



פרשת חיי שרה
Parshat Chayei Sarah

Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



THE PHILANTHROPY OF AVRAHAM

RABBI BEN SUGERMAN

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ARYEH OHAYON (23')

ADINA SPODEK ('23)

NAOMI REICHENBERG (22')

AVICHAI SHEKHTER (22')

The beginning of this week's parsha is moving and profoundly sad as Avraham loses and buries his life partner of decades. As gripping a narrative as it is, the Torah is here to instruct us

and not just to tell stories, so let's explore the possible lessons that the Torah might be conveying to us.

The Ibn Ezra understands the parsha of Sarah's burial as an indication of the virtues of the land of Israel, both for the living and the dead.

The Ramban (Bereishit 23:19) cites and rejects this approach. Among a number of suggestions, the Ramban understands this episode as one of the tests of Avraham where he was promised the land and yet had to

pay significantly for a burial plot. Rabbeinu Yonah, in his commentary to Pirkei Avot (5:2), also counts this as the tenth and final test of Avraham (both Rashi and the Rambam count the Akeida as the 10th and final test of Avraham). The gemara in Bava Batra (15b) also takes the view that this was a test for Avraham:

The Satan said to God: Master of the Universe, I have gone throughout the entire world and I have not found anyone as faithful as Your servant Abraham, to whom You said: "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it to you" (Bereishit 13:17). And even so, when he did not find a place to bury Sarah before he purchased a burial site for four hundred silver shekels, he did not find fault with Your ways or complain about the fact that you had failed to fulfill Your promise.

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky in his Emet L'Yaakov offers another lesson to be learned by the episode: for his entire life, Avraham proven himself to be a giver and not a taker.

- Avraham's shepherds argued with Lot's shepherds and Avraham immediately told Lot to take whichever properties he wanted.
- After assisting in the battle of the 4 and 5 kings, Avraham told the King of Sodom that he was not going to take even a shoelace from the spoils of war, spoils that he was more than entitled to after having won the war.
- At the beginning of Parshat Vayeira, Avraham was interested only in hosting guests, even at the expense of his own physical pain.

Avraham's personality was founded on benevolence and giving. He made it part of his nature that taking from others was something that he frowned upon. Consider the mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:10) that teaches us: **הָאוֹמֵר שְׁלִי שְׁלִי וְשִׁלְךָ שְׁלָךְ, זֶה מְדָה בִּינוּנִית. וַיֵּשׁ** . A person who looks to amass and retain his assets has a Sodomite characteristic. Lot's move to Sodom was in stark contrast to that of his uncle.

Which brings us to the beginning of this parsha. When offered the burial plot, Avraham was insistent that he would not receive the property as a gift as originally proposed. In fact, he was going to pay and even overpay, because he wasn't interested in taking. Philanthropy and benevolence was part and parcel of who he was. **תַּתֵּן חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם** . Let's be givers like our patriarch.

TIME WELL SPENT

ARYEH OHAYON

**וַיְהִי־זֶה חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שָׁנִי
חַיֵּי שָׂרָה**

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; [these were] the years of the life of Sarah” (Bereishit 23:1).

As we know, Parshat Chayei Sarah begins with the death of Sarah at 127 years old. The midrash (Bereishit Rabbah) relates that Rebbe Akiva was once giving a lecture to his students when he noticed that they were becoming drowsy. In order to wake them up, he asked: “Why did Esther merit to rule over 127 provinces?” He answered that Hashem said: “In the merit of Sarah who lived for 127 years, let Esther come and reign over 127 provinces.”

Why did Rebbe Akiva choose to use these specific

words to awaken his students? The Chidushei HaRim suggests that Rebbe Akiva wanted to impress upon his students the importance of every minute and the obligation to use our time to its greatest advantage. Sarah, who was a great *tzadekket*, spent all of her years sin-free and perfect, and it was because of this that her descendant Esther reigned over a full 127 provinces. If each year corresponded to a province, then each month might be a city, each week a neighborhood, and each day another family. Had Sarah wasted any of her time, Esther's kingdom wouldn't have been complete, but she wasted no time during her life. Thus Esther ruled over the full 127 provinces.

