

Parshas Chayei Sarah

For the week ending 25 Cheshvan 5756
17 & 18 November 1995

Summary

The life of Sarah, 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 chose a wife from amongst Avraham's family and not from the Canaanites. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim, to the city of Nahor, 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 Sarah, marries 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 Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

Commentaries

"When she finished giving him (Eliezer) drink, she said, 'I will draw water even for your camels until they have finished drinking'" (24:19).

If Judaism required you to eat in all the best *treif* restaurants in the world, a lot more people would be *frum*. The ultimate barrier to faith in G-d is not *logical* but *psychological*. Subconsciously, a person knows that if he accepts that the order in Creation logically implies an 'Orderer', this will eventually mean that he is going to have to stop driving to the golf club on Saturday morning! More than that, he's going to have to stop seeing himself as the center of the universe.

**Belief is not the
knowledge
that there is a G-d,
but rather the
acknowledgment.**

Having been brought up in the 'ME' generation, the thought that the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment may not be the ultimate purpose of life strikes at the very foundations of our cultural orientation. How much more comfortable to pay lip service to a Creator who is not interested in us in the slightest — then we can pretend He's not really there

for all intents and purposes, and we can carry on doing exactly as we want! This is a bribe which most people find irresistible. The desires of the heart blind the intellect and the Truth becomes its victim. As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch put it "Belief is not the *knowledge* that there is a G-d, but rather the *acknowledgment*."

When Eliezer tested Rivka as a wife for Yitzchak, he sought only to find out if she had a love of *Chesed* (kindness). Why didn't he check that she also had the strength of *Emuna* (faith in Hashem) to be the future mother of the Jewish People?

The answer is that *Chesed* and *Emuna* are inextricably linked: Only one who is selflessly involved in the needs of others can free himself from the bribes of his own selfish desires. Only one who loves *Chesed* for its own sake has the objectivity to recognize his Creator. When Eliezer saw that Rivka was a lover of *Chesed* for its own sake, he realized that she also had the objectivity needed for true *Emuna* and that she was fit to be the mother of the Jewish People.

(Based on Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman *Hy"d*, and *ybl"t* Rabbi Nota Schiller and Rabbi Zev Leff)

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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-810-315

fax: 972-2-812-890

ohr@jer1.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Gramercy.ios.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

avram.rothman@canrem.com

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"...the years of the life of Sarah" (23:1).

Tzadikim have the power to raise both time and nature to new levels of spirituality, invigorating them with a new light and radiance. For this reason the Torah speaks of the years of the life of Sarah: Because of her righteousness, the days themselves were imbued with new life and were named after her.

(Sfas Emes)

"...the years of the life of Sarah" (23:1).

The years of the life of Sarah were 'all equally good' (Rashi). Sarah experienced many sad events in her life. However she never paid attention to them. She accepted everything with equanimity and *simcha* (joy). Both good and bad alike. That's what Rashi means 'all (were) equally good'— even the bad, she accepted with love.

(HaDrash v'Halyun)

It changes all the time...

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"And these are the days of the years of the life of Avraham which he lived" (27:7).

Some people's days are as full as years, while the years of others could be packed into days. In a certain village, the graveyard seemed to contain only tragically young occupants. On one gravestone the age read 'Twenty years and fifty days,' on another 'Thirty years and twenty days,' and so forth. All who entered the graveyard were astonished. Why was it that these people had died so tragically young? It transpired that in this particular village, the custom was to inscribe on the gravestones **only the number of years and days which had been used totally to their full potential.** It was for this reason that even those who had lived to a ripe old age, had, in terms of the utilization of their lives, died 'tragically young.' When the Torah records the life of Avraham, it says "these are the days of the years..." It would have been sufficient either to say "these are the days," or "these are the years." The seeming redundancy is to teach us that not a day in the life of Avraham Avinu was lived at less than its maximum potential. Every year was filled to the brim with its days.

(Adapted from Gesher HaChaim in Lekach Tov)

Haftorah: Melachim 1:1-31

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 *David HaMelech* to leave clear instructions regarding his succession, certainly this rich man was obliged to do so. We do not find that King David was

annoyed at *Nassan* the prophet 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 so after their death!"

(Adapted from *The Midrash Says*)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Kah Ribon- icr v-h
"G-d, the Master..."

G-d to Whom belongs honor and greatness
Save Your sheep from the mouth of lions

אלקא די ליה יקר ודבותא
פרוק ית ענך מפום אריותא

It was Moses who gave Hashem the title "Great." In the time of the Babylonian exile, Daniel deleted the title "Great" because he felt that Hashem's "Greatness" was not apparent in exile. (*Mesechta Yuma 69b*) The *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah* gained their title — "Members of the 'Great' Assembly" — by restoring "Great" to Hashem's title. Their reasoning was that the survival of Yisrael amongst all the hostile nations, like a sheep among lions, is the **greatest** expression of Hashem's power.

A contemporary dimension arises from one commentary's identification of the "lions" in this song as the descendants of Yishmael.

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