

THE PATH OF LIFE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Chayei Sarah

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Chayei Sarah
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Today's Learning:
Arachin 6:1-2
O.C. 227:1-3
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 45
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nazir 29

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (15:24), "A path of life above for the intelligent one, so that his soul will turn away from the grave below." Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; early 14th century) writes: King Shlomo a"h informs us here that an intelligent person who recognizes the transitory nature of this world is the one who knows that the real "path of life" is above. Therefore, he distances himself from the pleasures of this world and does not make them permanent fixtures in his life. To what may this be compared? To a person who plans to live in a certain city for a short time; he will not invest in property or a lot of furniture. Similarly, an intelligent person does not invest in his body more than is necessary for his health and to enable him to serve G-d, for he knows that his true home is above. Moreover, R' Bachya adds, the soul actually longs to return home. This is why King Shlomo writes

(Kohelet 7:1) that the day of death is greater than the day of birth.

These ideas may be tied into our parashah, R' Bachya continues. When a person is born, we cannot praise his good deeds, for he has not performed them yet. Only when a person dies can we say with certainty that he was righteous. So, too, say our Sages, only when Sarah died her was her greatness revealed. This occurred because several miracles that used to occur in Avraham and Sarah's home ceased when she died, thus revealing that they occurred in her merit. Furthermore, she had the great merit of dying in Eretz Yisrael and being buried there.

"Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry over her." (23:2)

The Gemara (Shabbat 105b) teaches: "If one cries over the death of a talmid chacham, Hashem counts the tears and stores them away, as it is written (Tehilim 56:9), 'Place my tears in Your flask; are they not in Your record?'"

R' Shmuel Eliezer Eidels z"l (Polish rabbi and author of one of the most widely-used Talmud commentaries; died 1632) writes: The fact that the Gemara interprets the verse in Tehilim as referring to mourning the deceased suggests that crying for any other reason is prohibited. (Chiddushei Aggadot)

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995; one of the leading halachic authorities of the 20th century) notes that one also may cry in connection with teshuvah / repentance. Indeed, the Ne'ilah prayer on Yom Kippur includes a line that is based on the above verse from Tehilim: "Yehi ratzon / May it be Your will, You who hears the sounds of weeping, that You place our tears in Your flask permanently" This presumably refers to tears of teshuvah.

R' Auerbach adds: Although one is obligated to pray truthfully, one may say these words of Ne'ilah even if he is not crying. The reason is that the prayer uses the plural form and refers to the collective tears of the Jewish People. One may be certain that some Jews, either in one's shul or elsewhere in the world, are crying at that moment. (Quoted in Halichot Shlomo: Mo'adim II p.3)

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (1724-1806; Eretz Yisrael and Italy) writes that a mourner who is unable to cry, and likewise any person on the High Holidays who is unable to cry, should make crying sounds. This is alluded to by the superfluous word "kol" / "the sound of" in the verse (Tehilim 6:9), "Hashem has heard kol / the sound of my weeping." (Shiyurei Berachah: Y.D. 394:3)

"Hear us, my lord - You are a prince of G-d in our midst; in the choicest of our burial places bury your dead . . ." (23:6)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) writes: My wise son Avraham Binyamin

asked: The opening phrase of this verse implies that the children of Chet were pleading with Avraham. Why? Didn't they have the upper hand in the negotiations for a burial place for Sarah?

R' Shlomo Kluger answers: Avraham asked for a parcel of land that would become his family's final resting place. The Hittites knew he was correct to request this as it was customary to bury family members together.

