



Parshas Chayei Sarah

For the week ending 25 Cheshvan 5759
13 - 14 November 1998

Overview

The life of Sara, mother of the Jewish People, comes to a close at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham buries her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham is prepared to pay its owner Ephron the Hittite the exorbitant sum which he demands for the cave. Avraham places the responsibility for finding a suitable wife for his son Yitzchak on his faithful servant Eliezer, who takes an oath to choose a wife from amongst Avraham's family and not from the Canaanites. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim, to the city of Nachor, and prays to Hashem to show him a sign so he will know whom to choose. At evening time, as he is about to water his camels, Rivka providentially appears and Eliezer asks her for a drink of water. Not only does she give him to drink, but she draws water for all ten of his thirsty camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme thoughtfulness and kindness is the sign that she is the right wife for Yitzchak, and a suitable mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan finally result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into the tent of his mother Sara, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of one hundred and seventy-five and is buried next to Sara in the Cave of Machpela.

Insights

YOUTH AND THE YOUNG

"Sara's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years" (23:1)

"Youth is wasted on the young" runs the old adage. When a person is young they are blessed with alacrity of mind and body, but they are also beset by the insecurities of youth and its immaturity. When a person grows older, experience brings a perspective to life which can lead to wisdom. However, the strength of our physical frame is not what it was in our youth.

Sara, however, was blessed with total emotional and spiritual maturity as a girl, and even as an old woman she retained her physical strength and agility of mind.

"Sara's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years." The verse seems to use the word "years" in a redundant fashion. More economically, the Torah could have written "Sara's lifetime was one hundred and twenty seven years." Rashi tells us that the repetition of the word "years" is to convey that each phase in Sara's life was equal. When she was one hundred, she was as if she was still twenty; meaning, when she was one hundred she still had all the advantages of youth. And even when she was twenty, she had the wisdom of an elderly person.

WHEN IT'S A WRENCH TO BE A MENTCH

"And Avraham prostrated himself before the members of the council..." (23:12)

The way a person behaves when he's sitting alone in front of his TV is not the way he behaves when he's receiving an Academy Award in front of 200 million people or when he is bowing to royalty or shaking hands with the President. How much of the time do we really visualize that we are in the presence

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Parshas Chayei Sarah

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of G-d? How often do we think "G-d is watching me now. He knows exactly what I'm thinking. He sees everything I am doing." I don't know how many people do that too often.

Avraham faced ten tests. Most commentators explain that his final and greatest test was the *akeida* — G-d's command to bring Avraham's son Yitzchak as a sacrifice. However, Rabbeinu Yona (*Avos* 5:3) explains that Avraham's tenth test was finding a grave for his wife Sara.

Why was this such a test for Avraham? Why was this the pinnacle of G-d's testing Avraham's mettle? How did finding a grave for Sara prove that he was worthy to be the progenitor of G-d's representatives in this earthly realm?

Imagine a used-car salesman. With a smile right out of a toothpaste ad which can blind at ten paces, he'll tell you that the jalopy he's leaning on will run for another 50,000 miles at least. When he moves his arm, the car sags like an exhausted mule.

Avraham thought he was the legitimate heir to *Eretz Yisrael*. He assumed that he could bury his beloved wife wherever he chose. However, he has to enter into a haggling match with Efron which made buying a used car look like dealing with a Rolls-Royce salesman.

Add the emotional upheaval of the *akeida*, followed directly by the news of Sara's death, and one could forgive Avraham for treating Efron, the world's prototypical used-car salesman, with the disdain he deserved. But is that how Avraham treated him?

"*And Avraham prostrated himself...*" Avraham treated Efron like the most honorable of people. He didn't say "I had a bad day! My wife just died! I'm stressed out."

Avraham remembered that Efron, a human being, deserved to be treated like the Image of G-d that he was. Avraham didn't react to Efron according to *Efron's* level. He behaved as a Jew should. If Avraham had a hard day, why should Efron suffer?

Sometimes the little pebbles in life's path trip us up more easily than its giant boulders. A person who understands that life is no more than a giant test will recognize a large test. But how about someone pushing in line in front of us? Will we react with the knowledge that we are G-d's ambassadors to the world? Will we feel that He is watching us, expecting us to bring honor to His name and to the people who bear His name? Sometimes the little annoyances of life are more of a test than the cataclysmic events.

A Jew must be a *mentch* even when treated in a most *unmentchlich* way. That's the hallmark of a person who knows that he is standing in the presence of the King.

Because we have a hard day at the office, it doesn't mean that we can take it out on our children or our spouse. This can take enormous self-control. It takes a person who has total mastery over himself to always treat every human being, Jew or non-Jew, with dignity.

