



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

Chayei Sarah תשפ"ד

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

This week's portion begins with Sarah's passing at age 127. The Torah reports that her years were all equally righteous and that Sarah lived a perfect life. Now it became Avraham's responsibility to bury her in an appropriate place.

It is remarkable how much attention Avraham and the Torah gave to the seemingly simple matter of where to bury Sarah. The Torah, which is usually very terse, uses 20 verses, comprising 275 words, to describe in great detail Avraham's purchase of the burial plot from Ephron the Hittite. Why so much to do about where a person's body finds its final resting place? Isn't the body just the canister that held the soul during one's lifetime? Now that the soul is gone, just bury it anywhere.

The place that Avraham chose to bury his holy wife was called the מערת המכפלה - *The Double Cave*. Although it had been known as such for many years, no one really knew the basis for this peculiar name. The Midrash tells us that the day that the angels came to inform Avraham and Sarah that they would have a child, Avraham ran to find an animal worthy of serving to his guests. He spotted one, but it ran away from him. He chased it until it led him into the cave. The moment Avraham entered the cave, he sensed an aura of holiness that emanated from the ground and realized that Adam and Chava were buried there. From that point, Avraham and Sarah aspired to be buried there, with these two holy people.

Although Rashi gives two reasons why it was called מכפלה - *double*, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro זצ"ל offered the following explanation.

The Torah begins with the verse:

(א) בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

1) *In the beginning of Hashem's creating the **heavens** and the **earth**...*

The Torah begins with the second letter of the alphabet, **ב** – *bet*, whose numerical value is 2. This teaches us that the one beginning, **בראשית**, comprised two parts, as if to say that there are two beginnings here. They are (1) Heaven and (2) Earth. **Earth** is where we perform our service to Hashem, and **heaven** is where we will go to receive the reward for our deeds. Creation of the earth was not intended to be an end unto itself. Rather, heaven and earth were created simultaneously because the earth was created as the precondition to the World to Come.

The word **ארץ** - *earth* - comes from the word **רץ**, which means *to run*. When one runs, as opposed to flees, he always has a destination, a place to which he is trying to get. Towards what is this world running? What is the destination of one's existence on this earth? **שם** - *there!* The heavens. The word **שמים** (plural for **שם**) means all the "*there*"s.

Putting it all together, the Torah teaches us that in the beginning Hashem created (1) the journey – this earth where we do the running, and (2) the destination, the World to Come, the heavens and the reward, the goal of all the running.

This being said, although from our perspective, heaven and earth seem to be as far away from each other as, well, heaven and earth, in reality they are two sides of the same coin. In the World to Come a person will only have what he put there while in this world. When one dedicates his life towards deeds that have meaning only in the World to Come, his life in heaven will be a mirror image of his life here on earth. In this sense, the World to Come is a "double" (**כפל**) of this world.

This is why the cave that contained Adam and Eve, Avraham and Sarah, and, later, Yitzchak and Rivkah and Yaakov and Leah was called "**מכפלה**." These were all people who lived their lives in this world for the sole purpose of the World to Come. In their cases, their World to Come was a duplicate of their lives on this world.

There is something missing from this metaphor. While it is easy to understand how this world is reflected in the World to Come, through the life that we live here, through the life that we live here, where do we see the converse? Namely, where is the manifestation of the spiritual next world in our current physical world?

The World to Come is reflected in the Torah and mitzvot that we do in this world, for, although we cannot see the spiritual benefits achieved by the Torah and mitzvot that we do, they are part of us nonetheless. The Mishna in Pirkei Avot says (4:2):

(ב) בְּנֵי עֲזַאי אוֹמְרִים, הָיוּ רָץ לְמִצְוָה קֶלָה (כְּבִתְמוּנָה), וּבִזְרוּחַ מִן הָעֵבֶרָה.
שְׂמִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה, וְעֵבֶרָה גּוֹרֶרֶת עֵבֶרָה. שְׂשֹׁכֵר מִצְוָה, מִצְוָה. וְשֹׁכֵר עֵבֶרָה,
עֵבֶרָה

2) *Ben Azay says, run to perform an easy mitzvah (just as you would to a difficult one), and flee from sin. For one mitzvah causes another mitzvah, and one sin causes another sin. **For the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the reward for a sin is a sin.***

The conventional understanding of this Mishna is that the reward that Hashem gives us for a mitzvah is, that he gives us the opportunity to do another mitzvah. Our Sages, however, teach us otherwise. The reward for the mitzvah is the mitzvah itself that you just performed. How is that? Because that mitzvah has now become part of you and contributes to who you are, through performing the mitzvah you have become a greater and holier person.

