

Kol Rina  
An Independent Minyan  
Parashat Chayei Sara  
November 14, 2020 \*\*\* 27 Cheshvan, 5781

Chayei Sara in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3174/jewish/Chayei-Sarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3174/jewish/Chayei-Sarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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.

Haftarah in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/585783/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/585783/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

This week's haftarah describes an aging King David, echoing this week's Torah reading, which mentions that "Abraham was 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."

Food For Thought

*Rabbi Sacks' "Food For Thought" is a weekly feature in the 11 year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will carry on distributing these essays each week, so people around the world can continue to learn and be*

*inspired by his Torah.*

[Beginning the Journey \(Chayei Sarah 5781\) By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l](https://rabbisacks.org/chayei-sarah-5781/)  
<https://rabbisacks.org/chayei-sarah-5781/>

A while back, a British newspaper, The Times, interviewed a prominent member of the Jewish community and a member of the House of Lords – let's call him Lord X – on his 92nd birthday. The interviewer said, "Most people, when they reach their 92nd birthday, start thinking about slowing down. You seem to be speeding up. Why is that?"

Lord X's reply was this: "When you get to 92, you see the door starting to close, and I have so much to do before the door closes that the older I get, the harder I have to work."

We get a similar impression of Abraham in this week's parsha. Sarah, his constant companion throughout their journeys, has died. He is 137 years old. We see him mourn Sarah's death, and then he moves into action. He engages in an elaborate negotiation to buy a plot of land in which to bury her. As the narrative makes clear, this is not a simple task. He confesses to the local people, Hittites, that he is "an immigrant and a resident among you" (Gen. 23:4), meaning that he knows he has no right to buy land. It will take a special concession on their part for him to do so. The Hittites politely but firmly try to discourage him. He has no need to buy a burial plot: "No one among us will deny you his burial site to bury your dead." (Gen. 23:6) He can bury Sarah in someone else's graveyard. Equally politely but no less insistently, Abraham makes it clear that he is determined to buy land. In the end, he pays a highly inflated price (400 silver shekels) to do so.

The purchase of the Cave of Machpelah is evidently a highly significant event, because it is recorded in great detail and highly legal terminology, not just here, but three times subsequently in Genesis (here in 23:17 and subsequently in 25:9; 49:30; and 50:13), each time with the same formality. Here, for instance, is Jacob on his deathbed, speaking to his sons:

"Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebecca were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites." (Gen. 49:29-32)

Something significant is being hinted at here, otherwise why specify, each time, exactly where the field is and who Abraham bought it from?

Immediately after the story of land purchase, we read, "Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham with everything." (Gen. 24:1) Again this sounds like the end of a life, not a preface to a new course of action, and again our expectation is confounded. Abraham launches into a new initiative, this time to find a

suitable wife for his son Isaac, who at this point is at least 37 years old. Abraham instructs his most trusted servant to go “to my native land, to my birthplace” (Gen. 24:2), to find the appropriate woman. He wants Isaac to have a wife who will share his faith and way of life. Abraham does not stipulate that she should come from his own family, but this seems to be an assumption hovering in the background.

As with the purchase of the field, this course of events is described in more detail than almost anywhere else in the Torah. Every conversational exchange is recorded. The contrast with the story of the Binding of Isaac could not be greater. There, almost everything – Abraham’s thoughts, Isaac’s feelings – is left unsaid. Here, everything is said. Again, the literary style calls our attention to the significance of what is happening, without telling us precisely what it is.

The explanation is simple and unexpected. Throughout the story of Abraham and Sarah, God promises them two things: children and a land. The promise of the land (“Rise, walk in the land throughout its length and breadth, for I will give it to you,” Gen. 13:17) is repeated no less than seven times. The promise of children occurs four times. Abraham’s descendants will be “a great nation” (Gen. 12:22), as many as “the dust of the earth” (Gen. 13.16), and “the stars in the sky” (Gen. 15:5); he will be the father not of one nation but of many (Gen. 17:5).

Despite this, when Sarah dies, Abraham has not a single inch of land that he can call his own, and he has only one child who will continue the covenant, Isaac, who is currently unmarried. Neither promise has been fulfilled. Hence the extraordinary detail of the two main stories in Chayei Sarah: the purchase of land and the finding of a wife for Isaac. There is a moral here, and the Torah slows down the speed of the narrative as it speeds up the action, so that we will not miss the point.

