

Chayei Sarah - Rabbi Lerner - November 4, 2012

The Death of Sarah

23:1: *The years of Sarah were one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah's life (Shenai Chayei Sarah).* **Rashi:** why does the Torah break up the years of her life into three parts like this? The famous Midrash says that it is to teach us that when she was 100 she was as sinless as one who is age 20 (until that age a person does not suffer Heavenly punishment); and at 20 she was as pure with the wholesome beauty of a child of age 7. **Ramban:** This Midrash is not correct; we see this breakdown of the years of one's life with two other major Biblical personalities, Avraham and Yishmael, and yet the Torah does not in those instances indicate anything about innocence, beauty or righteousness; in particular, since the implication here is that all of her years were wonderful and she was pure the whole time, this certainly cannot be said of Yishmael, who was far from pure and wholesome and sinless his whole life, even if he did Teshuvah near the end. The basis of this Midrash is specifically with Sarah because it says *Shnei Chayei Sarah* - this repetition, this extra phrase, told us about the quality of her life, that was amazing; the breaking up of the years into periods is nothing extraordinary by itself.

Baal Haturim: Why say *Shnei Chayei Sarah*? Why not Yemai Sarah? Because she had two lives - she went through life once and then had a second life, when at age 89 she was rejuvenated and was able to conceive again; she was raising a child again as if she was a young woman; she became a young woman starting life over again - so she had two lives.

Rashbam: we don't find by other women, such as the other Imahos, that we talk so much about their lives or even when most of them died - why here with Sarah? It is because the Torah wants to get to the story of Me'Aras Hamachpeylah; therefore it had to tell us the number of years of her life so that we can know all the details of the purchased of the land by Avraham.

Why this juxtaposition of the story of the Akeidah to the death of Sarah? Furthermore, why does she die in Chevron and Avraham has to come from elsewhere to mourn her - why are they not together? **Rashi:** the Torah juxtaposes the death of Sarah to the Akeidah because she died as a result of the news about Akeidas Yitzchak; when she saw him tied down on an altar and about to be killed, she had a heart attack and died. **Midrash:** when she found out about it, she ran to Me'Aras Hamachpeylah, a holy place, and prayed for his life there. Avraham and Sarah were given the mesorah that Adam and Chavah were buried there, so this was the holy place in Canaan. **Abarbanel:** no one else, especially Efron, knew that this was their burial place, or they might never have sold him the property; Avraham was careful in the negotiations, first with the Chiti, then with Efron, not to say how special this was. **Rabbeinu Bachya:** the phrase *Kiryas Arbah Hi Chevron* tells us that whoever was buried in that place, that person's soul is tied in above to that city in heaven - Chevron is from the word chibur, connection - this was the only known holy place up to that time. The Avos wanted desperately to be buried there - especially Avraham and Yaacov - because that is where the neshamah can easily go back to its roots. It is called Yiryas Arbah because of the four couples were buried there. Sarah ran there because she knew it to be a holy place and she petitioned God from there to save her son's life.

The Mesorah therefore connects the two stories. This would mean that the Akeidah brought about her death. Would she have lived longer had this event not occurred? The words *Shnei Chayei Sarah* indicate to the **Kli Yakar** something different; with Avraham it says *Shenai Chayei Avraham* **Asher Chai** - why add those two words? Because he used every day to its

fullest and did not waste one day. Another reason is that he did not live all of the years for which he was originally destined - he should have lived to 180, like Yitzchak; he lost 5 years of his life so he should not see Esav go out into an evil life; since he was promised a good old life, he was cut off early; so here it says the years he lived, *Asher Chayah*, because they were cut off; Sarah however lived her full predestined life; she died because of the Akeidah, but this was her predestined time; she would have died then even had the Akeidah not occurred. **Rav Alpert:** why would Hashem make the Akeidah as the means of her death if it was such a seminal event in Jewish history? Why should this Tzadeikas die because of this incredible event that brought such great zechus to all their descendants? The story of the Akeidah was unknown to the world - Avraham and Yitzchak went alone to the mountain, and it would not have become publicly known; it was only through the death of Sarah that it became publicized; Avraham was ready to kill his child because of his love of Hashem. This story of Sarah's death taught the world about the Akeidah and the age of Yitzchak when he was on the alter, that he was 37 years old, and not a young child - he was a grownup who allowed himself to be killed; it was the death of Sarah that put this phenomenal story on the historical map. It came to light only because of her death.

