



Parshat Chayei Sara

For the week ending 27 Cheshvan 5760
5 & 6 November 1999

Overview

Sara, mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sara's tent, 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 175 and is buried next to Sara in the Cave of Machpela.

Insights

MAN ALIVE

"These are the lives of Sara..." (23:1)

Neshama. She had always liked her name. Neshama. A name which whispered the very breath of life. Neshama breathed in deeply the life-giving fluid in which she floated.

Turning on her side, the life-support cable gently undulated in the dark liquid-world like a lethargic seasnake. It was at a time like this that one thought about the elemental things. Name. Life. The future. She was frightened. What lay ahead of her? As far back as she could remember, she had been in this safe secure waterworld. Now her life was drawing to an end. Death, non-being, the end of all she knew, of knowledge itself, awaited her at the tunnel's end. Like a puny raft circling on the edge of a giant whirlpool, she felt herself being drawn inexorably down into the vortex. Panic rose in her mouth. A primordial fear of the unknown gripped her. I don't want to die! I want to stay in this world and live forever! She had spent her days here in deep meditation on the secrets of the universe with her spiritual guide. But now she was alone. And she knew this was the end.

The time had come. It seemed that her ears filled with the most sublime music. A single chord of all the watervoices sounding one wordless chord undulating through every known scale. The sound grew and grew. She was terrified. Terrified of the pain. Terrified of not feeling the pain anymore. Down and down she went. Down to the world's end. Down to the place of death. It was here. This was the end. It was over. She had died.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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Parshat **Chayei Sara** — 27 Cheshvan 5760, 5 & 6 November

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It wasn't a particularly busy night in the delivery rooms at Hadassah Hospital. Another little soul had just come into the world. Screaming and crying as though she had been summoned reluctantly to this earthly sphere. The nurse cleaned the little baby, wrapped her in swaddling to keep her warm, and gave the baby into her mother's arms. The mother looked at her newborn daughter and thought to herself. "You are so beautiful, little *Neshama*."

Like the dark world before this existence, this world too is no more than a dark corridor compared with the great palace of light into which we will enter. This world is the place where we have the opportunity to prepare ourselves to enter that palace. To the extent that we prepare, so we will be able to bask in that radiance.

I don't know about you, but I don't find it so easy to see this world as a corridor. It's so easy to get caught up looking at all the neon signs along the way. It's so easy to think that this world is the palace itself. And it's a pretty shabby palace for all its beauty. Is there anyone here who dies with

even half his dreams fulfilled? With how many problems and heartaches and backaches is this world filled!

This week's parsha is called *Chayei Sara* — "The Lives of Sara." It's a strange title. This is the Parsha in which Sara passes away. So why is it called "The *Lives* of Sara?"

The name is apt. Because only when we leave this passing world do we really start to live. Later in the book of Bereishet, there is a Parsha called *Vayechi Yaakov* — "And Yaakov lived." That's the Parsha in which Yaakov passes away. As the Talmud says, "*the righteous in their deaths are called alive.*"

There's an interesting fact about the Hebrew word for "life." It has no singular. *Chaim* is a plural noun. Maybe that's to remind our *neshama*, our soul, that there are two lives — and this one is only a prelude to the "main attraction."

Sources:

- *Rabbi M.A. Amiel in Iturei Torah*

Haftarah: Melachim I 1:1-31

FULL TIME JOB

It is the duty of parents to instill in their child the same Torah values by which they themselves live, and to ensure that their offspring become the next link in the chain of G-d's eternal mission. This job often continues until the parent's very last days.

This message is delivered to us both in the Parsha and in its parallel haftara. In the Parsha, the aging Avraham — having successfully raised Yitzchak to follow in his ways — faces the challenge of finding a wife suitable for the future father of Israel. Avraham's job as parent wasn't finished just because his son had proved righteous. His task was not complete until he gave Yitzchak everything necessary to carry on Avraham's mission and to fulfill his own personal potential.

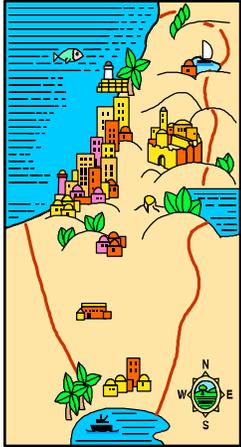
In the haftara, too, we find the ailing King

David with one final task to complete. His son Adoniyahu had proclaimed himself heir to the throne, hoping David's silence would be viewed as tacit approval. David, however, quickly made it known that his son Shlomo would be the next king. It was Shlomo who was best able to carry on David's work and complete the building of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

Our Sages tell us "The righteous have no rest in this world nor in the world to come." The righteous have no desire to sit and stagnate; rather, every opportunity for growth must be seized. As we learn from Avraham and David, there is no retirement from parenthood, nor from the service of G-d.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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



LOD

To most Jews in Israel and throughout the world, the city of Lod (Lydda) is associated with the Ben Gurion International Airport located nearby.

Although not specifically mentioned in Tanach, tradition has it that Lod was a fortified city when Joshua led his people into the Promised Land. After being rebuilt by descendants of the Tribe of Binyamin it was an important town.

The Talmud (*Mesechta Sanhedrin 32b*) mentions Lod as the seat of the Torah academy and judicial court of the great sage Rabbi Eliezer. The merchants of Lod were noted for their business acumen (*Mesechta Bava Metzia 49b*), which suggests that the town was a commercial center.

Modern Lod is a development town populated mainly by immigrants who arrived after the establishment of Israel, and there are Arabs living in its old city.