God promises, but we have to act. God promised Abraham the land, but he had to buy the first field. God promised Abraham many descendants, but Abraham had to ensure that his son was married, and to a woman who would share the life of the covenant, so that Abraham would have, as we say today, “Jewish grandchildren.”

Despite all the promises, God does not and will not do it alone. By the very act of self-limitation (tzimtzum) through which He creates the space for human freedom, God gives us responsibility, and only by exercising it do we reach our full stature as human beings. God saved Noah from the Flood, but Noah had to make the Ark. He gave the land of Israel to the people of Israel, but they had to fight the battles. God gives us the strength to act, but we have to do the deed. What changes the world, what fulfils our destiny, is not what God does for us but what we do for God.

That is what leaders understand, and it is what made Abraham the first Jewish leader. Leaders take responsibility for creating the conditions through which God’s purposes can be fulfilled. They are not passive but active – even in old age, like Abraham in this week’s parsha. Indeed in the chapter immediately following the story of finding a wife for Isaac, to our surprise, we read that Abraham remarries and has eight more children. Whatever else this tells us – and there are many interpretations (the most likely being

that it explains how Abraham became “the father of many nations”) – it certainly conveys the point that Abraham stayed young the way Moses stayed young, “His eyes were undimmed and his natural energy unabated” (Deut. 34:7). Though action takes energy, it gives us energy. The contrast between Noah in old age and Abraham in old age could not be greater.

Perhaps, though, the most important point of this parsha is that large promises – a land, countless children – become real through small beginnings. Leaders begin with an envisioned future, but they also know that there is a long journey between here and there; we can only reach it one act at a time, one day at a time. There is no miraculous shortcut – and if there were, it would not help. The use of a shortcut would culminate in an achievement like Jonah’s gourd, which grew overnight, then died overnight. Abraham acquired only a single field and had just one son who would continue the covenant. Yet he did not complain, and he died serene and satisfied. Because he had begun. Because he had left future generations something on which to build. All great change is the work of more than one generation, and none of us will live to see the full fruit of our endeavours.

Leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow a life with immortality.

[Lessons on Leadership from Abraham and Sarah : Hayei Sarah by Jonathan Milgram](http://www.jtsa.edu/lessons-on-leadership-from-abraham-and-sarah)  
<http://www.jtsa.edu/lessons-on-leadership-from-abraham-and-sarah>

*Sarah Imenu*, matriarch of the Jewish people, is a rich and complex biblical character. As we read this week of her demise and her husband’s quest for her rightful resting place, it seems fitting to reflect on her extraordinary life, her role in the creation of the Jewish people, and the model of leadership she, together with Abraham, bequeathed to us as a legacy.

Sarah is, perhaps, the first woman we encounter in the Bible whose humanity and personality shine through in the text. She is physically beautiful, even drawing the attention of kings. She is wise; God instructs Abraham to heed her words. She is selfless, a barren woman giving her handmaid to her husband so that he may have progeny. She is jealous, enraged by that same handmaid’s ability to birth a son. And, finally, she is passionate, sexually active even at an advanced age.

As if the literal meaning of the Torah’s text did not provide enough details about Sarah’s qualities, in their midrashim, the talmudic Rabbis broaden our view of her and deepen our awareness of her contributions to public life. Baffled by her barrenness, for example, one rabbinic opinion flies in the face of the literal meaning of the text to assert that not she, but rather Abraham was sterile! Another rabbinic approach contends that along with Abraham, Sarah spread monotheism among the pagans and was charged with converting the women. In short, both the biblical and rabbinic traditions are full of appreciation and admiration for this “first lady of Israel.” Indeed,

as her name connotes, Sarah is the first female royal of Israel—in Hebrew her name means “princess,” and if based on the Akkadian *sharratu*, “queen” (Sarna, *Genesis: JPS Commentary*).

Among all the characterizations of Sarah, I would like to highlight one description that contemporary readers find unusual, if not perplexing: the notion that she was both Abraham’s wife and sister. While travelling in the Negev with Sarah, Abraham claimed not once, but twice [!] that she was his sister and according to one account, Sarah herself said, “he is my brother” (Gen. 20:5). It was feared that if it were known Abraham was her husband, he might be killed by one of Sarah’s admirers. Indeed, under the assumption that Sarah was not married, King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him. Only when God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and accused him of abducting a married woman—an act which if followed by cohabitation was punishable by death—did Abimelech realize the truth. Abimelech confronted Abraham, accusing the couple of being untruthful and nearly bringing tragedy upon the king and his people. Abraham defended himself and his wife saying that Sarah was, in fact, his sister, even if only through one shared parent.

