

Parashat Chayei Sarah

Taking Action to Protect the Future

And take a wife for my son Isaac (Genesis 24:4)

ולקחת אשה לבני ליצחק (בראשית כד:ד)

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, a leading rabbinic figure of the 20th century, was once asked whether Jewish law forbids the purchase of insurance, as it represents a lack of faith in God. After all, it stands to reason that if one has faith that the future lies in the hand of God, wouldn't buying insurance to alleviate the pain of a tragic setback indicate a lack of faith? Rabbi Feinstein answered unequivocally (*Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 2:111*) that Jewish law certainly permits the purchase of insurance. Apart from his ruling, his underlying logic carries a critical message especially relevant to each of us today. Rabbi Feinstein explains that God endowed humanity in recent generations with the idea of establishing insurance, and that each of us is also blessed with the intelligence to take action and buy insurance in the first place. He also notes that if a person wants to have faith, he should buy the insurance policy and have faith that God will provide him with the means to pay the premium each month. While we trust in the future, we cannot sit back and wait with faith for the future to arrive. Rather, God endows us with the intelligence, wisdom and ability to plan and act in our own best interest.

Abraham finds himself in a similar predicament. At the conclusion of the binding of Isaac, after Abraham has demonstrated his complete faith, he is given the divine promise to Abraham that his descendants will be “as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore...” (Genesis 22:17) They will literally be too numerous to count. Yet, at Sarah's death Abraham has only one child, with no wife and no grandchildren. Rather than waiting for the prophecy to happen on its own, Abraham recognizes that he himself must take action to insure the future that he was promised. For this reason, Abraham sends his servant Eliezer back to Ur, the ancestral home, to find a wife for Isaac who, according to Rashi, is 37 years old at the time of Sarah's death. (Rashi on Genesis 25:20) When Eliezer expresses doubt about whether his mission would prove successful and whether he would indeed find an appropriate match for Isaac, Abraham tells Eliezer that, “The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house, and from the land of my nativity, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying: ‘To your seed will I give this land; He will send His angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son from there.’” While Abraham's faith remains absolute, he recognizes that he must also take the action necessary to guarantee his future.

Rabbi Robert Orkand [notes](#) that, “The covenant with Abraham—indeed with the Jewish people—is not that God will act to bring it about. Rather, God lays out the promise, but Abraham and his children must do the hard work to bring about the desired outcome. The covenant will be what God said it would be, but not without human action. The meaning of these events is that God depended on Abraham in his generation and depends upon us in ours. We know from Jewish history that if we want a land of our own and generations of Jewish children we cannot leave the future to God. We are challenged by God to fulfill the covenant and our future will depend on our meeting that challenge.”

This is why we work so hard on behalf of a strong, self-sufficient Jewish state. It is not due to our lack of faith—quite the opposite! That faith guides us to do our utmost to ensure that Israel will always have the means and support to protect itself from the threats that it faces. This is also why it is so important for the Senate to pass legislation reauthorizing the Iran Sanctions Act for another ten years until 2026. An overwhelming bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives [passed similar legislation](#) last week 419-1. While the Iran sanctions are currently waived following the JCPOA (nuclear agreement) with Iran, this bill sends a strong message to Iran that the United States is

serious about enforcing the nuclear deal. It also represents a form of insurance, giving the United States the leverage it needs and ensuring that future administrations, of either party, can re-impose or “snap-back” the currently waived sanctions if Iran violates the deal. This kind of insurance isn’t a lack of faith. Instead, it represents the understanding that as people of faith, we must take the necessary action to ensure that Iran does not renege on its commitments and restart its nuclear program for many years into the future. ■

Excellence in Kindness

שתה וגם לגמליך אשקה (בראשית כד:יד) (Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink (Genesis 24:14))

The IDF’s emergency field hospital, which Israel regularly sends to disaster areas across the globe, has helped save lives and has treated sick and injured victims of numerous natural disasters, including after the [2010 earthquake in Haiti](#), a [2013 typhoon in the Philippines](#), a [2015 earthquake in Nepal](#), and many more. Now, the international community, via the World Health Organization, has officially recognized the field hospital as the best in the world. [According to Ynet News](#), the IDF Medical Corps’ field hospital, “was recognized by the World Health Organization as the world’s leader, becoming the first field hospital to achieve the highest possible ranking from the UN agency.”

In 2012 the World Health Organization began a process to set binding standards for field hospitals sent to disasters. Type 1 provide emergency outpatient care, Type 2 provide operating rooms, surgical teams, and ICUs, while Type 3 provide inpatient referral surgical care. After a lengthy evaluation process, the WHO team announced that the Israeli field hospital was recognized as a level-3 hospital—the only one in the world. One [member of the WHO evaluation team] said, “There’s room for the world to learn from the Israeli field hospital.” And, as we see from Parashat Chayei Sarah, excellence in the performance of kindness is a natural trait that we can trace back to Abraham and Rebecca.

Tasked with choosing a future wife for Isaac, Eliezer devises a plan that will allow him to discover the ideal match for Abraham’s son. “Behold, I stand by the fountain of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. So let it come to pass, that the woman to whom I shall say: Let down your pitcher, please, that I may drink; and she shall say: Drink, and I will also give your camels drink; let the same be she that You have appointed for Your servant, for Isaac...” (Genesis 24:13-14) Essentially, he devises a test of kindness: the winning contestant would not only draw water for Eliezer. She would also offer to draw water for his ten camels—which represented a great deal of effort and exertion. Sixteenth century kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Alshich wonders: Why did Eliezer decided to test Isaac’s future wife specifically in the area of performing acts of kindness, and why did he devise such a demanding test? Alshich explains that because Isaac’s father Abraham excelled in welcoming guests to his home and performing other acts of kindness, and he had commanded his children to follow in his footsteps, it would only be logical that Abraham’s future daughter-in-law must not only be willing to perform acts of kindness, but that she must excel in the attribute of *chessed* as well. Rebecca, of course, passed Eliezer’s test with flying colors. “And when she had done giving him drink, she said: ‘I will draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking.’” (24:19)

[According to Israel21c](#), “The IDF field hospital delegation will travel to Hong Kong in the coming two weeks to accept an official flag from the WHO organization in recognition of its extraordinary achievement.” Col. (res.) Dr. Ofer Merin, the commander of the General Staff’s Surgical Hospital Unit, whose civilian job is directing the Shaare Zedek Medical Center’s Trauma Department, called the designation, “a national honor for the state of Israel and for the Medical Corps.” The hospital has come to symbolize Israel’s national commitment to *chessed*—acts of kindness—and the desire of the Jewish state to help people in need at any time, and any place. This new designation emphasizes not only Israel’s commitment to helping others, but to doing so with devotion, dedication and excellence. Rebecca would surely have approved. ■

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