



Chayei Sarah: The Danger of Thought

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her. And Abraham arose from before his dead, and he spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, "I am a stranger and an inhabitant with you. Give me burial property with you, so that I may bury my dead from before me (Genesis 23:2-4)."

Avraham had lost his beloved life partner. Sarah was by his side from the beginning. Before "*Lech Lecha*," when Avraham was a spiritual wanderer seeking out truth, Sarah was always there. When God commanded Avraham to leave all he had known, when upon entering Canaan they encountered famine and relocated to Egypt, throughout years of childlessness, all of the ups and downs, Sarah remained a devoted partner to her beloved Avraham. But it was now that Avraham had to say goodbye. It was upon him to see to the needs of her burial as this last display of love and honor in this world. Avraham came to Kiryat Arba "*to eulogize Sarah and bewail (cry for) her.*"

The Tiferes Shlomo (Rebbe of Radomsk, Rabbi Shlomo HaKohen Rabinovitch, 1801-1866) asks a simple question. "*The verse tells us that Avraham came to eulogize and cry for Sarah, yet the very next verse says, "And Avraham arose from before his dead" and went to speak to the people of Heth. It would appear that although Avraham intended to eulogize and cry, he never actually did so. What happened? Why did Avraham refrain from eulogizing his beloved wife?"* The Rebbe provides a profound answer. As Avraham prepared to begin eulogizing his precious partner, his mind began to fill with thoughts. "*Sarah was so righteous and pious. She suffered so much throughout life, and yet, her belief never wavered. She raised a most holy and virtuous son, a son who would ultimately take on the mantle of his father and continue to be the ambassador of God in this world. And now she is gone. God asked me to sacrifice my son, and Yitzchak and I went and willingly complied; isn't that enough for you God? Must you take the other half of my soul as well?"* Avraham felt a wave of anger, animosity, and resentment towards God building inside of him. In that moment, he stopped. Avraham understood that I must keep these feelings in check and not allow them to overpower me. *I do not understand the ways of God, but I know He loves me and that somehow this is all is for the best.* Avraham never delivered a eulogy as he was fearful that his pain over the loss of his wife would taint his relationship with God. Thus, the verse indicates that he intended to eulogize and cry but stopped himself and attended to the details of Sarah Imeynu's burial.

There are profound and meaningful lessons which emerge from the Rebbe's words. Events occur in life which confound and perplex us. Like Avraham, we must learn to accept that the Divine plan will often appear illogical and random to us, and we cannot allow this lack of clarity to tarnish or erode our relationship with our beloved Father. There is a time to question, but then comes the time to accept and move forward.

But there is a second lesson which is not limited to the realm of theological thought. At times, negative thoughts fill our heads and hearts. It can be a feeling of inadequacy, failure, or just a general feeling of not measuring up. At times we feel like damaged goods as a result of our past mistakes. These feelings can rob you of hope, optimism, and a desire to accomplish. Negative thoughts can overtake you to the point where you no longer sense any shred of personalistic good. Too often, we allow these negative thoughts to take control. We allow anger at ourselves or others to dominate relationships. We allow feelings of inadequacy to prevent us from trying new things. We must muster Avraham Avinu's strength to identify the negative thoughts which can overtake and paralyze us, and we must shut them down. While it is true that I cannot always control what swirls around in my mind, I can choose to allow those thoughts to dominate me or to find strength and push them to my internal periphery.

Our beloved matriarch, Sarah, never received her eulogy, but she received something much greater. Her death brought us the strength to continue our relationship with God even if we are beset by questions. Sarah's death gives us the strength to let go of the negative thoughts which seek to hold us back. May the lives we lead and the accomplishments we accrue be an ongoing eulogy and zechus for our holy mother.