Each of us is presented with the fleeting gift of time and the mission of utilizing that time in the best way. Every moment well spent brings reward, but every misspent second comes at a price. Through spending all of her 127 years in the best possible way without wasting even a moment, Sarah merited the gift of being a mother of many nations. While living a life on the same level as Sarah may be hard for us, we can still learn a lesson from her life: the importance of using our time on earth in the best way we can, and that we should stop wasting valuable moments. We are only given a finite amount of time on this earth, and we should use it well.

PUT IN THE EFFORT

ADINA SPODEK ('23)

This week's parsha, Parshat Chayei Sarah, focuses on Avraham's struggle to secure land for his wife Sarah's burial and his efforts to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. To summarize, Sarah dies and Avraham chooses a burial plot in Chevron, owned by Ephron the Chitti. Originally, Ephron claimed he would give the land (which was a cave) to Avraham as a gift, but with Avraham's insistence on paying full price, Ephron took advantage of the situation and Avraham ended up paying a highly inflated amount. After burying Sarah, Avraham turns his attention to finding a wife for his son Yitzchak and sends a servant in search of a suitable woman. Rivka is then chosen and marries Yitzchak, and Avraham later dies. These two events are clearly written and seem to just be informative, which is why we know that on further inspection, there must be an inherent lesson.

Avraham Avinu was promised by God at the *Brit Bein Habetarim* that he would have an immense amount of land and children one day. But looking back at Avra-

ham's life, the only parts of the divine promise Avraham sees in his lifetime are a small fraction of land that he owns, a burial cave, and a wife for Yitzchak who can now possibly continue the family lineage. God's promise was not fully fulfilled in Avraham's lifetime, and the parts that were only came about because of Avraham's efforts. From this we learn that even with God's word, we are required to put in our human effort as well. Yes, Avraham will have land and will have children like the stars and sand, but only with the efforts of his descendants, who will work towards fulfilling God's promise rather than just waiting for it to come true.

Avraham leads by example by not just accepting the free land from Ephron, but instead putting in the effort to legally purchase it and by going out of his way to search for someone to continue his bloodline. Hashem's promise to Avraham can at first be taken as just a statement, but with the understanding that it is only possible with our own determination and efforts, it can be viewed as an invitation to fulfill His words. At the end of the day, God knows the outcome. He knows what will happen, but we have the power to choose how we get there. Having faith in Hashem does not mean sitting back and trusting Him to do all the work; it is a combination of knowing the future is inevitable, yet understanding that we are the ones who have the ability to bring it about. [The ideas written in this Dvar Torah come from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's z"tl *Covenant & Conversation*.]

LIVE LIFE

NAOMI REICHENBERG (22')

Often, when writing Divrei Torah, I check to see what Rabbi Sacks zt"l writes on the weekly parsha. Writing a Dvar Torah on Parshat Chayei Sarah, I thought it would be only fitting to do the same, especially after the untimely death of Rabbi Sacks this past Shabbat. Rabbi Sacks points out that Chayei Sara is a very interesting name for this week's parsha. How can we name a parsha about life when the beginning of it is about Sarah's death and the end about Avraham's? Rabbi Sacks writes, "The answer, it seems to me, is that – not always, but often – death and how we face it, is a commentary on life and how we live it." He goes on to write about how life is about finding a "why", a purpose. Avraham, our patriarch, dedicated his life to *avodat Hashem* and showed us the truest form of *emunah*. Sarah, our matriarch, is the greatest example of *tzniut*. They both represent such chesed and good middot. Both Avraham and Sarah found their purposes in life, which is perhaps why this parsha is called

Chayei Sarah. This reflects the truly fulfilled lives they lived until the end and the middot they have hopefully instilled in us, their children.

Just a year ago, when Rabbi Sacks zt"l wrote this Dvar Torah, he probably did not think it would end up portraying himself so greatly during the same week of his levaya. The *gadlut* of Rabbi Sacks is seen through his teachings and his *emunah*. He faced cancer three times and he felt no need to discuss it simply because he believed that whenever Hashem was ready to have him back, that would mean his *tafkid* was complete. Rabbi Sacks found his purpose just like Avraham and Sarah did, by inspiring so many across the world daily. Not only did he find his purpose, but he fulfilled it, and now the *Aibeshter* needs him back. His *neshama* should only have an immense *aliyah*. Iy"v we should all merit to find purpose in our lives and to emulate the *Gedolei Hador* who came before us by finding our purpose. Have a great Shabbos!