When one looks carefully at the parshios, there is, in fact, not an exact juxtaposition of these two stories; there is the intervening story of the birth of Rivka and others to his brother's family, from Nachor. Why does the Torah insert the birth of Rivka between these stories? **Sforno:** After Rivka was born, Sarah died; Rivka is going to fit into Sarah's shoes, she is the next generation; this was made known to Avraham - he knew that not only was a baby born, but she was the bashert of Yitzchak; Sarah also knew this at the point she was born. Hashem does not allow a tzadik to die until a substitute is born. In this story, Sarah only went to pray for Yitzchak after the knowledge of Rivka, his bashert, was born; she is not as worried about his life knowing this, but she was concerned about the possibility that maybe they had sinned and he would die; but she knew that Judaism is likely to continue with Yitzchak and Rivka; as the pasuk says, "the sun rises, the sun sets." **Rabbeinu Bachya:** positioning parshios in the Torah is always critical; all of the sections are placed and arranged to teach important lessons - there are always reasons, with the most important secrets often revealed not by what is written but the order of how they are written. This insertion of the birth of Rivka, this interruption of events, was to tell us that she was born right *after* Sarah died - that's why it says *Vatamas Sarah*, that she had already died; the sections are joined together as if they were one - Rivka and Sarah were like one, with one immediately stepping into the shoes of the other; the Midrash does not see the 5 pasukim detailing Rivka's birth to be a break between the juxtaposition of the Akeidah and death of Sarah, because Sarah and Rivka were like one. When Rivka ultimately is brought to Canaan, it says *Vayevi'eha Yitzchak Ha'Ohelaha Sarah Imo* - she was like Sarah his mother, she was the continuation of Sarah. So according to Rabbeinu Bachya, Sarah dies first and then Avraham finds out; so Sarah did not die feeling comfortable.

23:2: *Sarah died in Kiryas Arbah which is Chevron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her.* Where is Yitzchak in all of this? Why was he not there to mourn his mother? She was incredibly tied to her child Yitzchak and he was totally absent from her burial and mourning? **Rabbeinu Bachya:** The Torah should have said that both of them came to mourn her - there is no doubt that Yitzchak would cry for his righteous mother. The obligation to mourn a parent is much greater than for a spouse - so Yitzchak had a greater obligation than Avraham. Furthermore, she had an incredible love for him, with one soul tied to another (Nafshah Keshurah Benafsho). But it must be that Yitzchak did not know - he was completely in the dark about her death. Avraham hid it from him so that he would not feel

responsible for her death when she saw him tied up on the altar; that is why we do not hear of Yitzchak for a long time, until the arrival of Rivka. When Avraham returned from the Akeidah, it says that Avraham returned to the two lads, Yishmael and Eliezer, and they returned to Beer Sheva; it just says Avraham returned, not Yitzchak. Yitzchak stayed on top of the mountain, on Har Hamoriah, for three years until he was 40; he was involved with learning Torah and perfecting himself to continue the mission of his parents. When Eliezer returns with Rivka, she saw Yitzchak in the field - he himself was returning from *Be'er Lachai Ro'Ee* - he was returning from Har Hamoriah where he was involved with God. They both arrive at the same time and begin their lives together. Avraham did not want to break the news to Yitzchak to spare him the pain, as well as not interrupt his spiritual growth.

Abarbanel: why is Yitzchak not mentioned? Because he was actually with Sarah at the time of her death and did not have to come from anywhere like Avraham did. She would not separate herself from Yitzchak after the Akeidah.

Why were Sarah and Avraham separated? **Rashi**: they lived in Beersheva, but she ran to Chevron to save the life of Yitzchak. **Ramban**: Rashi might be correct - we know Avraham journeyed for 3 days to reach Har Hamoriah for the Akeidah, which would be about right for a journey from Beersheva - it would only take one day from Chevron, he would have gotten there sooner, so that would suggest that they were living in Beersheva. But, the Ramban feels they were already living in Chevron, and it took him three days to travel because God wanted him to take longer to think about what he was doing and receive more *sechar* for it. The word *Vayavoh* doesn't imply anything special - it does not have to mean a real journey. Men and women in those days lived in their own tents, and he could just have come from his tent. **Abarbanel**: *Vayavoh* means that he came for a special mission.

Rab Alpert and **Oznayim LaTorah**: When Rabbi Akiva used to see his students falling asleep in his shiur, he would tell Agadata. One famous agadata was when he asked how come Esther was able to reign over 127 countries? Because Sarah lived for 127 years. What is the connection between them? Sarah was one of the most beautiful women in world history, as was Esther - the greatest challenge for a beautiful woman is a result of their being pursued by everyone because of their beauty. They must try very hard to remain *Yashar*, to remain righteous, and not let fame get to their heads - these two stood out in their character, not to let anything affect their purity and righteousness; their moral compasses were never affected. Esther was completely tied to Mordechai and the mission of the Jews. Both of them were not affected by the trappings of their beauty.