This is the mechanism through which a person grows in holiness. As he chooses to perform spiritual deeds, each deed is incorporated into him and increases his spiritual level, overtaking some of his earthiness. In the course of life, one can transform his body from something earthy to something quite holy.

This is man's purpose on this earth, viz, to reach the heavens, while right here on the earth, through making his life on this world a double of his life in the World to Come.

There is a deeper understanding of this concept, and Rabbi Shapiro ל"צ brings it out from a striking metaphor for this in the story of Creation.

On day three Hashem created all the trees and vegetation (Genesis 1:11,12).

(יא) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֵוֹ
אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ בּוֹ עַל הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי כֵן
(יב) וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ בּוֹ
לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב

11) Hashem said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: herbage yielding seed, **fruity trees**, yielding fruit each after its kind, containing its own seed on the earth." And it was so. 12) And the earth brought forth vegetation: herbage yielding seed after its own kind, **and trees yielding fruit**, each containing its seed after its kind.

The Sages pick up on the difference between what Hashem said and what the earth produced. Rashi comments:

עץ פרי - שיהא טעם העץ כטעם הפרי והיא לא עשתה כן אלא ותוצא הארץ
וגוי ועץ עושה פרי ולא העץ פרי

Hashem said that the earth should bring forth "fruity trees." This means that the actual tree- the wood and leaves- would be a fruit with the flavor of the fruit that it grew. So, the wood and leaves of an orange tree, for example, would taste like an orange, and one could eat it and enjoy it just like the actual orange. But the earth did not follow Hashem's instructions. All it produced was trees that yielded fruit, not trees that tasted like its fruit.

Our Sages are careful to note that the earth did not decide to disobey Hashem, as the earth has no ability to make a choice. Only Human beings have the ability to choose to defy Hashem's will. Hashem created this discrepancy to teach us a lesson.

All the delicious flavors that enter a fruit growing on a tree, come from the tree itself. The roots bring up nutrients, minerals and moisture into the branches and the branches mix all those ingredients together and produces its unique fruit with those flavors. The wood of every fruit tree is different and will produce only that particular fruit. The Midrash reveals (ילקוט שמעוני ויקרא תרע"ב) that when Mashiach comes the fruit tree itself, its wood and leaves, will also be edible fruit per the original instructions.

The current relationship between a fruit and its tree is a metaphor for the relationship between the performance of a mitzvah and its reward.

The World to Come where we will receive the reward for our mitzvot, is called גן עדן - the *Garden of Eden*. The purpose of every garden is to produce delicious fruits for people to enjoy. Eating and savoring the delicious fruits in the Garden of Eden is a metaphor for the reward in the World to Come.

The only way to have fruit is through a tree. The tree represents the performance of a mitzvah in this world, from which the reward in the World to Come is produced. Just as in this world the tree that produces the fruit has no flavor, so too, the act of performing the mitzvah provides no inherent pleasure. Save a few mitzvot, such as פרו ורבו - *procreation*, and עונג שבת ויו"ט - *pleasuring the Shabbat and Yom Tov*, performing a mitzvah is a dry act that yields no tangible pleasure to the one performing it. Even though we do derive an emotional and intellectual pleasure from doing mitzvot - the good feeling of having done something good, and the satisfying knowledge that we have fulfilled Hashem's

commandment to us - there is no pleasurable sensation in its performance. (It doesn't feel pleasurable to have the tefillin strapped to your arm and head. For bar mitzvah boys, it is actually uncomfortable until they break in the new leather straps.) Nevertheless, just as the flavors of the fruit are in the tree, yet all that we taste is tasteless wood, so too, the mitzvah's reward is in the "tasteless" act, even though we don't experience it now.

There is a deep reason for this. If the tree was fruit, just like the fruit, people would consume all the trees, and eventually, there would be no trees to produce fruit. Therefore, Hashem made the trees without a good flavor. Similarly, if one could derive the pleasure of a mitzvah in this world and it was physically pleasurable to do mitzvot, there would be no challenge to doing them. On the contrary, people would be running after them like they do ice cream, and all the other pleasures people spend their lives pursuing. Additionally, if a mitzvah were pleasurable with its reward built in, we would be living in Gan Eden in this world.

But the purpose of this world is to **earn** reward. As our Sages have said: (רש"י על דברים פרק ז' פסוק יא)

(יא) היום לעשותם - ולמחר לעולם הבא ליטול שכרם

Today is for doing the mitzvot, and tomorrow, the World to Come, is for reaping the rewards.

Earning implies hard work. We must *serve* Hashem. This implies negating and overriding our personal desires to perform Hashem's will.

