

CHEVRAH TORAH 5778...Seeking ✨ Spirituality

Shabbat CHAYEI SARAH Genesis 23:1-4/25:1-11

KEY KOSHI:

WHAT DO THE END OF SARAH'S & ABRAHAM'S LIVES TEACH US ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL AIM OF LIFE?
HOW IS DEATH & OUR RESPONSE TO IT A JOURNEY TO FAITH?

P'SHAT—AWARENESS... The beginning of knowing about God is simply paying attention, being fully present where you are

23:1] Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. 2] Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her. 3] Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, 4] "I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial."

25:1] Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2] She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 3] Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Midian were Ephah, Ephher, Enoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. 5] Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac; 6] but to Abraham's sons by concubines Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East. 7] This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred and seventy-five years. 8] And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. 9] His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, 10] the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. 11] After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled near Beer-lahai-roi.

¹ וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעָה שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה: ² וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיְבֵא אַבְרָהָם לְסֹפֵד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבִנְתָּהּ: ³ וַיִּקָּם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי חֵת לֵאמֹר: ⁴ גְּרוֹתוֹשֵׁב אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם תָּנוּ לִי אַחַזְת־קֹּבֶר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָהּ מִתִּי מִלְפָּנָי:

¹ וַיִּסֹּף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה וּשְׁמָהּ קֵטוּרָה: ² וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ אֶת־זִמְרָן וְאֶת־יֶקֶשׁוֹן וְאֶת־מִדְּיָן וְאֶת־מִדְּיָן וְאֶת־יֶשְׁבַק וְאֶת־שׁוּחַ: ³ וַיִּקָּשׁוּ יְלָד אֶת־שָׂבָא וְאֶת־דָּדָן וּבְנֵי דָדָן הֵיוּ אֲשׁוּרִים וְלוֹטוּשִׁים וְלֵאמִים: ⁴ וּבְנֵי מִדְּיָן עֵיפָה וְעַפְרָי וְחִנְדֵן וְאַבְדִּיעַ וְאַלְדָּעָה כָּל־אֵלֶּה בְנֵי קֵטוּרָה: ⁵ וַיִּתֵּן אַבְרָהָם אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ לְיִצְחָק: ⁶ וּלְבְנֵי הַפִּילִגְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם נָתַן אַבְרָהָם מִתְּנַת וַיִּשְׁלַחֵם מֵעַל יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ בְּעוֹדָנוּ חַי קְדָמָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ קָדִם: ⁷ וְאֵלֶּה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר־חַי מֵאֵת שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וְחֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים: ⁸ וַיָּגוּעַ וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשִׁבְעָה וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ: ⁹ וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אוֹתוֹ יִצְחָק וַיִּשְׁמַעְאֵל בְּנָיו אֶל־מַעְרַת הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֶל־שָׂדֶה עֶפְרָן בֶּן־צֹחַר הַחֵתִי אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא: ¹⁰ הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר־קָנָה אַבְרָהָם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי חֵת שָׂמָה קֹבֶר אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: ¹¹ וַיְהִי אַחֲרַי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק עִם־בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאֵי:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS... God showed Moses a Torah of black fire written on white fire.

The negative ground on and by which all things can be read is itself a message.

23:1-2 Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty seven years. Sarah died in Kiryat-Arbah... And Abraham came to mourn for her and to bewail her.

MIDRASH HAGADOL... Why is Sarah's life divided into segments? To teach you that for the righteous each time of life counts; young or old, every day makes a life.

RASHI... "shannah" is repeated at each stage of Sarah's life to teach that they were all equal in goodness.

HaDRASH v'HaIYUN... How can anyone say that? Sarah remained childless for 90 years, and had so many other misfortunes? The answer is that "a person must thank God for the bad as well as the good," and, as far as Sarah was concerned, whatever happened to her, even the worst of times, she considered it for the good.

PHILO... "v'LivKoTaH" The small letter kaf indicates that Abraham did not weep too much since immoderate mourning is not fitting for the wise who should not feel too sorry for restoring to God the precious deposit entrusted to them.

KLI YAKAR... Weeping usually precedes the "hesped-eulogizing", because the overpowering force of grief dissipates with the passage of time. Hence, first comes the emotional outcry, and then fond remembrance. In Sarah's case, however, the degree of loss—the absence of her presence, was felt more and more as the days passed. His weeping continues long after the eulogies are through.

V.3-4 Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites saying, "I am a resident-alien among you; grant me a burial site..."