Much has been written on this incident, with some Bible scholars focusing on the trickery and deceit in which Abraham and Sarah took part. Were Abraham and Sarah being completely honest with Abimelech? Was such an act by the “first couple” of Israel appropriate behavior? In the following, I would like to address the question, “what does it mean to be a wife and sister?” To answer this, I will offer a possible historical and cultural context that deepens our understanding of why Sarah’s status as wife and sister of Abraham is so important to her position as a leader. Sometimes examining the unstated presumptions of a biblical narrative results in an interpretation that can enlighten.

We can understand the wife-sister motif in our narrative in relation to the practice in some parts of the ancient near east where a man would, at times, marry a woman and simultaneously adopt her as a sister. Under this arrangement, with the juridical status of a sister, a married woman had greater protection and rights. As one scholar emphasizes, this might hark back to a cultural web of practices in which brothers were expected to be responsible for sisters. And, certainly, a half-sister married to her half-brother, as in our story, would have enjoyed the same benefits. Some have argued that the arrangement was primarily among the upper crust and royalty, which would attest to the power and position that our biblical couple may have enjoyed. Such a social status would have been appropriate to emphasize in the presence of King Abimelech. While the biblical text does not share these details of the wife-sister status, it adds an important dimension to the narrative. As the meaning of her name and her status as a wife-sister would suggest, Sarah too was a focal figure in contributing to Israelite religion’s humble beginnings. As appropriate for her time and place, with her pedigree, position and protection in hand, she—together with Abraham—faithfully brought their joint message of monotheism, the mission of God in heaven who would bring freedom,

salvation, and eternal truth to the world. To paraphrase one great scholar, the purity of the content was protected by the quality of its container. Through Sarah, the very human, beautiful, courageous, regal, and strategic spouse of Judaism's first "president," the message of monotheism's truth spread and sounded in the land of milk and honey and beyond. But what of the trickery with Abimelech? Was this not a stain on the first couple's legacy of leadership?

The confrontation between Abraham, Sarah, and King Abimelech potentially marks a pivotal stage in the development of Abraham and Sarah's leadership, an opportunity from which the couple learns important lessons for leadership. As the tradition intimates (see above), the couple eventually grew into the appropriate leadership qualities that became their legacy. In describing the next encounter with Abimelech, the acquisition of the well at Beer Sheva (Gen. 21:22–34), the Torah uses the ambiguous phrase *ba'et ha-hi*, "at that time," to open the story of Abraham's meeting and pact with the king. The great medieval French commentator Rashbam (grandson of Rashi) explains that the phrase here refers to the time of the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah. Against the simple meaning of the text, Rashbam comments that the couple came together to meet Abimelech and acquire their first property in the promised land. Isaac's miraculous birth to his mother at such an advanced age provided the optimal opportunity to approach the king who was, seemingly, aware of the extraordinary event.

In contrast to the earlier misleading encounter with Abimelech, the verses here describe a sophisticated, open, and diplomatic negotiation for the acquisition of the well. There is no evasiveness in dealing with royalty and Abimelech is even reproached because his servants prevented Abraham and Sarah's herds from free access to water. It is not without intention that verse 22 specifically refers to Abimelech without his royal title, intimating that he and the other party were now equals. With their previous ways behind them, Abraham and Sarah entered a new and mature phase of their leadership. Even so, Abimelech's insistence that an oath be taken not to deal falsely with him or his people (v. 23) will remind some readers of the earlier interaction between the leaders.

The lessons learned from leadership mishaps—whether one's own or those of a predecessor—form part of the web of what should inform all leaders: truth, principle, and purpose. Certainly, Abraham and Sarah modelled not only stellar leadership but growth in leadership.

As our country moves on in the aftermath of such a difficult and divisive presidential election season—a time requiring a special sense of unity among our citizenry—may we be witnesses to true and steadfast leadership and the ability of our political leaders to learn from past mistakes. Only then, in this sweet land, will liberty and freedom ring.

