Parshas Chayei Sarah

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 choose 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 faithful servant Eliezer, who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is the right wife for Yitzchak, and a suitable mother of the Jewish People. 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. 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 Chessed (kindness). Why didn’t he check that she also had the strength of Emuna (faith)? The answer is that Chessed 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 Chessed for its own sake has the objectivity to recognize his Creator. When Eliezer saw that Rivka was a lover of Chessed 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)
“...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)

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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 Nasser 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 Nasser 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 iucr v-h
‘G-d the Master...’

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

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.