ARTSCROLL... The MIDRASH homiletically renders this phrase "And Abraham arose from the face of his death," for now, with the death of his wife, he saw his own death staring him in the face.

V.19 Then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the field of the cave of Machpelah, facing Mamre, now Chevron, in the land of Canaan

HIRSCH... The word *Machpelah* derives from *KaPHaL*—doubling. The name *Chevron*, from *LaCH'BoR*, to unite or bind, has a similar connotation. Thus, the first Jewish possession of land in *Eretz Yisrael* stood for the attachment of husband and wife, the loyalty of succeeding generations, and the building of Jewish family....

NORMAN... The picture of Abraham at this juncture is surely a disturbingly sad one: the tribal patriarch who has lost those closest and most dear to him. But we ask, "Is it too late for Abraham? Is this what he has to look forward to—a life of isolation, cut off from his own progeny and the promise of a future... The change in Abraham is evident in the great emotion he exhibits upon Sarah's death. Perhaps for the very first time in his life he sheds tears for someone for whom he cares. The text here seems to be redundant "he came to mourn for her and to cry for her." The writer goes out of his way to indicate that Abraham was deeply affected by her death, emphasized by the small *kaf*. Abraham emotes as never before. Why did he grieve so exceedingly? Perhaps out of guilt over his failure during her lifetime or maybe because he came to realize how much she meant to him after all. The irony is that Abraham came together with Sarah in death as they never seemed to in life, buried next to each other in Machpelah... [Self, Struggle & Change, Norman J. Cohen, pgs 88-89]

25:5-6 Then Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac, but to the Abraham's sons by concubine he gave gifts...

RASHI... R' Nechemiah stated: Abraham gave to Isaac his right to dispense blessing [Baba Metsia, 13a] For the Holy One said to Abraham: "You shall be a blessing..." Which means, the blessings are given into Isaac's hand to bless whomever he wishes.

MIDRASH TANCHUMA... There are those who say he gave to his son the birthright, while others insist it was the deed to *Machpelah*—the field and its burial site, that Abraham now gave to Isaac as his chief inheritance.

V.7-8 Now these are the days of the years of Abraham's life... Abraham breathed his last, dying at a ripe old age, sated with years, & he was gathered to his kin

RADAK... "b'sayvah tovah—at a good old age"—For he lived to see his children and his twin grandchildren turn 15, treated with dignity and respect by them all his days... The Midrash adds, he lived to see his son Ishma'el return as a *Ba'al Teshuvah*.

RAMBAN... "zakeyn v'save'ah"—Abraham lived to see all the desires of his heart fulfilled. This is the mark of the righteous who are content with their lot, in contrast with those who are never satisfied...

SARNA... "zakeyn v'save'ah—old and contented"—Such a summation of a life is found with no other personality in biblical literature. The phrase describes not his longevity, but the quality of his earthly existence.

S'FORNO... and he was gathered to his people"... Abraham was gathered into the bond of eternal life attached to the bundle of souls which are the righteous of all generations... "AMAV—his peoples," because there are many different spiritual levels among the righteous. Not all attained the same level on earth but all share in the joys of Life Eternal.

HIRSCH... Do not take this literally. His relatives are buried in Mesopotamia. These words are a reference to *Gen 15:15*... the immortality of the soul. For this is nothing other than the Divine *Ru'ach* placed by God into us gathered back into God. Judaism without this conception is inconceivable.

V:9-10 His sons Isaac & Ishma'el then buried him in the cave of Machpelah... There was Abraham buried, alongside Sarah—his wife.

R' Harold KUSHNER... Isaac & Ishmael are reunited at their father's funeral... Although Ishmael could not have forgotten how his father treated him and how his brother supplanted him, he seems to have forgiven Abraham for having been a less-than-perfect father. Isaac, too, seems to have come to terms with his father's nearly killing him on Mt. Moriah. Might these reconciliations have occurred in Abraham's lifetime, and be the reason for Torah's describing him as "contented" in his old age?

D'RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS...

Rabbi RONA SHAPIRO...

