

A TIME TO DANCE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Chayei Sarah

A Time to Dance

R' Avraham Shalom Halberstam shlita (the Stropkover Rebbe in Yerushalayim) observes that there are two parashot in the Torah that have the word "life" in their names--our parashah, Chayei Sarah, and Vayechi--and they both have death as one of their main subjects. He explains:

When Avraham negotiated with the Hittites over a burial place for Sarah, he said, "... that I may bury my dead from before me" and "If it is truly your will to bury my dead from before me." With these words, says the Stropkover Rebbe, Avraham was emphasizing our belief in an eternal soul. Though the dead are buried and seemingly gone, they have merely departed from before us, from our sight; however, they are not without life.

Our parashah begins with a funeral and ends with a wedding. Likewise, at the beginning of his Laws of Mourning, Rambam z"l (1135-1204) writes: "Moshe Rabbeinu established for Yisrael the seven days of mourning and the seven days of celebration after a wedding." What is the connection between wedding celebrations and mourning? The Stropkover Rebbe explains that this is a reflection of the Jewish attitude toward death. It is sad, there is mourning, but there also is a clear understanding that the deceased is alive and well in a world where he or she is rejoicing. This is reflected as well, in the observation of R' Moshe Alshich z"l (1508-1593) regarding the verse in Kohelet (3:4), "A time of wailing and a time of dancing." These two items are in a different grammatical form than all of the other pairs of activities listed in the adjacent verses. All of the other pairs, explains the Stropkover Rebbe in the name of R' Alshich, are mutually exclusive (for example, verse 5--"A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to shun embraces"). In contrast, wailing and dancing are not mutually exclusive, because death is an occasion for mourning, but also for rejoicing in the reward that awaits the righteous. (Heard from the Stropkover Rebbe in a eulogy for R' Kalman Winter z"l, 20 Marcheshvan 5774)

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

One of the most famous expressions uttered by a husband about his wife is Rabbi Akiva's statement to his students, "Everything that I have and everything that you have - it is hers." Was this really true? While it is true that Rabbi Akiva's wife agreed to suffer deprivation while he was away in yeshiva, it was he who toiled in study to become one of the greatest Tana'im / Sages of the period of the Mishnah!

R' Shalom Aroush shlita (Yerushalayim) explains: A marriage is more than a union of two bodies. It is a union of two souls. When a marriage works properly, the husband's soul and the wife's soul are one in the same way that a pair of legs operates as a unit. We do not say that a person's two legs work separately, but in complement to each other. Rather, we expect them to be one unit.

Rabbi Akiva understood this, and he understood that his soul drew spiritual strength from the very special soul of his wife. He knew that his accomplishments were possible only because of that additional spiritual strength that he received from his wife's soul. (B'gan Ha'shalom p.120)

"Avraham was old." (24:1)

The Midrash Tanchuma relates that Avraham was the first person to look old. Avraham prayed for this change because he and Yitzchak looked alike. Avraham said to Hashem, "It is fitting that the young should honor the old, but right now, no one can tell which of us is the father and which of us is the son."

R' Shaul Yisraeli z"l (1909-1995; rabbi of Kfar Ha'roeh, Israel and a rosh yeshiva in Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) puts Avraham's prayer in the broader context of Avraham's mission in life. He asks: Why does our society tend to value youth over old age? It is because we value material accomplishments over intellectual and spiritual accomplishments. Youth have the ability to pursue material pleasures more than the old, and they have the ability to enjoy those pleasures more than their elders do. We dread getting old, and we lack respect for the old, because we fear losing those abilities.

If we valued intellectual and spiritual accomplishments, we would respect the old more than the young. Our Sages say that the word "zaken" / "elder" alludes to the phrase, "Zeh sh'kanah chochmah" / "He who has acquired wisdom." [Halachah requires us to stand up even for an unlearned person over the age of 70 out of respect for the wisdom that results from his life experiences.] Avraham's life's work was to change mankind's outlook from one that valued pursuing pleasures to one that valued awareness of G-d and of the resulting obligation to pursue opportunities to perform acts of kindness. (Siach Shaul)

"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)

Memories of Yerushalayim

The following is from the journal of R' Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim z"l (1845-1905), known by the acronym "Aderet." The Aderet was rabbi in the towns of Mir and Ponovezh and, in his last years, Assistant Rabbi of Yerushalayim. Here, he discusses a complex halachic question regarding "techum Shabbat" (the limitation on going more than 2,000 amot [3,000-4,000 feet])

on Shabbat) and "eruv techumim" (by which one may extend his techum Shabbat; different from an "eruv" that permits carrying). Through his discussion, we learn of several challenges facing Jews in Yerushalayim circa 1902.

The elders who live in the wonderful building called the "Moshav Zekeinim" / "Elders Home," built specially for them on the outskirts of the city, asked: Given that the distance from there to the closest courtyard is 800 amot [1,200-1,600 feet], their techum ends in the middle of the Holy City, Yerushalayim [and they can walk no further]. Can they place their eruv techumim within the city so that the whole city will be considered their domain? This issue was raised by R' Yaakov, may his light shine, known as "R' Yaakov Amerikaner." R' Shmuel Salant, may his light shine [1816-1909; Rabbi of Yerushalayim], said that the entire city can be considered one domain only if it is walled or has an eruv, but we don't have permission [from the government] to make an eruv, and the wall has a breach [presumably referring to the opening next to Jaffa Gate], so the city has the status of an open field. (Har Ha'moriah § 13)

Later in his journal (§ 58), the Aderet writes:

I was asked regarding the Moshav Zekeinim in the Holy City, the first building when you come from Yaffo, which is distant from the City and you can't get from there to the city on Shabbat--what should they do as far as reading the megillah, whether of the 15th as in the city or on the 14th because it is distant from the city one mil [a Talmudic measure] and the city can't be seen from there? There already was a discussion here in Yerushalayim in 5647 [1887] regarding the new developments outside the walls, and some maintained that even they should read on the 14th. . .

One can ask about the Old City itself [whether it still qualifies as a city walled since the time of Yehoshua bin Nun], since for years, due to our many sins, Yerushalayim had no Jews. Ramban z"l [1194-1270] wrote in his letter [quoted in last week's Hamaayan] that he found only two Jews in the City. . . But, let us not speak against that which was practiced here from the earliest days by awesome scholars, the rabbis of the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim z"l. . .

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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