Nevertheless, the children of Chet pleaded: "Sarah was so important, we all feel like her family members. Therefore, "in the choicest of our burial places bury your dead." (Chochmat Ha'Torah)

"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)

"Go to my father's house and to my family and take a wife for my son." (24:38)

Weren't Avraham's relatives idolators like their neighbors? What was special about them? Indeed, why did Avraham's father, Terach, merit to be the progenitor of all of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs? Perhaps the following midrash provides an answer to this question:

The Midrash Tanchuma (Parashat Shmot) states: If someone's name is doubled in the Torah, it is an indication that he has a place in two worlds - this world and the World-to-Come. Examples include Noach (Bereishit 6:9), Avraham (22:11), Yaakov (46:2), Moshe (Shmot 3:3), Shmuel (Shmuel I 3:10), and Peretz (Ruth 4:18). The midrash then asks: Why then is Terach's name doubled (see Bereishit 11:27)? The midrash answers: He too has a place in two worlds, for he repented before he died.

The midrash concludes: Hashem told Avraham (Bereishit 15:15), "As for you -- you shall come to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age." Avraham responded, "After all my hard work to perform good deeds, I will return to my ancestors [who were idolators]?" At that time, Hashem informed Avraham that his father had repented.

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) elaborates on Terach's repentance. Terach was originally among the greatest opponents of Avraham and his "new" religion. Our Sages say that it was Terach

who delivered Avraham to be burnt in Nimrod's furnace. At some point, however, Terach had a change of heart. The Torah relates that Terach took his family and moved from Ur Kasdim (the site of the furnace) to Charan. R' Soloveitchik notes that the Torah is not specific about when and why Terach abandoned his home for this move. Each of the major commentaries (Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Ramban) offers a different explanation for the sequence of events. They also disagree whether Avraham was the leader or Terach was.

R' Soloveitchik himself suggests that Terach reached the decision to move at the very same time that Hashem commanded Avraham to leave his home. But if Avraham went because of G-d's command, why does the Torah (Bereishit 11:31) describe Terach as "taking" Avraham? The Torah wants to indicate that Terach's act of repentance was even more impressive than Avraham's submissiveness to G-d's command. (Abraham's Journey p.52)

This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

Shabbat Parashat Chaye Sarah: In some communities, it is the custom that if a chattan / bridegroom is present, he is called to the Torah for the section that describes Eliezer's search for a bride for Yitzchak (beginning with 24:1). If the chattan is a kohen, the first aliyah is lengthened to include this section. (Luach Davar B'ito p.327)

In earlier times, it was customary in some countries to take out a second Sefer Torah and read from 24:1 through 24:7 any time a chattan was present, even in a week when Parashat Chaye Sarah was not read. (Ketter Shem Tov).

25 Marcheshvan: On this date, early in the Second Temple era, the Jews who returned from Bavel re-conquered the province of Shomron and walled its cities. (Megillat Ta'anit)

27 Marcheshvan: On this date, late in the Second Temple era (in the days of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai), the korban mincha of fine flour began to be brought in the Bet Hamikdash after a period when it had not been brought as a stand-alone offering because the Tzedukim (Sadducees) objected to it. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai challenged the Tzedukim to provide a Torah source for their actions, but they were unable to do so. Having demonstrated the ignorance of the leaders of the Tzedukim, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai then persuaded the Tzedukim that the mincha was a legitimate stand-alone offering (not merely a supplement to animal offerings). (Megillat Ta'anit)

Erev Rosh Chodesh: R' Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim z"l (1843-1905; rabbi of Ponovezh, Mir and Yerushalayim) had a custom not to eat lunch on Erev Rosh Chodesh during the winter months so that he would eat the Rosh Chodesh meal at night with a full appetite (see next entry). (Nefesh David)

Rosh Chodesh: It is a mitzvah to eat extra on Rosh Chodesh. (O.C. 419:1).

It is customary for children to bring their school "rebbe's" gifts of money on Rosh Chodesh. The Midrash Pesikta states that this money is not counted against the annual income that was allotted to a person on Rosh Hashanah. (Mishnah Berurah 419:1)

Marcheshvan is one of three months that does not have the same number of days every year (sometimes 29, sometimes 30). The others are Kislev and Adar.

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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