Is the most important event in Sarah's life her death?...If Sarah's life is, in fact, significant, what does the recording of her death teach us about her life?...One answer is found in the Midrash, seeing that her death immediately follows *Akedat Yitschak*... "At that time, Satan went to Sarah and appeared in the guise of Isaac. Seeing him, she asked: What has your father done to you? He answered: My father took me up to the top of a certain mountain, built an altar, arranged the wood, bound me on top, and took knife in hand to slaughter me. Had God not said: "Don't stretch out your hand." I would already have been slaughtered. He did not finish telling the tale before she died. [TANCHUMA] Traditionally, Abraham is seen as the ultimate servant of God...His allegiance to God supersedes all human ties, even to his beloved son...But Sarah dies because she knows that the sacrifice of their son is wrong, that God could not, would not, command such an act...Sarah knows that there is no category that transcends the ethical...no commandment holier than the responsibility not to inflict pain on others...Sarah knows that relationships are the ultimate testing ground of morality, of faith, of God...

Abraham is looking for the truth on the mountaintop. Unsatisfied with the domesticity of everyday life, he seeks a higher truth with some transcendent meaning. Indeed, throughout the Abraham narratives, we see an Abraham frustrated with domestic life...He's at his best arguing for justice over Sodom and Gomorrah. He is a failure, however, when it comes to meting out justice at home, unable to deal with the conflict between Sarah and Hagar...unable to act on the conflict between his sons...

Sarah's death says...there is no truth on the mountaintop, no special holiness up there. Truth is right here at home, in cooking dinner, taking out the garbage, holding hands, raising a child...Sarah dies knowing that truth, a truth Abraham never learns...But following Sarah's death...there are no mountaintops, no wars with kings, no dramatic moments...He buries his wife, worries about his bachelor son...marries again himself...In fact, after the Akedah, Abraham does not speak to God again...What has become of Abraham, this mighty partner of God...

Perhaps this par'shah is called "*Chayei Sarah—the Life of Sarah*," because with Sarah's death, Abraham finally learns to live her life; he comes down from the mountaintop and becomes a man of the heart...He learns to find truth and meaning within the context of family, in marrying off his son, in raising children and grandkids, in the small acts of daily kindness that make life holy...With Sarah's death, Abraham is given a more humble, but ultimately more real, more human, vision of life. With her death, Abraham finally comes to understand and live—CHAYEI SARAH—a Sarah Life.

Rabbi Larry HOFFMAN...

I have reached the age where I think about dying, and it occurs to me that I want to die like Abraham....As IBN EZRA explains, "His soul left his body instantly, without the torment of delay." The key word, however is "SaVeaH—satisfied." I cannot control when death will come, but our commentators advise that I can live in such a way that whenever my end arrives, I will be *satisfied*....

First, I am to make out a will...Just before he dies, therefore, Abraham disposes of his estate. He names Isaac as his heir and makes gifts to others...Second, Abraham saw to his family even in matters unrelated to money. When the portion begins, he buries Sarah; then he secures a wife for Isaac. The Midrash notes that Abraham was buried by both Isaac and Ishmael [25:9], and concludes that Abraham provided for Ishmael too. He made amends for having thrown Ishmael out with Hagar, and arranged for Isaac and Ishmael to be reconciled after he was gone.

Third, there is the spiritual preparation. It is human nature to desire wealth, to seek out honor, to hope for longevity. NACHMANIDES says that Abraham got beyond all that...Abraham also gave up the futile attempt to control the will of others...We cannot control the rumors, gossip, stories and slander that people may tell...All we can do is pursue righteousness, and let people say and think what they will. Spiritual preparation for death demands that we make a moral inventory of our lives, apologize to those we have hurt, and mend our ways for whatever time we have left...

Finally, hardest of all, we can make peace with the days allotted to us. No one lives long enough, not if they have their health...Abraham abandoned the pretense that he could revisit his youth and live forever...The Commentators remind us that there is more to life than what we know as earthly existence. I cannot picture it, but I believe with our tradition that I am part of an eternal divine plan in which I have a share even after my hands unclasp for the very last time on earth...

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE... God's "I am" has the psycho-theological force not of dissolving individual selves but of reminding us that we were never individual selves in the first place... Our selfhood endures by virtue of its participation in some greater Self,

Rabbi MAURICE LAMM... After Sarah died, Abraham went about systematically arranging her burial, expressing his own emotion, but primarily, assuring *kevod ha'met* (the honor of the deceased) for Sarah. The service he conducted was formal—first, only speaking praises for his wife, the first matriarch; and, after that, weeping over her loss. Abraham could hardly hold back his weeping until after the eulogy. The word for "weep" is written strangely in the Torah, with a diminished letter *khaf*. The Sages comment that this demonstrates that although Abraham was genuinely suffering, he acknowledged that Sarah had reached a ripe old age and was expected to die. He cried, but in a controlled manner....

