

WHOLESOME SARAH

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Chayei Sarah

Wholesome Sarah

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Today's Learning:
Ketubot 9:6-7
O.C. 664:7-9
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Beitzah 22
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shabbat 16

This week's parashah begins with the death of the Matriarch Sarah. Midrash Rabbah applies to Sarah the verse (Tehilim 37:18), "Hashem knows the days of the wholesome / wholesome, their inheritance will be forever" - Just as they are wholesome, so their years are wholesome."

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) asks: What is the connection between the first part of the verse - "Hashem knows the days of the wholesome" - and the second part of the verse - "their inheritance will be forever"? He explains:

The Torah says (Devarim 33:28), "Yisrael shall dwell securely, solitary, in the likeness of Yaakov, in a land of grain and wine." The Jewish People can be secure only when they stand apart from the

nations of the world. Sarah was the first person to express this, saying (in last week's parashah - 21:10), "For the son of the slave- woman shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak."

Sarah also represents another "first." Her burial place was the first Jewish-owned land in Eretz Yisrael, as described in this week's parashah. Says R' Kook: These two "firsts" are alluded to in the two parts of the verse, "Hashem knows the days of the temimim, their inheritance will be forever." The first part refers to Sarah's understanding that Jewish wholesomeness is attained through Jewish solitariness. The second part refers to Sarah's role in securing the inheritance of the Jewish People in Eretz Yisrael. (Shemuot Ha'raayah)

"I am an alien and a resident among you; grant me an estate for a burial site with you, that I may bury my dead from before me."

"The children of Chet answered Avraham, saying to him, 'Hear us, my lord - You are a prince of G-d in our midst.'" (23:4- 6)

R' Meir of Premishlan z"l (Galicia; early 19th century) exclaims: Could it be that the evil Canaanites would honor Avraham thus!? Rather, their intention was as follows: It was well known that Hashem had decreed 400 years of wandering upon Avraham's family. Avraham wanted his own lifetime to count toward those 400 years; therefore he said, "I am an alien among you." But the Canaanites did not want to give Avraham that satisfaction. "No!" they said. "You are a prince among us."

(Divrei Meir)

"Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Please tip over your jug so I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will even water your camels,' her will You have designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak; and may I know through her that You have done kindness with my master." (24:14)

Rashi explains: "She is fit for him since she will be charitable and will therefore be worthy of admission into the house of Avraham."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (preeminent educator and mussar figure in Israel; died 2005) writes: What we learn from Eliezer's request and from Rashi's explanation is that the measure of chessed is the quantity in which it is done. Precisely because Rivka not only fulfilled Eliezer's request but went beyond it, she proved that she was worthy of entering Avraham's household. Many people say, "I am willing to do chessed, but only up to a point." The ideal practice of chessed, however, knows no limits. [Ed. note: Presumably, R' Wolbe is not referring to limits that are imposed upon a person by his circumstances, for example, his need to earn a living and spend time with his family. Rather, R' Wolbe apparently is referring to limits a person imposes on his chessed because he thinks he has already fulfilled his obligation.]

The story is told of a rabbi [some say it was R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l of 19th century Kovno, Lithuania] who was asked by a congregant: "May I use milk for the Four Cups at the Seder since I have no money for wine?" "No!" answered the rabbi, and he gave the questioner a large sum of money to buy provisions for the holiday.

"Why did you give him such a large donation?" other congregants asked the rabbi. "Wine does not cost that much!"

"Because," replied the rabbi, "if the questioner intended to use milk for the Four Cups, it is apparent that he is lacking not only wine, but also meat." That, says R' Wolbe, is chessed - recognizing how great others' needs are and following through.

In truth, if we only recognized others' needs, we could perform unlimited chessed. How so? Because chessed is performed not only with one's money and other tangible things. Smiling, saying a kind word, and giving encouragement are all forms of chessed. There is no limit to the "small" acts of kindness that we could perform if we would only recognize that others need our kindness.

(AleI Shur Vol. I, p. 93)

From the Haftarah . . .

