judah Wallis, who was born and raised in Pavenitz, Poland.

While he was in Dachau, a Jew who was being taken to his death suddenly flung a small bag at my father, Judah Wallis. He caught it, thinking it might contain a piece of bread. Upon opening it, however, he was disturbed to discover a pair of tefillin. Judah was very frightened because he knew that were he to be caught carrying tefillin, he would be put to death instantly. So he hid the tefillin under his shirt and headed for his bunkhouse.

In the morning, just before the appel [roll call], while still in his bunkhouse, he put on the tefillin. Unexpectedly, a German officer appeared. He ordered him to remove the tefillin, noted the number on Judah's arm.

At the appel, in front of thousands of silent Jews, the officer called out Judah's number and he had no choice but to step forward. The German officer waved the tefillin in the air and said, "Dog! I sentence you to death by public hanging for wearing these."

Judah was placed on a stool and a noose was placed around his neck. Before he was hanged, the officer said in a mocking tone, "Dog, what is your last wish?"

"To wear my tefillin one last time," Judah replied.

"The officer was dumbfounded. He handed Judah the tefillin. As Judah put them on, he recited the verse that is said while the tefillin are being wound around the fingers: "Ve'eirastich li le'olam, ve'eirastich li b'tzedek uvemishpat, ub'chesed, uv'rachamim, ve'eirastich li b'emunah, v'yodaat es Hashem – I will betroth you to me forever and I will betroth you to me with righteousness and with justice and with kindness and with mercy and I will betroth you to me with fidelity, and you shall know God."

It is hard for us to picture this Jew with a noose around his neck, wearing tefillin on his head and arm – but that was the scene that the entire camp was forced to watch, as they awaited the impending hanging of the Jew who had dared to break the rule against wearing tefillin.

Even women from the adjoining camp were lined up at the barbed wire fence that separated them from the men's camp, forced to watch this horrible sight.

As Judah turned to watch the silent crowd, he saw tears in many people's eyes. Even at that moment, as he was about to be hanged, he was shocked. Jews were crying! How was it possible that they still had tears left to shed? And for a stranger? Where were those tears coming from? Impulsively, in Yiddish, he called out, "Yidden, I am the victor. Don't you understand, I am the winner!"

The German officer understood the Yiddish and was infuriated. He said to Judah, "You dog, you think you are the winner? Hanging is too good for you. You are going to get another kind of death."

"Judah, my father, was taken from the stool and the noose was removed from his neck. He was forced into a squatting position and two huge rocks were placed under his arms. Then he was told that he would be receiving 25 lashes to his head – the head on which he had dared to position his tefillin. The officer told him that if he dropped even one of the rocks, he would be shot immediately. In fact, because this was such an extremely painful form of death, the officer advised him, "Drop the rocks now. You will never survive the 25 lashes to the head. Nobody ever does."

Judah's response was, "No, I won't give you the pleasure."

At the 25th lash, Judah lost consciousness and was left for dead. He was about to be dragged to a pile of corpses, after which he would have been burned in a ditch, when another Jew saw him, shoved him to the side, and covered his head with a rag so people didn't realize he was alive.

Eventually, after he recovered consciousness fully, he crawled to the nearest bunkhouse that was on raised piles and hid under it until he was strong enough to come out under his own power. Two months later he was liberated.

During the hanging and beating episode, a 17-year-old girl had been watching the events from the women's side of the fence. After liberation, she made her way to Judah. She walked over to him and said, "I've lost everyone. I don't want to be alone any more. I saw what you did that day when the officer wanted to hang you. Will you marry me?"

My parents walked over to the Klausenberger Rebbe and requested that he perform the marriage ceremony. The Klausenberger Rebbe, whose Kiddush Hashem is legendary, wrote out a kesubah [marriage contract] by hand from memory and married the couple. I have that handwritten kesubah in my possession to this day.

## FOOD 4 THE SOUL

"And Abraham was elderly, come into days." (Genesis 24:1)

Abraham, we are told, was not just elderly, but "come into days." Meaning, he had entered into his days, every one of them.

Whatever it was he needed to do, whether to teach wisdom or to graze sheep, to throw himself into fire or to feed hungry strangers, to command or to obey, to love or to fight—in every act of life he invested his entire being.

And so he owned every day of his life. His life was his.