*(Jonathan Milgram is Associate Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS)*

[What Torah Can Teach Us about Overcoming Loneliness by Rabbi Michael Dolgin](https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/what-torah-can-teach-us-about-overcoming-loneliness)  
<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/what-torah-can-teach-us-about-overcoming-loneliness>

In the beginning of Parashat Chayei Sarah, Abraham introduces himself to the people of Canaan, the land that has been promised to his descendants. In doing so, he also introduces us to ourselves: “Ger v’toshav anochi imachem,” translated as “I am a resident alien among you.” (Genesis 23:4).

The JPS translation offered in the URJ Plaut Torah Commentary is accurate, but it cannot truly do justice to these words. Instead of some demographic category, ger v’toshav, the Hebrew words translated as “resident alien,” describe the inherent challenge of the human condition. Abraham identifies himself as an outsider, as a ger, meaning a stranger. Is it possible that the citizens of ancient Hebron would have mistaken him for a local? Using this term, the father of the Jewish people makes a statement: Regardless of outward similarities, he stands apart.

While Abraham possibly feels unique as the founder of monotheism in a pagan world, I think something more basic is in play: Each of us is eventually a ger. Our inner lives are experiences that only we – and the Holy Blessed One – can truly understand. Each of us stands apart: It’s a basic element of the human condition. Even in our most intimate connections and relationships, others must come to know us from the outside.

Nevertheless, we are also a toshav, a resident among others. The pandemic has reminded me and so many others with whom I speak that our nature is to be social. While it is normal to feel alone, we find it difficult to exist when we are completely distanced from others. We need to feel that we share a residence in this world with others. This distinction is existential rather than geographic; whether we are physically in contact with others or not, we need to be part of a community, a collective.

This week’s Torah portion addresses the difficulty of overcoming loneliness. In Genesis 23, Abraham seeks permanent possession of a piece of land in which to lay his beloved Sarah to rest. Rituals of burial and mourning give us a sense of eternity and continuity. It is not merely graves that need perpetual care; we too need reassurance that love and spirit can survive beyond our mere moments together in this realm.

This summer, I was pained and privileged to stand with families as they buried their loved ones who died due to COVID-19 without the usual supportive benefit of funeral gatherings and shiva visits. The result, of course, was difficult and distressing.

Nevertheless, I watched families take comfort in some of our core burial rituals that have remained the same for millennia. I will never forget how one family, allowed only 10 people at the burial of their beloved, shoveled earth into the grave while quietly and gently pausing to share stories that moved their hearts. In that moment, I could feel the presence of their loved one. Love is indeed stronger than death!

The theme of love also dominates the remainder of the Torah portion. Abraham sends his agent Eliezer to find a fitting partner for Isaac. While he seeks out family, as was

customary in ancient times, the central traits he seeks are character and heart. Abraham and Sarah were known for their hospitality and welcoming all into their tent. Through Eliezer, Abraham seeks a spouse for Isaac who shares this essential value. In the eyes of our tradition, neither Rebecca nor Isaac are passive partners. Rebecca chooses to be with someone who shares her values. When she and Eliezer arrive back in the Land of Israel, Isaac is waiting. Genesis 24:63 says: "And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching." The commentators, led by Rashi, see this verse as less about walking and more about praying, about pouring out his sadness over his mother and his hopes for the future. In doing so, tradition teaches that Isaac established the afternoon prayer service on that very day.

This moment, like most spiritual moments, is not about words in a siddur. By setting a profound example for us, Isaac overcomes his own profound loneliness by realizing his hope of finding a soulmate and a true partner in life. Even if we are lucky enough to have such a partner, we must work to know one another each and every day. When we respect the loving memories of those who have gone before us, when we invest in our key relationships today, we possess all that is truly valuable in the human experience.

