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## Shabbat Shalom Fax

*Parshat Chayei Sarah*

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27 Cheshvan, 5781

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November 14, 2020

**GOOD MORNING!** As I sit here composing this week's column, all of us here in the not-so-United States are anxiously awaiting the final tally of the votes in five different states. As of now, there is some uncertainty as to who will be the 46th president. The only thing we can absolutely be certain of is that the US is deeply divided. It is for this reason that I decided to focus this week's column on something that historically brought the Jewish people together as a nation.

**This week's** Torah portion opens with the death of the first matriarch of the Jewish people and the funeral arrangements made by her husband Abraham. Much of this week's reading discusses Abraham's plan for securing a suitable wife for his son Isaac and how Abraham's loyal servant Eliezer made that happen.

**Eliezer succeeds** in discovering a very kind and caring person named Rebecca, and she returns with him to the land of Israel as a potential wife for Isaac. Toward the end of this week's Torah reading we find:

*Isaac brings her (Rebecca) into the tent, his mother Sarah's... (Genesis 24:67)*

**The Torah** goes out of its way to comment on a seemingly mundane event. Why is this significant? What was special about this tent? According to our sages (*Bereishis Rabbah* 60:16), while Sarah was alive three miracles occurred in her tent each week.

**The first** of the miracles was that the candles Sarah lit for Shabbat would burn throughout the week and only extinguish the following Friday in order to be lit again for Shabbat. The second was that Sarah's dough would always miraculously increase. The third was that a protective cloud (representing the Divine Presence) was stationed above her tent (according to rabbinic tradition, Sarah was a greater prophet than Abraham).

**When Sarah died** all these miracles ceased. However, when Isaac brought his bride-to-be into his late mother's tent, all the miracles immediately returned to that tent. Rebecca thus took her place as the next matriarch of the Jewish people.

**One of the concepts** that we learn from this story is that the matriarchs of the Jewish people lit candles every Friday for Shabbat. According to Maimonides (*Laws of Chanukah* 4:14), lighting candles on Friday night is of the utmost importance and takes precedence over many other *mitzvot*. The reason for this is that the Shabbat candles ushers in peace within the home. Maimonides goes on to explain why this is so crucial; "For the entirety of the Torah was given only to promote peace in the world."

**The Talmud** (*Shabbat* 35b) details a fascinating custom that was observed in Talmudic times every Friday afternoon towards the onset of Shabbat. A person would climb to the rooftop of the tallest structure in town and blow a series of *shofar* blasts. They consisted of three separate series of blasts. The Talmud goes on to explain the significance of each series.

**The first** was to inform the farmers in the field that it was time to lay down their tools and start making their way back home to prepare for Shabbat. According to the Talmud, those in the fields nearest to the village would wait on the outskirts of the village for the farmers who were in the fields that were the furthest away. They would then all enter the village together to get ready for Shabbat. This must have been a remarkable and unifying experience for all of them, as well as for all those who saw this take place each week.

**The second** series of *shofar* blasts alerted the shopkeepers in the village that it was time to close their stores and make their way to their homes. The third series of *shofar* blasts indicated that it was time to welcome in Shabbat and light the candles, ushering in a time of peace and serenity into the homes.

**The Talmud continues**, "After this third series of blasts the trumpeter used to wait the amount of time that it would take to roast a small fish, he would then blow a final blast and put the *shofar* away (indicating that Shabbat has now begun)." This "time that it would take to roast a small fish" has been determined to be 18 minutes. This is one of the reasons why we light Shabbat candles 18 minutes before sunset.

**If you** have ever spent Shabbat in the holy city of Jerusalem, you will have heard the siren sound 40 minutes before sunset announcing the imminent onset of Shabbat. It is a remarkable and unforgettable experience – the city streets begin to fall quiet and there are few cars on the streets. Almost immediately there is a palpable difference in the atmosphere of the city.

**This "Shabbat Siren"** is VERY different from the air raid sirens, which alert the country to missiles that have been fired from Israel's not-so-friendly neighboring countries. I grew up in Jerusalem and lived there until about the age of nine. One of the jarring memories of my youth was hearing the shrill air raid sirens going off in the middle of the night and everyone hurrying out of their apartments and heading to the communal bomb shelters that were in the

basement of every apartment building.

