

DRAWING CLOSER TO THE LIFE OF SARA

by Rabbi Label Lam

In summarizing the life of our mother Sara the Torah breaks the years of her life into component parts and then puts them all back together and says; "the years of the life of Sara." Rashi comments amazingly on that little phrase and tells us about the years of the life of Sara, "All of them were equally good!"

What could that possibly mean? How is it possible to describe about any person's life that all their years were equally good? Certainly that cannot be the true description of Sara's life.

Her husband was a dissident. He expressed opinions that were hostile to the mental mindset of the society around him. They were called on to live a nomadic existence, never having settled in their later year of life. Twice Sara was captured and nearly ravaged. Most of her life she was barren and physically incapable of having children. She brought a woman into her husband's domain and it brought conflict into her personal life. The son from that relationship caused her aggravation along with her son and her husband and eventually had to be expelled. Never having seen her grown son to the chupah, she died of fright upon being treated to a visage of that son about to be slaughtered. Her husband and The Almighty rebuked her for laughing slightly inwardly when heat exhausted strangers suggested that the next year she would have a child. Meanwhile, her whole life was running to meet the needs of unexpected guests in even the most disagreeable weather. Can one say about this life that all of her years were equally good?

To accentuate the question, I remember that for a mental exercise one of my teachers once asked us to imagine a new machine that would freeze our emotional state eternally at any moment the button on that machine would be pressed. He asked, "When do you think most people would push that button?" We concluded after some discussion that, "Many would probably die never having pressed the button anticipating, hoping at each moment that maybe the next instant will deliver something more splendid." Sara, however, would have pushed that button at any moment in her life. How is that possible?

A child living through a war-time may never feel the ravages of war. Her mother is carrying her. Her mother is shielding her from pain and hunger. She hears the bombs but the mother absorbs the fear. The child only fears losing the mother. She senses, though, the mother is more concerned with losing her child. The child resides in a loving embrace.

King David said affirmatively, "What's good for me is being near G-d!" What could he mean? The

equation of life is packed with zillions of variables. The subjects of health, love, business, children, ecology, politics are each miles deep with details that are worlds out of control. A person can become overwhelmed with enormous insecurity when considering the challenge of merely facing the day. In a quantum universe, anything can happen, and if Murphy rules the day it probably will happen. How does one endure the roller coaster ride that is called "life"?

Find and focus on the constant in the equation, King David seems to be saying. However the external conditions of our life fluctuate, no matter what the market or the Rangers do on a given day, even if a storm erupts around us, there is a way to remain in the center of the cyclone.

Sara's happiness was not found in the map of external conditions. She did not look for the goodness of her life to enter through some outside door. Her beauty, her trust, her goodness, and her innocence shone out to a world and shaped it. She was not effected by the ugly circumstances that were thrust upon her.

When we were babies, our parents checked on us "now" and "then" to determine if we were content or discontent. Later when we came home from school, they asked "how was your 'day'?" In adulthood we had a good "year" or a bad "year" in business, sports, or relationships. As time proceeds we speak about the 70's, the 90's, "good marriages", "good decades" or "times of hardship". In the finality when you visit a nursing home, you only see two types of faces, reflecting a "life" bitter or sweet. Life makes it hard for a person to remain neutral. In the end we are ultimately content and sweetly disposed or sore and bitter.

The final result does not = (nachas "pleasure" factor) (tragedy) x (inconvenience) x hardship. If so, Sara would have been, by definition, a bitter individual. Rather, a sweet or bitter existence is the summary of a choice that is made many times every day.

If you want to know if you're experiencing life from the inside out, as an actor rather than as a victim ripening to a sweet conclusion, then ask yourself at any present moment, "Am I prepared to press the button now?" If we can produce more moments that the answer to that question is "yes", then we are drawing closer to the life of Sara.

Good Shabbos!

Text Copyright © 1998 Rabbi Dovid Green and **Project Genesis, Inc.**
