

**Cody Umans**

*D'var Torah*

## **CHAYEE SARAH**

Good Morning/Hello.

In my opinion Generosity, respect and commitment are all main teachings of the Jewish religion, and are all strong messages of my portion, Chayee Sarah.

At the beginning of the portion, Sarah has died, and Abraham finds a burial place for her in the Cave of Machpelah. Abraham knew that he had to find a wife for Isaac to keep Judaism alive. He sent his servant Eliezer to his own family to find a wife for Isaac. When Eliezer got to the town of Nachor, Abraham's native land, he prayed to G-d, saying that the girl who not only offers me water, but who also offers water to my camels is the one who's right for Isaac.

Rebecca does both of these things. Eliezer asks her family if he can take her back to marry Isaac. Rebecca's family asked her if she wanted to go back with Eliezer, and she agreed to go. When she and Isaac saw each other, it was love at first sight. Rebecca became a living image of Sarah, and took her place as the matriarch of the Jewish religion. At the end of the portion, Abraham dies, and Isaac and Ishmael come together to bury him.

Some of the most generous people in my parasha are Rebecca and her family. Rebecca offered water to Eliezer and his camels without being asked. Rebecca's mother and brother gave Rebecca the choice to marry Isaac, as well as the choice to leave whenever she wanted to. At that time, a woman was rarely given the choice to marry of her own free will. Ironically, Isaac didn't have a choice about whom he married. Usually, it was the man who got the choice and not the woman.

When Rebecca came to Sarah's tent, she not only took physical possession of the actual tent, she basically took Sarah's model (position) to carry on the blessings. One of the four blessings that Sarah brought to Abraham's house was that she held her doors wide open and she provided alms for the poor.

Another example of generosity in the portion was when Ishmael and Isaac together buried their father, Abraham, in the Cave of Machpelah, even though Ishmael's father had kicked him out of the house at a very young age.

The two brothers set aside their differences and came together for their father. As Isaac and Ishmael were brothers, so, too, are the religions they started, Judaism and Islam. Though some thinkers disagree on this point, Ishmael is traditionally viewed as the father of the Islamic faith. The cave of Machpelah in the town of Hebron where Abraham and Sarah were both buried is claimed by both religions.

Today people from these two religions are fighting over the town of Hebron partially because of the cave of Machpelah. I don't see why you have to fight to sort things out. Today, we have so much hi-tech communication.

Shouldn't that help us learn about each other and therefore make it easier to be peaceful? But it's the opposite. Back then, Isaac and Ishmael came together to do something important. Why can't we do that today?

How come all of our technological equipment gets smaller, but our problems get larger? Isaac and Ishmael had the same father, so that means that both religions came from the same source.

Shouldn't we all be able to agree to come together and make peace? We learn at age three to learn from our mistakes but grown ups that rule countries seem to have problems with that.

We were asked to choose a ritual and an ethical Mitzvah in preparation for our B'nai Mitzvahs. We learned to be more generous and responsible for doing Mitzvot.

This past year I went to Spanish Harlem with some other kids from the community to work and play with younger kids who lived in a shelter and had a family member with AIDS. The first week, only two kids came. By the next week, we had seven kids! After that the kids were always asking when we were coming back. There was one girl, Desiree, who was around 8 years old. She came back every single week with her little brother. She spoke English more fluently than any of the other kids, so we asked her to help us translate.

I learned that we they were just people like us, and to remember that they weren't as privileged as we were. My mom with some helpers prepared food baskets which I (am paying for) and will be delivered to the families at the shelter this Monday.

I think that respect is another important part of the Jewish religion. Once we put away our material differences we were cool, which was instantly. You should respect and be kind to everyone even if they are different from you. I know personally that it can take a lot of effort, but there are many ways of being generous.

Generosity doesn't mean you have to give materials, it can be taking care of someone, respecting others feelings, or simply be doing something without being asked. For me, generosity can be as simple as helping a friend with homework.

All of you sitting here are generous to come to my bar mitzvah. It also feels so good to be generous. When I came home from Harlem I walked a little taller that day and I knew that I really could make a difference in the world.

My grandmother Omi donated the torah that I read from today, to the New Shul. This torah had been in the family for 100 something years and she was still willing to let other people use it.

I would like to thank my parents for being generous. They set up this bar mitzvah for me, and have done so many generous things that I can't even begin to state them. My parents let me play on my travel baseball team, which takes up a lot of their time; they commute me from Manhattan to Brooklyn just because they know how much it means to me. They switched me from public school to private school just so I could get a better-rounded education that a school like Poly Prep provides.

You guys always are willing to help, and have always supported me mentally and physically. Thank you for being such good role models for me.

I would like to continue to be generous. One of my future plans is to take care of my family. Hopefully I can take as good as care of them as they have taken of me. I would also like to support my temple, the New Shul, by coming to services and continuing to practice my religion.

In ninth grade I will have to do a community service project and I want that to be part of my commitment to the Jewish religion. I have learned so much about generosity and respect while preparing for my bar mitzvah that I know that it will be useful for my ninth grade project. I am committed to help out around the neighborhood for my ninth grade project.

Something that I have learned while preparing for my bar mitzvah is that you may have second thoughts about making such an important commitment, but in the end you know that you've done the right thing.

I also learned that it can be very hard to fulfill your commitment but once you do, you are rewarded.

For myself making a commitment to Judaism takes a combination of self-confidence, faith and soul searching. Once the decision is made you are open to whatever comes your way. I don't really know how I will feel in the future about religion, what I will learn or where it will lead me. What I do know is that the decision to live as a Jew is an act of faith and it is important to me.

Commitment can feel like an adventure and it can feel scary. I don't know where or if I will find the answers to my life's questions or beliefs; maybe in a synagogue or on a baseball field or wherever I least expect it, maybe working with underprivileged children or even with my own friends. But making the decision to live life in a Jewish way puts me on a path to explore the religion further than I have ever done before. Whether I agree or not with all the teachings, I am thinking and questioning, and that helps me to determine what kind of a person I want to be and what I want to believe.

Religion provides me with lessons, holidays and occasions to spend time with family and friends. As William James said, "Human beings by changing the inner attitudes of their minds can change the outer aspects of their lives."

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SHABBAT SHALOM.