JUST THE BEGINNING

AVICHAJ SHEKHTER (22')

For most people, the older they get, the less active they are, and once they are elderly, they slow things down quite a bit. In this week's parsha, Avraham loses Sarah, his wife, when he is 137 years old. We see him mourn Sarah's death, and then he moves right into the action. He engages in an elaborate negotiation to buy a piece of land in which to bury her. As we see throughout the sale, this is not a simple task. He humbly tells the people of the land, that he is a *גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם* -- "an immigrant and a resident among you" (Bereishit 23:4), meaning that he knows he has no right to buy land. It will take a special compromise on their part for him to buy it. They try to discourage him and show him that he does not need to buy the land,

אִישׁ מִמֵּנוּ אֶת קִבְרוֹ לֹא יִכְלֶה מִמָּךְ מִקְבַּר מִתְּךָ

-- "No one among us will deny you his burial site to bury your dead" (Bereishit 23:6). He can bury Sarah in someone else's graveyard. Avraham makes it clear that he is determined to buy land, and in the end, he overpays a price of 400 silver shekels to do so.

The purchase of the Ma'arat Hamachpela is seemingly a highly significant event, because it is recorded in great detail, not just here but three times subsequently in Bereishit (here in 23:17 and subsequently in 25:9; 49:30; and 50:13), each time with the same formality. Here, for instance, is Yaakov on his deathbed, speaking to his sons:

וַיְצַו אוֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי נֹאסֵף אֶל עַמִּי קִבְרוּ אֹתִי אֶל אֲבֹתַי אֶל הַמַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן הַחַתִּי אֶבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן הַחַתִּי...

“And he commanded them, and he said to them, I am going to be brought to my people, bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Chittite....” (Bereishit 49:29-32).

The former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks pointed out that something significant is being hinted at here, otherwise, why specify, each time, exactly where the field is and who Avraham bought it from?

The same idea is seen when Avraham is trying to find Yitzchok a wife. This happens right after the sale of the cave and we expect him to slow down but he then takes on this big task. This story is also in great detail which calls our attention to the significance of what is happening, without telling us precisely what the significance is.

Rabbi Sacks suggested the explanation is simple and shocking. Throughout the story of Avraham and Sarah, God promises them two things: children and land. The promise of the land is seen seven times, while the promise of children occurs four times. Avraham’s descendants will be “a great nation,” as many as “the dust of the earth,” “the stars in the sky,” and “he will be the father of not one nation but of many.”

Despite this, when Sarah dies, Avraham has not a single inch of land that he can call his own, and he has only one child who will continue his mission, Yitzchok, who is currently unmarried. Neither promise has been fulfilled, hence the extraordinary detail of the two main stories in Chayei Sarah. There is a moral here, and the Torah slows down the speed of the timeline as it speeds up the action so that we will not miss the point.

God promises, but we have to act. God promised Avraham the land, but he had to buy the first field. God promises Avraham many descendants, but Avraham had to ensure that his son was married to a woman who would share the life of the covenant. What changes the world, what fulfills our destiny, is not what God does for us but what we do for God.

That is what leaders understand, and it is what made Avraham the first Jewish leader. Leaders take responsibility for creating the conditions through which God’s purposes can be fulfilled, even in old age, like Avraham in this week’s parsha.

Perhaps, though, the most important point of this parsha is that large promises – a land, countless children – become reality through small beginnings. Leaders have a vision of the goal but also realize the journey they need to go on to reach it. There is no miraculous shortcut, and if there were, it would not help. The use of a shortcut would end up helping you in the short term while destroying you right after. Avraham acquired only a single field and had just one son who would continue the covenant. Yet he did not complain and he died satisfied because he had begun, because he had left future generations something to build on.

As we mourn the passing of Rabbi Sacks, who exemplified great leadership and was considered a teacher to multitudes of Jews around the world, even those who didn’t know him, we learn from him that leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow life with immortality.

Shabbat Shalom

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