**The siren** that indicates that Shabbat will begin shortly is what is known as the “All Clear” siren, which is a long continuous tone (as opposed to the “Warning Sirens” which are similar to those of an ambulance; a continuous ascending and descending tone).

**This tradition** of the *shofar* blasts recorded in the Talmud may even have even been a tradition in the times of the Holy Temple. When the Second Temple existed, the trumpeter stood on a platform on a stone specially sculpted for him at the top of the south-west corner of the outer wall.

**During the excavations** of the southern section of the Temple Mount a stone was uncovered with the inscription: “The place of the trumpeter.” This stone is on permanent display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

**Rabbi Edward Davis**, rabbi emeritus of Young Israel of Hollywood Florida, describes the unifying and enduring power of this custom of lighting candles for Shabbat with the following anecdote:

**Back in the mid-nineties**, a Jewish advertising executive in New York came up with an idea: What if the New York Times – considered the world’s most prestigious newspaper – listed the weekly Shabbat candle lighting time each week? Sure, someone would have to pay for the space, but imagine the Jewish awareness and pride that might result from such a prominent mention of the Jewish Shabbat each week!

**He got in touch** with a Jewish philanthropist and sold him on the idea. It cost almost two thousand dollars a week, but he did it. And for the next five years, each Friday, Jews around the world would see “Jewish Women: Shabbat candle lighting time this Friday is...”

**Eventually**, the philanthropist had to cut back on a number of his projects. In June 1999 the little Shabbat notice stopped appearing in the Friday edition of the Times, and from that week on it never appeared again, except once.

**On January 1, 2000**, the NY Times ran a Millennium edition, a special issue that featured three front pages. One had the news from January 1, 1900. The second was the actual news of the day, January 1, 2000. And then they had a third front page, projecting future events of January 1, 2100.

**This fictional page** included things like a welcome to Cuba, the fifty-first state, a discussion whether robots should be allowed to vote, and so on. But in addition to the articles trying to imagine the future, there was one more thing: at the bottom of the Year 2100 front page was the candle lighting time in New York, for January 1, 2100.

**Nobody paid for it**; it was just put in by the Times. The production manager of the New York Times, an Irish Catholic, was asked about it. His answer was right on the mark, and it speaks to the eternity of our people and to the power of Jewish ritual: “We don’t know what will happen in the year 2100, it is impossible to predict the future. But of one thing you can be certain: that in the year 2100 Jewish women all over the world will be lighting Shabbat candles.”

**TORAH PORTION:** Chayei Sarah, Genesis 23:1 - 25:18

**Sarah** dies at the age of 127. Avraham purchases a burial place for her in Hebron in the cave of Ma’arat HaMachpela. Avraham sends his servant, Eliezer, back to the “old country,” his birthplace Charan, to find a wife for Yitzchak (Isaac). Eliezer makes what appear to be very strange conditions for the matrimonial candidate to fulfill in order to qualify for Yitzchak. Rivka (Rebecca) unknowingly meets the conditions. Eliezer succeeds in getting familial approval, though they were not too keen about Rivka leaving her native land.

**Avraham** marries Keturah and fathers six more sons. He sends them east (with the secrets of mysticism) before he dies at 175. Yitzchak and Ishmael bury Avraham near Sarah in the Ma’arat HaMachpela, the cave Avraham purchased in Hebron to bury Sarah. The portion ends with the listing of Ishmael’s 12 sons and Ishmael dying at age 137.

**SHABBAT LIGHTING:** *Jerusalem* 4:05 Miami 5:14 Cape Town 7:08 Guatemala 5:12 Hong Kong 5:23 Honolulu 5:31  
Jo'Burg 6:15 LA 4:32 London 3:58 Melbourne 7:49 Mexico 5:39 Moscow 4:07 New York 4:21 Singapore 6:32 Toronto 4:35

**“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”:** More than the Jewish people have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jewish people. — Ahad Ha’am (the pen name of Asher Hirsch Ginsberg – a secular Jew)

Dedicated with Deep Appreciation to  
**Rodney & Chana Cox**



Shabbat Shalom,

*Yitzchak Zweig*

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

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