



# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Bereshit

Parshat Chayei Sara

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## It's A Puzzlement!

By Chaya Sarah Smith

The name of this week's *Parsha*, *Chayei Sara*, puzzles me. Why is it called the Life of Sara, when it is clearly about her death, and the aftermath of her loss? Indeed, as I studied the *Parsha* in preparation for writing this *dvar Torah*, I found more questions than answers. I encountered more loose ends than satisfying resolutions.

The *Parsha* begins with an overview of Sara's life that seems to be presented in code.

וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה

*Sara's lifetime—the span of Sara's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. (Bereshit 23:1)*

And then it immediately informs us that she died and that Abraham mourned her.

וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיְבֹא אַבְרָהָם לְסָפֵד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבִכְתָּהּ

*Sara died in Kiriath-arba—Hebron—in the land of Canaan, and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sara and to bewail her. (23:2)*

We hear nothing more about her until we learn that Abraham has buried her in the cave of *Machpelah*.

It clearly states that Abraham gave a eulogy at Sara's funeral — this is where we learn that it is a *מצווה* to do so — but why isn't it in the narrative? Shouldn't we hear what her husband had to say? The Torah does not elaborate, and it's been left to the rabbis to decipher.

*As I studied the Parsha in preparation for writing this dvar Torah, I found more questions than answers. I encountered more loose ends than satisfying resolutions.*

*Rashi* famously parses the age of Sara to 100, 20, and 7 years. At the age of 100, she was like a woman of 20 who has never sinned and when she was 20 she was as beautiful as when she was 7.

Why does the Torah inform us that Abraham gave the eulogy first, and then wept? It seems odd to react this way. For most of us, the immediate reaction to being notified of a loved one's loss is tears.

One commentator (the *Nodah b'Yehudah*) suggests others arrived before Abraham and began to praise Sara, therefore, he had to immediately give his eulogy. The *Netziv* and others propose that since her loss overwhelmingly affected the community, out of respect for her status, he eulogized Sara as a public figure before weeping for the loss of his wife. She wasn't just his wife, she was a leader in her own right.

If we look carefully at the word וּלְבַכְתָּהּ, (and wept) it is written with a diminished כ, a כ that is smaller than the other letters. The Torah seems to be offering a clue to explain Abraham's weeping.

Commentators infer from this that the diminished letter indicates Abraham made an effort to curtail his crying and offer several possible reasons: 1. He was more focused on his responsibilities to the community than his own loss. 2. He is teaching us that we diminish our mourning when the deceased lived a full life — as it says, Sara lived a long life, she lived out her days. 3. Sara was a righteous woman and therefore merited an exalted place in *Olam Haba*, and that fact should temper our sadness.

*Perhaps  
the answer comes  
when Rebecca marries  
Isaac and she steps into her  
role as one of the  
Imahot.*

What about Isaac? Why wasn't he at his mother's funeral? *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* maintain that after the *Akedah*, Isaac returned to Beersheba with Abraham, but suggest it was left out of the narrative. *Abarbanel* supposes that Isaac did not return with Abraham but instead went to Hebron to live with Sara, and if that is the case was he there when Sara died?

The purchase of the cave of *Machpelah* was a defining moment. Even though *Hashem* had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham, this is the first actual acquisition of property. But again we are still talking about the death of Sara, not her life.

Sara's burial brings us back to the opening paradox: why call the *Parsha* the Life of Sara if it is only about her death?

Perhaps the answer comes when Rebecca marries Isaac and she steps into her role as one of the *Imahot*. The Torah makes this very clear:

וַיְבִיאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־רֵבֶקָה וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבֶהּ וַיִּנְתָּם יִצְחָק אֶת־רֵי אִמּוֹ  
*Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sara, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her and thus found comfort after his mother's death. (25:67)*

When a person passes away the impact they had on others is their legacy. Sara *Imenu's* legacy lives on to this very day.

**Arlene (Chaya Sarah)** and Steve have been active members of the YIS for over 43 years, including the 3 ½ years they spent in Madrid with their 2 sons. Time sure flies when you are having fun!

*Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?  
Please contact Steve Smith at [stevenjsmith@yahoo.com](mailto:stevenjsmith@yahoo.com)*

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