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik notes that the covenant and communication between God and Abraham continued only so long as Sarah lived. At her death that communication ended, as it did for all the patriarchs when their spouses died. Abraham's exalted spiritual creativity shut down with Sarah's death and with the beginning of his grief. This marked the end not only of Sarah's history but also of Abraham's... Did he not still yearn to see beyond the horizon?...

...Despite our meanderings in space, we still see with the eyes of our earliest ancestors, and our hearts still quicken to the same things theirs did. The sky is still our principal metaphor for limitlessness and eternity, for unchanging, absolute reality. ... That is why heaven and earth are the eternal prototypes for eternal and mortal life. And the great gulf between them characterizes our relationship with God: Whereas the life of the heavens is immortal and everlasting, our own life in the earthly sphere is mortal, always ending in death. This paradox is at the heart of our spiritual universe: The earth we inhabit during our lifetime is forever coupled with the unattainable and limitless heaven, two divine opposites eternally joined. It is a cosmic drama, breathtaking in its clash of eternal order with transience and transformation played out in the universe of our goals.

...For mourners, death is the intersection of time and eternity, of materiality and spirituality, of certainty and contradiction, of this world and the next. Earth serves as a metaphor of unshakable certainty: The word "*adam*" (human) derives from the word "*adamah*" (soil), the firm and constant ground of existence. The word "*shamayim*" (heaven) derives from the fusion of the words "*esh*" (fire) and "*mayim*" (water)—two mutually exclusive qualities—gravity and antigravity, implosion and explosion, the contracting planets and the expanding universe.

...Mathematicians say that parallel lines meet in infinity. Patently this appears to be a contradiction in terms. But this is only if we deal with Euclidian "plane" geometry, the flat geometry of only two dimensions. In a "spherical" geometry that is based on a three-dimensional system, all lines are really curves and "parallel" lines do indeed meet if they continue to infinity... From the moment of our creation we have been yearning to bridge that eternal divide. Patriarchs and prophets, psalmists and poets, and even the unlettered have been searching the heavens, seeking to know God, just as the astronomer is driven to chart and measure the heavens.

For all of us, this spiritual connection reaches its climax in death, when, tradition teaches, earth and heaven kiss. Mourners address God most profoundly during this time, and their souls are more naturally tilted upward at this moment than at times of gratitude and celebration. To symbolize this upward focus, religious traditions often depict the human body as a candle, the soul as its flaming wick, which in death soars skyward, leaving behind the residue of ash that is the body returning to its origin.

I ask myself: Cannot infinite God and finite human being share a spiritual linkage, forever outside our limited capacity to understand, not ever measured by our sophisticated instruments, yet nonetheless true, as it appears as we stare at the horizon?...I know that these opposite divine realms of heaven and earth exist as parallel lines that meet in eternity as they do in infinity; that the “world’s kiss” at the end of a life, that just as the body (*adam*) is interred into the soil (*adamah*) from which it came, so the nebulous soul (*neshamah*) returns to the *esh* and *mayim*. I feel in my bones that there is a mystical dialogue between heaven and earth, as there is a dialogue between us and God, and that two people who were together on earth are not separated after death. They are the parallel lives that meet in eternity.

...With all of our modern sophistication, our brilliant technological achievements, our impressive scientific progress, our discovery of new worlds of thought, we have not come any closer to grasping the meaning of death than did our ancient ancestors. We search alongside Abraham...

...What death means to mourners depends very much on what life means to them. If life is a stage and we, poor players who strut and fret our hour upon it and then are heard no more...If life is only the arithmetic of coincidence—human beings only chance composites of molecules; the world a haphazard conglomeration without design or purpose, then death has no transcendent significance...If life is only nature mindlessly and compulsively spinning its complicated web, and human beings are only high-level beasts, then death is simply a further reduction to the basic elements, an adventure into nothingness. Death simply brings to an end a cruel match that pits human against beast and one human against another.

On the other hand, if life is the creation of a benevolent God, the infusion of the divine breath, and if we are not only higher than the animals but also “*a little lower than the angels*”; if we have a soul as well as a body, and if our relationship is not only the “I-it” of human beings and nature but also the “I-Thou” of creature with Creator...then death is a return to the Creator at the time set by the Creator...If life is not mere happenstance, then we know that someday our bodies will be replaced, even as our souls will unite...as parallel lines meet...with Infinite and Eternal God.

...Death has meaning if life has had meaning. If there was meaning in the life of the deceased, then be assured that this death has meaning, too—whether or not we are able to discern it.

[excerpted from *Consolation: The Spiritual Journey Beyond Grief*]