This is why it is often so difficult to perform mitzvot. They are dry acts devoid of pleasure. It's like eating wood. We perform the mitzvot because Hashem has commanded us to do them and because He knows what's best for us. Indeed, one who lives his life according to the commandments of the Torah, lives the most rewarding and meaningful life. We love to do them and are truly excited with every opportunity to

perform a mitzvah, but not because they yield us a physical pleasure. It's because we are happy with the fact that we feel so privileged to be able to fulfill Hashem's commandment to us. Even where we understand that we derive a real benefit from the mitzvah, such as, the protection to the home provided by a kosher mezuzah on the door, the act of putting the mezuzah on the door, is still just a bland action, devoid of any pleasure.

However, the Torah reveals to us, that in the World to Come where we will eat the fruits of our labor and savor their delicious flavors, we will realize that all those flavors were embodied in the very dry "wooden" actions that we did on this world, and that it was directly from them that the delicious fruit that we are now enjoying came. In the World to Come we will see how the tree itself was really the fruit, for in it lies the flavor. We will see how the mitzvah that we did, embodied all the delicious flavors that we are experiencing in the World to Come.

This idea sheds new light on a Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:23).

בן־האי־האי אומר, לפנים צערא אגרא

Ben Hei Hei says: The reward given for a mitzvah is commensurate to the difficulty experienced in performing that mitzvah. The greater the difficulty one experienced in getting the mitzvah done, the greater the reward he will receive for having done the mitzvah.

Because we understand that the mitzvah is the tree which has all the flavors that we will experience in the World to Come, we realize that the quality and the self-sacrifice involved in performing the mitzvah are themselves the delicious flavors that we placed into the tree. That is what we are getting paid for. That self-sacrifice is what we are getting paid for, and that is the source of the flavor in the tree that we will experience in the World to Come.

This is the lesson that Hashem wanted to teach us by commanding that the earth bring forth a “fruity tree” but in the end only produce a “fruit tree.” The reward that we will reap in the World to Come is a mirror image of the life we led in this world, based on the Torah and mitzvot that we did throughout our lifetimes.

This is why it was so important to Avraham that he and Sarah be buried there. The cave and its name carried a profound twofold message to the world, one which Avraham and Sarah had dedicated their lives to teaching: (1) The purpose of this world is the next world, and (2) Here lie the holy people whose lives on this world were lived completely for the next world. Their resting place on earth was the sanctuary for their holy bodies; a testament to the holy lives they led.

Our Sages teach us (Tana Devei Eliyahu 25) that we are obligated to aspire to be like our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

לפיכך הייתי אומר שכל אחד ואחד מישראל חייב לומר מתי יגיעו
מעשי למעשה אבותי אברהם יצחק ויעקב

The goal of a Jew is to reach the level the Forefathers reached, which allowed them burial in the מערת המכפלה where their lives on this world mirrored perfectly the life they would have in the World to Come. But even if we are unsuccessful in reaching perfection as they did, we can still achieve a significant level of spirituality and holiness!

Because one’s body is the agent through which he performs mitzvot, it becomes holy and must be treated with utmost respect.

This is also why the Torah has commanded that a dead body be buried in the ground, as opposed to any other method of treatment. King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes (12:7):

(ז) וישב העפר על הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל האלקים אשר נתנה

7) The body will return to the earth from which it came, and the spirit will return to Hashem Who gave it.

Man was created from the earth and placing a body back into the earth returns it to its home. This is the most respectful place for it.

The following law illustrates the extreme importance of respect to a dead body by burying it.

A Cohen, one of the priestly family, may not come in contact with a dead body. He may not enter a room with a dead body in it or even an open a graveyard. Yet, if a close relative passes away, a Cohen may taint himself to attend the funeral. "Close relatives" are his father, mother, wife, brother, sister, son, and daughter. The one exception to this rule is the Cohen Gadol, the High Priest, who may not even attend the funeral of his close relatives. He is considered so holy that he may have no contact with death at all.

There is, however, one instance where even the High Priest must actually bury a dead body: Where there is no one else to do so. For example, if the High Priest found a corpse on a deserted road or in a field and there is no one to bury it, he must bury the body himself. So important is the honor of the dead body of a Jew that even the High Priest may not leave it unburied. The High Priest himself, who is forbidden to attend the funeral of even his own mother, father, son, or daughter, *must* defile himself to bury a random body found on the road.

The dead body of a Jew is not like the glass bottle that held a very expensive wine, such that when the wine is gone, you just toss the bottle without a thought. Through the many mitzvot that the person did, and through the Torah that he learned, his body became holy. It must therefore be treated with the utmost respect, which explains why every Jewish grave is, to a degree, a מכפלה.

There is living proof to this concept. There are many documented cases of holy Sages whose bodies had to be exhumed for some reason. When they were exhumed, they were found to be whole and as fresh and supple as the day that they were buried. Since their bodies were completely holy, they were not subject to decay. These people were also buried in a **מכפלה**.

