

Chaye Sara, Rabbi David Mahler

I am consistently enthralled by contemporary events mirroring the weekly *parsha*.

Last Shabbos, *Klal Yisrael* lost two precious leaders – Rabbi Dovid Feinstein and Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks.

For much of our history, our people have been led by two types of leaders. *Shevet Levi* were our spiritual leaders. They were the teachers of *Am Yisrael*, always answering the spiritual needs of the people. They had no land of their own yet lived all over the country in order to have a more impactful influence, and were supported by those they educated and inspired. The monarchy, the political leadership of the Jewish people was handed to *Shevet Yehuda*. They led the nation in the desert. The tribe of *Yehuda* gave us *Dovid HaMelech*, the great *Hillel* and will ultimately give birth to *Mashiach*.

Later on, *Klal Yisrael* was led by a pair of individuals - the *Av Beis Din* and the *Nasi*. The *Nasi* was usually the more public leader while the *Av Beis Din* was more of the *halachik* consciousness of the nation. The *gemara* (*Moed Katan* 26a) teaches that this structure dates back to King *Shaul* and his son *Yonatan*, with the king as the *Nasi* and his son as the *Av Beit Din*. The final *Av Beis Din* was *Shammai*, while the final *Nasi* was *Hillel*.

This *Shabbos* we read of the passing of the first two Jewish leaders – *Avraham* and *Sarah*. Though they led together, as a united team working towards a common goal, their individual roles had a distinct flavor.

*Avraham* and *Sarah* did share a common trait. They could be old and young simultaneously. The structure of the opening *pasuk* of the *parsha* breaks down *Sarah's* age at her death, 127, into different components. *Rashi* comments that when she was 100, she was like a 20 year-old in certain ways and when she was 20, in a certain sense she was like a 7 year-old. Rav Soloveitchik suggested that *Rashi* is offering a more general, and profound, insight into the greatness of *Sarah*. At different stages in life, people naturally possess different strengths and are inclined towards different forms of accomplishment. *Rashi* is teaching that *Sarah* possessed the strengths of adulthood even when she was younger while at the same time, retained the strengths of youth even when she advanced in age. In her youth she was wise, thoughtful, mature and developed – beyond her years. When she grew old, she never lost any of the idealism, strength, industriousness and hope characterized by youth.

The *Rav* suggested that both *Avraham* and *Sarah* possessed this quality. They were able to be a child at heart. They were neither cynical nor skeptical. They were optimistic and hopeful while at the same time, consistent and mature, with an awesome sense of responsibility.

Yet they were also very different. *Avraham* was a public figure with a very public persona. He was a wealthy man, a warrior, an orator and dreamer. *Avraham* was a negotiator, a hospitable man who was deeply committed to family. He dined with world leaders such as *Avimelech*, spoke with leaders such as *Paroh* and dealt with *Malki-Zedek*, King of *Shalem*. He was most certainly a world-leader.

Though *Sarah* was a teacher and motivational personality along with her husband, she is characterized by the *Torah* very differently. When the three angels come to *Avraham* they inquire of *Sarah*'s well-being. *Avraham* tells them that she is in the tent. The *Rav* notes that “*Sarah* is enveloped in mystery. *Sarah*, the biblical woman, is modest, humble and self-effacing. She enters the stage when she is called upon, playing her part with love and devotion in a different corner of the stage, and then leaves softly by the side door without applause and without the enthusiastic response of an audience which is hardly aware of her. She returns to her tent, to anonymity and retreat.”

Our *parsha* begins with the passing of an unmatched private leader and concludes with the passing of an unmatched public leader.

This past week the Jewish world, the *Torah* world, lost both a private and public leader. They were two very different leaders and different personalities. Both are colossal losses.

*Rav* Dovid Feinstein was an indescribable *Torah* giant. He accepted the mantle of being the *posek* of American Jewry after the passing of his father, Reb Moshe. Rabbi Feinstein was one of the *Gedolei Hador*, giants of the generation. He lived in a league of his own in terms of his encyclopedic *Torah* knowledge, humanity, humility, care and modesty. The greatest *halachik* questions came across his desk every day – questions of life and death, marriage and divorce and who is a Jew. Yet he often ate lunch at the local pizza store on the Lower East Side of Manhattan with regular Jews who seemed to have not found their place in the community. He would spend hours schmoozing with anyone and do *chesed* for all.

This past January he was offered perhaps the greatest *kavod* afforded to any Jew nowadays. He was approached to have the honor of completing the entire *Shas* at the *Daf Yomi* celebration at Met-Life Stadium. With 90,000 present and thousands elsewhere watching online, he was to be the *Mesayem*. He allowed his good friend, Rav Shmuel Kaminetzsky, a few years his elder, to have that great *kavod*. He was a walking *Kiddush Hashem*.

*Am Yisrael* also lost an icon of the Jewish World. Rabbi Sacks brought an unrivaled honor and dignity to the Jewish people world-wide. He was our people's greatest ambassador to the rest of the world. He was a man of such great dignity and stature who our community was able to host twice over the last decade. He had a great sense of nobility. Rabbi Sacks was a man of penetrating insight who did everything in his power to give the world a sense of moral clarity and decency. He taught everyone that דרכיה דרכי נעם – *Torah* is sweet and pleasant. He, too, was a walking *Kiddush Hashem*.

Rav Dovid was more of a private figure - Rabbi Sacks, a public one.

They also came from very different homes and this is what inspires me most. Rabbi Feinstein grew up in the cradle of one of the greatest Jews of the past 200 years. Rav Moshe Feinstein was a singular *Torah* leader. Rav Dovid continued and grew his father's legacy.

Rabbi Sacks, religiously, came from much humbler beginnings. In one of the eulogies given at his service in London, a speech of his was referred to where he notes the fact that *Avraham's* name signifies that he is the father of many nations. Rabbi Sacks writes that it is odd that a person who broke away from his father, kicked out one of his sons and almost sacrificed his other, is called the father of many nations. Perhaps the lesson is that one can become great irrespective of the home in which one grows up.

The two *Manhigei Yisrael* became leaders because of their unrelenting love, care and commitment to the Jewish people – not because of their surroundings. Our homes mean a ton. They influence us immeasurably but they are neither a first-class ticket to greatness or an excuse to absolve ourselves from trying to reach the loftiest of heights.