*(Rabbi Michael Dolgin has served Temple Sinai Congregation of Toronto since 1992.)*

### Judaism and War by Rabbi Elliot Dorff, PhD

<https://www.aju.edu/ziegler-school-rabbinic-studies/our-torah/back-issues/judaism-and-war>

*A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven:*

*A time for being born and a time for dying, ...*

*A time for slaying and a time for healing, ...*

*A time for loving and a time for hating,*

*A time for war and a time for peace.*

*(Ecclesiastes 3:1- 8)*

Although the Rabbis who shaped the Jewish tradition had trouble with some parts of the biblical Book of Ecclesiastes, these famous words from that book aptly articulate the fact that Judaism is not pacifistic. While Judaism abhors war and yearns for a Messianic world in which it will cease, it recognizes that our world is unfortunately not Messianic. It provides guidelines for determining when it is indeed "a time for war" and when not, and it establishes rules for the just conduct of wars -- all the time seeking to avoid war and to work for peace. It recognizes that sometimes justice requires even violence, not only in personal self-defense but in the military action of a nation.

The morality of war is a topic Jews faced seldom in their history. Only in three relatively short periods of Jewish history did Jews have political and military autonomy -- namely, from the time of Moses to the destruction of the First Temple (c. 1300 B.C.E.

- 586 B.C.E.), during the Maccabean period (168-40 B.C.E.), and since the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948. It is only in these periods that Jews directly confronted the realities of power and the agonizing decisions of determining when and how to use it.

Jews, of course, have been part of other people's armies, and in democratic countries they have even fought for the right to serve. Asser Levy, for example, insisted on the privilege of personally doing his military duty in the colony of New Amsterdam and refused to pay a tax in lieu thereof. But then the decisions of when and how to fight were in other people's hands.

The modern State of Israel, of course, has unfortunately had a surfeit of experience with war, and it has developed a Code of Ethics to govern the conduct of its wars. That code, Ru'ah Tza'hal (The Spirit of the Israeli Defense Forces) specifies at its beginning that it draws on four sources:

The tradition of the IDF and its military heritage as the Israel Defense Forces.

The tradition of the State of Israel, its democratic principles, laws, and institutions.

The tradition of the Jewish People throughout their history.

Universal moral values based on the value and dignity of human life.

Notice that the document, while drawing on "the tradition of the Jewish People throughout history," does not use Jewish law as a source. That, I would suggest, is because of the precious little experience Jews have historically had in deciding which wars to fight and how for over two thousand years, and so what Jewish law says about such things is both outdated and inadequate.

In 2012 Professor Asa Kasher, author of the first version of Israel's Code of Ethics for the IDF and a Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Tel Aviv University, organized a conference on this issue. Professor Michael Walzer, Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, suggested that here, as in many other places and times in our history, Jews should borrow from other cultures, in this case from Just War Theory developed largely in Catholic thought but more recently in secular philosophical thought as well. I instead suggested that we can articulate a Jewish Code of Ethics for war by doing what I call "depth theology," that is, probing the foundational perspectives and values of the Jewish tradition and applying them to the contemporary means and conundrums of war. Both papers were published in 2012 in the journal *Philosophia* and can be found here. (accessed 11/2/20)

Both of us, like the Jewish tradition, would have us do everything possible to avoid war, but we both would also acknowledge that sometimes war is both just and necessary. It is that understanding that should lead us American Jews to take time to honor the veterans who have fought for our country when that was necessary, sometimes at considerable cost to their physical or mental health and sometimes even at the cost of their lives. Israel does the same to honor its veterans, and we Americans should do no less for ours. (*Rabbi Elliot Dorff, PhD is AJU's Rector and Sol & Anne Dorff Distinguished Service Professor in Philosophy. He is Chair of the Conservative Movement's*

*Committee on Jewish Law and Standards and served on the editorial committee of Etz Hayim, the new Torah commentary for the Conservative Movement. )*

### In Memory of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt'l

<https://www.torahinmotion.org/discussions-and-blogs/in-memory-of-rabbi-lord-jonathan-sacks-zt'l>

I had the honour of sharing a few words in honour of Rabbi Sacks zt"l at the moving program Mizrachi of Canada organized this week. I share my words below.

I am honoured and unworthy to be asked to say a few words in memory of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l.

What made Rabbi Sacks so special? Why did so many people look to him for inspiration?

I believe it begins with his educational choices. Rabbi Sacks was a student of philosophy. He focused on the grand ideas and ideals of Judaism, never losing sight of the big picture. Like Saadia Gaon, the Rambam, Gersonides and Rav Soloveitchik before him, he mastered the philosophical teachings of the day. Moreover, he knew how to translate those ideas into the cultural language of our times, enabling him to speak to the issues of the day.