Avraham's tenth test was really two tests in one. He was under the greatest stress and he was confronted with a person who was somewhat less than a prince. Nevertheless, he accorded him honor. This, the ultimate test, showed that Avraham was fit to be the father of the Jewish People — G-d's ambassadors.

THE HUMAN FACE

"And Avraham rose from before the face of his dead..." (23:3)

Shabbos is the face of the world. G-d blessed Shabbos. Our Rabbis teach us that G-d blessed it with the radiance of the human face. This is a rather strange idea. Isn't it limiting to say that the great purpose and final target of Creation, Shabbos, should be blessed with nothing more than the radiance of the individual human face? Doesn't this imply that G-d blessed something all-encompassing — Shabbos — with something very limited — the human face?

On closer inspection we will find that the Shabbos and the light of the human face are one and the same.

The face is the only part of the body where you can see the intellect dominating the physical. The light of wisdom illuminates the face; according to the inner light and wisdom of a person, so is the radiance of his countenance. This interior radiance shines with such power until it bursts through the flesh and bone of the skull, it breaks the wreaths of sinews of the head, until it shines out through the face like a beacon turning the flesh and blood into radiant light.

In Hebrew, the word for face is *panim*. *Panim* is spelled the same as the word *p'nim* which means "inside." The face is the only part of the human being where you can see the inside of a person. In the face, you can see the domination of the intellect over the body.

The same is true of Shabbos. Shabbos is like the face of the Creation. When we rest on Shabbos, we reveal that face. We reveal that the purpose of the world is spiritual — we allow the spiritual core to break through the physical world. We accord spirituality its appropriate place at the pinnacle of Creation and we relegate the physical to its subsidiary role as a backdrop to holiness. Thus, the radiance of man's face revealing what is inside the physical is exactly the same as Shabbos revealing the interior of the physical world. The face of the world is Shabbos.

When a person passes from this world, this light of the intellect passes with him. Thus you can't really call the face of someone who is dead a "face," because "face" connotes that interior world which now no longer resides in the body. However, even after her passing, Sara's "face" still radiated something of that internal life. For Sara's life was taken from her with a kiss, that most gentle of journeys from this world to the next. Therefore the Torah writes that "Avraham got up from before the face of his dead..."

Sources:

Youth and the Young - *Mayana shel Torah*

When It's a Wrench to Be a Mentch - Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Rabbi Yissachar Frand

The Human Face - *Pachad Yitzchak*

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Haftorah: Melachim I 1:1 - 31

The need to secure the succession of the Jewish People, which is the subject of this week's Parsha, is reflected in the Haftorah: King David is coming to the end of his days (like Avraham) and his handsome and indulged Adonijah tries to wrest the succession from Shlomo, King David's appointed heir. But King David is alerted to Adonijah's scheme by his wife Bas-sheva and Nassan the Prophet, and the plot is foiled.

THE WILL TO DIVIDE

The Chafetz Chaim once wrote to a rich man that he was obliged to make a clear will dividing his property between his sons, for, as we find in this week's Haftorah, if the prophet Nassan admonished King David to leave clear instructions regarding his succession, certainly this rich man was obliged to do so. We do not find that David was annoyed at Nassan for reminding him of his mortality; rather he took steps to rectify a difficult situation. As the Chafetz Chaim wrote: "Children are known to disobey their parents and quarrel amongst themselves even during their parents' lifetime — how much more after their death!"

Adapted from The Midrash Says

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

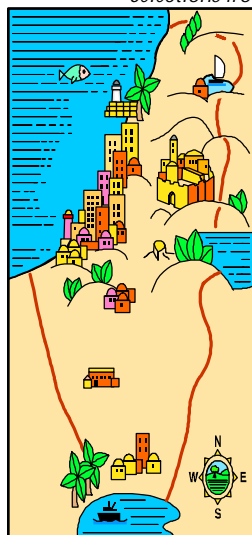
HEBRON

"Sara died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron, in the Land of Canaan." (Bereishis 23:2)

Kiryat Arba (Town of the Four) is so called because of the four couples buried there: Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah." (*Midrash Rabba*)

Ancient Hebron was not only linked to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs but is also mentioned in regard to the mission of the spies sent by Moshe to scout the land, one of whom — Kalev ben Yefuneh — was awarded this part of the land for his faithful report. It was also the seat of King David's reign for seven and a half years before making Jerusalem his capital

Hebron is today under Palestinian rule, but there is a Jewish settlement in the city and adjoining Kiryat Arba. The Machpela Cave where the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried continues to attract Jewish worshippers and visitors from all over the world.



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