When Avraham completed the purchase of the burial plot from Ephron the Hittite, the Torah tells us (23:17):

(יז) וַיָּקָם שָׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּמַכְפֵּלָה

20) And Ephron's field with the cave in it was confirmed...

Rashi takes the word **ויקם**, which also means “and it stood up,” literally and explains that the field and cave actually became elevated by leaving the hands of a commoner and entering the possession of a king.

תקומה היתה לו שיצא מיד הדיוט ליד מלך -

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato explains this concept in the first chapter of his work *The Path of the Just*.

ואם תעמיק עוד בענין תראה כי העולם נברא לשימוש האדם. אמנם הנה הוא עומד בשיקול גדול. כי אם האדם נמשך אחר העולם ומתרחק מבוראו, הנה הוא מתקלקל, ומקלקל העולם עמו. ואם הוא שולט בעצמו ונדבק בבוראו ומשתמש מן העולם רק להיות לו לסיוע לעבודת בוראו, הוא מתעלה והעולם עצמו מתעלה עמו. כי הנה עילוי גדול הוא לבריות כולם בהיותם משמשי האדם השלם המקודש בקדושתו יתברך

*If you look into this deeply you will see that the entire world was created for man's use. However, it stands in a delicate balance. If man pursues the pleasures of this world as an end unto themselves, taking himself far away from Hashem, he ruins himself and the world with him. If, however, he controls himself and clings to Hashem, using the resources of the world only as tools to serve Hashem, he elevates himself and the entire world with him. **For it is***

a great merit for the resources in the world to serve the human being who is sanctified with Hashem's holiness.

This applies to the human body as well as to all material matter in the world. They become sanctified and hallowed having been used to bring a person closer to Hashem.

Another very important message is inherent in there being a physical manifestation of one's life on this earth in the form of a resting place for his body. During one's terrestrial life, he impacts the earth and its inhabitants in many different ways. When one leaves the world, his accomplishments don't evaporate and leave the world with him; they remain here, continuing to impact the world. Leaving the body in the earth connects the deceased to all the deeds that he left on the world. Not to leave a person's body here on the earth is like saying he exists no longer in any form, and he has had no influence on the world. He and his influence have disappeared.

There is one more very important point. The Torah teaches that the dead will live again. There will be תחיית המתים - resurrection of the dead. Body and soul will be reunited so as to pay the body for hosting the soul during its time here on earth. (Ezekiel Chapter 37 relates an account of Ezekiel resurrecting a large group of dried bones.) Placing the body in the ground is like planting a kernel of wheat. When you put it into the ground, first it disintegrates, then a stalk appears with many kernels of wheat on it, each with their own many layers of bran.

This is what will happen with the dead bodies placed in the ground. Even though they disintegrate, when the proper time comes, they will be reconstituted and once again come alive. It is like planting a seed for the future.

Many are familiar with the Mishna that says - כל ישראל יש להם חלק - לעולם הבא - *“All of Yisrael have a place in the World to Come.”* The “World to Come” here means the new world that will begin with the resurrection of the dead. What many do not know is that the Mishna continues and lists those who will not be resurrected. The very first on the list is someone who does not believe that it will happen! If someone does not believe in it, he, per his belief, will not participate in it. A person who opts not to be buried is really saying that he does not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and, as such, will truly not be entitled to resurrection.

Our Sages teach us that this applies only to one who has elected not to be buried; someone who died in a fire, or perished in an oven in the Holocaust, will be resurrected when the time comes. Hashem will lovingly collect the ashes and restore them to life.

The Talmud teaches us (Gittin 56b) that when King Titus, who destroyed the second Holy Temple, died, he commanded them to burn him and spread his ashes over the seven seas so that the *“G-d of the Jews”* should not find him and punish him. The Talmud then tells the story of his nephew Onkelos who wanted to convert to Judaism:

אמר ליה דיניה דההוא גברא במאי אמר ליה במאי דפסיק אנפשיה כל
יומא מכנשי ליה לקיטמיה ודייני ליה וקלו ליה ומבדרו אשב ימי

Before he converted, Onkelos brought up King Titus’s soul from the dead and asked him, “What is your punishment in the World to Come?” Titus answered, “The very punishment that I decreed upon myself: Every day, Hashem collects my ashes, judges me, and then burns me again and spreads my ashes over the seven seas.”

If Hashem can collect Titus's ashes from the seven seas to punish him, He will surely collect the ashes of those who perished in the ovens of Auschwitz to reward them with a new life in the "World to Come."

Hence, burial is actually like planting; for we are placing the body in the earth from which it will be reborn in the future. May we merit the coming of Mashiach and resurrection of the dead, speedily in our times.