

Shabbat Parashat Hayyei Sara
Choosing to “Stay Jewish”

In this week’s *parasha*, Yitz’hak has come of age and Avraham decides that his son is ready to get married. However, he has a dilemma. After having left his native land and moved to the Land of Canaan, Avraham’s family is surrounded by idol-worshipping and pagan nations. Avraham does not want his son, the next link in the chain of God’s new monotheistic religion, to be assimilated into these communities after marrying one of their women. Avraham comes up with a plan: he will send his servant Eliezer back to their native land and people to bring back a wife for his son. This task was so important to Avraham that he made Eliezer take an oath to fulfill his wishes, even if Avraham were to die in the interim. Eliezer took the oath and headed back to Avraham’s native land, finding Rivka – the daughter of Avraham’s brother – who agrees to leave her home to become Yitz’hak’s wife. As the *parasha* comes close to its conclusion, Rivka and Eliezer have arrived at the tent of Avraham and Yitz’hak and the couple becomes husband and wife.

This story reminds us of the effort that it often takes to preserve and do our best to guarantee the future of the Jewish people. Avraham went to great lengths, through the work of Eliezer, to ensure that his tradition and customs would be sustained through his son Yitz’hak and his future family. The surrounding community in which Avraham lived was a powerful, and potentially overwhelming, one. Avraham must have been in a constant struggle to maintain the uniqueness of his faith as such a diminutive minority. As Jews who have made the choice to live as members of the modern world, not in isolation from it, we face the same struggle.

Families that have chosen and invested in Jewish day school education possess the same care and concern that the children of the next generation of Jewish life understands who they are as Jews and remains connected and committed to Judaism as did Avraham. Between school and family, our goal at VTT is to graduate students with strong senses of Jewish identity and a foundation in Jewish knowledge that will inspire them to continue on the journey of Jewish education and identity development. However, as Avraham exemplifies, focusing on thinking and choosing Jewish extends long beyond schooling and childhood. They must remain at the forefront of one’s consciousness over the course of one’s entire lifetime. Like Avraham, we must stay involved in our children’s Jewish lives and choices until and even through adulthood. We must make sure that they make Jewish choices in their social lives, Jewish youth group choices, Jewish community affiliation choices. Too many young adults opt out of Jewish affiliation and learning after their B’nei Mitzvah, when that is actually supposed to signify a sort of beginning to it. With them now, we must not only rely on our school to provide the necessary background and experiences that will make our children feel Jewish, but also make Jewish life part of our everyday lives at home as best as we possibly can and in ways that are comfortable for us. As Avraham teaches us, Judaism needs to be part of our whole lives and we must drive this message home with our children long after their childhood. Not only will this effort benefit our children as individuals and the Jewish people, but will also serve as a means to bring our families closer together.

Shabbat Shalom