

# THE SATAN HAD ONE MORE TRICK UP HIS SLEEVE

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Chayei Sarah

### The Satan Had One More Trick Up His Sleeve

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 832, Burying A Man Next To A Woman - Is This A Problem? Good Shabbos!

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In the pasuk "And Abraham came to mourn Sarah..." [Bereishis 23:2], the letter "chaf" in the word "v'livkosa" (and to cry for her) is written as a small letter. The Baal HaTurim gives a reason for this: Since Sarah lived to the ripe old age of 127, the mourning for such a person is not that overwhelming. This is indicated by the smaller size letter in the word for crying.

I saw an interesting interpretation in the Sefer Kehillos Yitzchak from Rav Yitzchak of Volozhin. The Medrash explains the juxtaposition of the story of Akeidas Yitzchak with the death and burial of Sarah. According to this Medrash, the Satan appeared to Sarah and told her that Avraham took Yitzchak to offer him as a sacrifice on an altar. Before Sarah had a chance to hear the end of the story, "her soul flew away from her" and she died.

We know from the Medrashic teachings of our Sages that the Satan had tried to pull out all stops to prevent our Patriarch Avraham from carrying out his test of Akeidas Yitzchak. This event was such a seminal event in Jewish history, which resulted in eternal merit for the Jewish nation that the Satan tried every trick in the book to stop Avraham from passing this test and achieving the reward for his descendants that he eventually achieved. The Medrashim say that the Satan changed himself into a river and Avraham had to wade up to his neck to cross the river, etc., etc.

Once a person does a mitzvah in his life, no matter what type of wicked person he later becomes, the credit for that mitzvah will not be taken away from him. The rule in spiritual reward and punishment is that a sin cannot extinguish the effect of a mitzvah and a mitzvah cannot extinguish the effect of a sin. There are two separate accounts in Heaven: Debits and Credits. The fact that a person has debits does not take away from his credits. When a person does a mitzvah, the mitzvah is

done and it will always remain with him.

There is however, one exception to this rule. This is something called "regretting what was originally done" (toheh al ha'rishonos). If a person performs a mitzvah and later comes to regret the fact he did it, that regret causes him to lose the reward that came for doing the mitzvah.

When the Satan saw that he was unsuccessful in deterring Avraham from doing the Akeida, he did not give up. He had one more trick up his sleeve. Although Avraham had earned the reward for passing the test of the Akeida, so the reward was in the bank, if the Satan could get Avraham to regret performing the mitzvah, Avraham would lose his reward. This is exactly what the Satan tried to accomplish by bringing about the death of Avraham's wife through her hearing about her husband's participation in the Akeida. There is no force in the world that is as persistent, that is as big a 'nudge' as the Yetzer HaRah [evil inclination, which is the Satan.] Even when we think the battle is over, the battle is not over!

I once heard in the name of Rav Aharon Kotler: After the Akeidah, the pasuk says, "And behold an individual ram was caught up in the underbrush". Why does the pasuk need to tell us this seemingly insignificant detail? It is to show that the Satan had still not given up. The Satan was trying to make it hard for Avraham to find a substitute animal to offer, so he had to cut through the dense underbrush to get the ram free so that it might be offered in place of his son.

Here too, with Sarah's death, the Satan tried to put another obstacle in Avraham's way of Avraham keeping the reward he had already earned. It was yet another test to see whether he would now regret his willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak because it apparently led to the death of his wife. Avraham Avinu did not want this to happen so he purposely downgraded his crying for the death of Sarah (small Chaf) to indicate that her time was up already and that he was not going to let her death upset him to the extent that he would regret his participation in the Akeidah.

As a result of this, the merit of the Akeidah remained with Avraham and was preserved for his descendants for all generations. The practical lesson from all of this is that the Yetzer Harah never gives up and we must be forever vigilant against its wiles.

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## Lesson Learned From The Names Of Yishmael's Sons

I heard the following observation in the name of Rav Yisrael Belsky.

The end of the parsha contains a listing of the names of the twelve sons of Yishmael. In perek [chapter] 25 pasuk 13, four sons are mentioned: Nevoyos, Keidar, Adb'el and Mivsam. In pasuk 14, three more sons are mentioned: Mishma, Duma, and Massa. Finally, in pasuk 15 the last five sons are mentioned: Chadad, Teima, Yetur, Nafish, and Keidma.

It also is interesting that when the sons of Yishmael are mentioned at the beginning of Divrei HaYamim I [perek 1; pasukim 29-31], the grouping of the second two pasukim differs from what we find in Chayei Sarah. Whereas in Chayei Sarah, 3 sons are mentioned in the second pasuk and 5 sons are mentioned in the third pasuk, in Divrei HaYamim 5 sons are mentioned in the second pasuk (Mishma, Duma, Massa, Chadad, Teima) and 3 sons are mentioned in the third pasuk (Yetur, Nafish, and Keidma).

Furthermore, whenever a person's name appears in the Torah, the Targum (Unkelos) does not "translate" the name. A name is a name. Unkelos just repeats the name exactly as it appears in Chumash. However, in the second pasuk in Divrei HaYamim, the Targum (which is actually Targum Yonasan ben Uziel in Nach) does not just repeat the names of Yishmael's sons but rather, he 'translates' them, indicating that they mean something!

Mishma means to listen; Duma means to be silent; Massa means to understand; Chadad means to be sharp; Teima means to the south. What is the significance of these names for the sons of Yishmael?

These 5 words are the key to gaining knowledge. When someone is trying to explain something, the first thing the student must do is LISTEN. Next the student must be SILENT. Following that the student must try to UNDERSTAND it. After that the student can gain clarity and SHARPness. Finally, our Sages teach us if that if a student wishes to gain wisdom, he should pray facing the SOUTH (the Menorah which represented wisdom was positioned along the southern wall of the Temple).

However, we must ask, why on earth were the sons of Yishmael picked as the paradigm for gaining knowledge? If there is one ethnic grouping on the face of the earth that are not known for their knowledge it would be the descendants of Yishmael, of whom it is said "He is a wild-ass man; his hand is against everyone and everyone's hand is against him."

On the other hand, after the collapse of the Roman Empire, the wisest and smartest people in the world were the descendants of Yishmael. From the 7th century until the Enlightenment they were "it". The whole world was in darkness and the descendants of Yishmael possessed knowledge. They gave us Algebra. They gave us many inventions. They had the reputation for being wise and on the cutting edge of knowledge in the world. For several centuries, they were the civilized world.

What is the lesson of this? The lesson is that even a Per'e Adam like Yishmael and his descendants can seek knowledge and become wise if they apply the rules of obtaining knowledge. Namely -- Listen, Be Silent; Understand; Gain Clarity; and pray facing South!

No one is ever doomed because of his genes. Even the sons of Yishmael, when they apply the rules of knowledge can become respected for their wisdom.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter

Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for this Parsha are provided below:

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