"The king, David, was old, coming along in days; they covered him with garments, but he did not become warm." (Melachim I 1:1)

The midrash comments: "The king, David, was old' - Regarding this it is written (Mishlei 16:31), 'The crown of splendor is old age.' Where is this crown found? [Mishlei continues:] 'It will be found in the path of tzedakah.' From whom do we learn this? From Avraham, about whom it says (Bereishit 18:19), 'For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice.' In this merit, Avraham attained seivah and ziknah [two terms for old age], as it is written (in our parashah - 25:8), 'Avraham expired and died at a good seivah / old age,' and (24:1), 'Now Abraham was zaken / old, coming along in days.' [The midrash continues:] Likewise you find regarding King David, about whom it says (Shmuel II 8:15), 'David administered justice and charity to his entire people,' that he merited old age, as it is written, 'The king, David, was old'."

R' Shmuel Laniado z"l (16th century rabbi of Aleppo, Syria) writes extensively to explain this midrash. We present some excerpts.

The midrash seems to have been bothered by a question: Why does the verse say, "The king, David," rather than the more correct (in Hebrew), "David, the king"? The midrash answers that the verse is alluding to the reason why David merited old age. Specifically, the structure of our verse allows us to relate it the verse, "David administered justice and charity." "Charity" is something that even a

commoner can perform. "Justice," on the other hand, is the domain of the king. Thus, to parallel the phrase, "justice and charity," our verse had to say first, "The king," and then, "David." And, from the fact that the person of "David" parallels the concept of charity / tzedakah in these verses, we learn the lesson that the quoted verse from Mishlei teaches, i.e., old age will be found in the path of tzedakah.

The verse in Mishlei teaches another lesson as well. It says, "The crown of splendor is old age." Unfortunately, some people do not find old age to be a crown of splendor. However, when a person merits old age as a result of performing acts of charity, his old age will be a crown of splendor. Thus, regarding both Avraham and David, the Torah and the prophet respectively use the phrase, "Coming along in days." This teaches us that they gladly came along with their days. They did not dread old age but rather found it to be a crown of splendor.

(Kli Yakar)

Diaries

This week we present another excerpt from Ma'agal Tov, the diary of R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; 1724- 1806), describing the author's travels as a "Shelucha D'rabbanan" ("Shadar" or "meshulach") on behalf of the Jewish community of Chevron. The entry presented here is dated 24 Cheshvan 5514 [1753]. Note that some of the poetic language and Biblical references are lost in translation.

Wednesday: We departed from there [Senigallia, Italy] and arrived safely in the city of Ancona the same day. And it happened, as I was coming through the gate into the city square and "Avraham came out" - i.e., the g'vir Signor Avraham Hakohen, may G-d preserve him - to receive us in his house. Within the hour, the venerable rabbi, his honor the rav, R' Yechiel Hakohen, may G-d preserve him, came, together with some of the scholars of the yeshiva, amongst them the two luminaries, our master R.S. Pappo, may G-d grant him life, Master of the Mishnah; and R' Yehuda Peretz Bonsenior, may G-d preserve him.

These men are all perfect, all equally good, in doing great honor to emissaries from the Holy Land. Even toward me - a young man - they acted marvelously. Day and night - until midnight - the footsteps of the notables, community leaders and scholars never ceased; one group entering, the other going out - constantly busy with me. Would that I were a cowherd to one of them! . . . And when the time came for us to depart, they would not let us go without escorting us to our abode.

On the day of Shabbat [Parashat] Chayei Sarah, I preached the sermon. Afterward, the notables of the congregation came forward "into the shade of my roof" and suggested that they would walk with me to visit the Italian synagogue. [Elsewhere Chida explains that Ancona had an Italian synagogue and a Spanish synagogue.] . . .

[Chida remained in Ancona for several weeks.] When it came time for the men of the great council to consider the matter of my mission. "Chaim asked" [a play on Tehilim 21:5 and Chida's name]: "It is my desire to go to the people [presumably, to collect individually] and do not restrain my going to them." And so they did; after Shabbat they sent two men of stature [as escorts?] and "they hauled and drew up Yosef" [a play on Bereishit 37:28 and Chida's second name]. . . [The council met further] and a spirit of goodwill supported them [to give] the sum of 275 Corinthian ducats. I answered them that there is a hint of evil [i.e., 275 is the gematria of "raah" / "evil"], and it is not fitting after they have rendered me only good. This found favor in their eyes, and they added another five! . . .

There in Ancona I saw a commentary on the [Midrash] Sifre by R' Hillel in manuscript, and also She'eilot U'teshuvot Min Hashamayim by some holy man.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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