Just last month his latest book, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, was published. It is morality that sums up his life. Rabbi Sacks was the moral beacon we so badly needed, trying to heal the broken and divided world in which we live. With his powerful voice of reason, a voice of hope, a voice of responsibility, he sought to bring people together and bring healing to the world.

Rabbi Sacks took seriously the teaching of our Sages, *Who is wise? Halomed mikol adam*, one who learns from all people. He understood that we can learn from all people and from all religions. We at Torah in Motion had the honour of hosting Rabbi Sacks for our tenth anniversary celebrations. We had a program at University of Toronto, where he engaged in conversation with the Roman Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor (an event we dubbed *Lord and Taylor*). He began his remarks by saying how excited he was to be there. He noted that Jewish tradition teaches that upon seeing a non-Jewish scholar, one must make a bracha, and proceeded to make the bracha with *shem umalchut*, invoking G-d's name as he recited the bracha, *shenatan mechachmato lebasar vedam*.

Because he was *lomed mikol adam*, he could be *melamed l'kol adam*, teach all people. There were few who reached more people, and none who reached a wider spectrum. He reached well beyond the Orthodox world that he inhabited, inspiring and influencing Jews of all persuasions; perhaps more important, he reached out to and impacted upon the non-Jewish world. This is, unfortunately, something all too rare today. He was the moral voice of the UK and as in the days of old, the influence of this British "royal" reached the four corners of the globe. He was an *or lagoyim*, sanctifying

the name of G-d far and wide. He made us proud to be Jews.

Rabbi Sacks was a master orator and a master writer. While the great ones in all fields make it look easy, becoming a master takes hard work, followed by more hard work. His poetic use of language and range of sources, the verbal portraits he would paint, and the relevance of his message were a joy to behold. He had the ability to take the mundane and make it special. He could take ideas that we have known since kindergarten and shine a new light on them, allowing the old to be renewed. I can think of no better introduction to tefillah than his introduction to the Koren siddur. His introductions to the various machzorim are nothing short of masterpieces, resonating with meaning to the novice and learned alike.

Jonathan Sacks had intended to become Dr. Sacks, professor of philosophy. As a young student at Cambridge, he came to New York to see—amongst others—the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who turned the meeting on its head, asking him what he was planning to do for the Jewish people. It was that meeting that changed the course of his life, leading him to become the Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, author, teacher, orator, friend of royalty, leader, all the while serving as the ambassador of the Jewish people.

I believe this is the idea that informed his understanding of the rasha of the Pesach seder. Ma ha'avodah hazot lachem, what is this service to you? (s)he asks.

Commentaries throughout the ages have struggled to explain what makes this child a rasha. Rabbi Sacks, in what he himself called a "radical re-interpretation", explains that the child turns to his parents and asks them, Ma haavodah hazot lachem, what does Judaism mean to you? You want me to be a proud Jew, to take my Judaism seriously. What type of model, Mommy and Daddy, have you displayed? If we want our children to take their own Judaism seriously, we have to model that life for them. Only if we love Judaism, ve'avavata et Hashem, can we properly veshinnantem lebanecha, teach our children.

The Rebbe was asking the young Jonathan Sacks, Ma havodah hazot lecha? What are you going to do to bring the beauty of Torah to others? Rabbi Sacks took that message to heart, understanding that he now had a great mission, one that transformed his life and the lives of thousands, perhaps millions, of others.

I think the best way to honour the memory of Rabbi Sacks is to ask ourselves, Ma havodah hazot lachem? What does Judaism truly mean to us? What are we doing to ensure the beautiful message of the Torah is central to our lives? What are we doing to make a difference in our own lives, and in the lives of those with whom we come in contact? Yehi zichro baruch. *(Rabbi Jay Kelman, founder of Torah in Motion, received a BSc in accounting from Yeshiva University and Smicha from its affiliate, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. He served as a pulpit rabbi in Toronto for 15 years, and was a recipient of the Award for Rabbinic Leadership from the United Jewish Communities Federation of North America. He teaches Halacha and Rabbinics at the TanenbaumCommunity Hebrew Academy of Toronto )*

## Yahrtzeits

Larry Ozarow remembers his mother Mollie Ozarow (Malka bat Avraham Yitzhak va Rais'l ) on Saturday November 14th (Cheshvan 27)

Len Grossman remembers his father Harry Grossman on Friday November 20th (Kislev 4)