

# MECHAYE SARAH

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hevron, in the land of Canaan. Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her. Avraham arose from before his dead and said to the sons of Ches, "I am a stranger and a resident among you. Let me purchase a burial place from you so that I may bury my dead." (Bereishis 23:2-4)*

This week's parshah begins with the death and burial of Sarah Imainu, and provides a good opportunity to talk about a topic that is as much a fact of life as is taxes: death and burial.

As we have mentioned before, death is a necessary element of life because the body must dissolve. According to Kabbalah, the Original Snake imparted a spiritual impurity to mankind that is so strong that it cannot be removed from the body, for the most part, except through death and the dissolution of the body.

Immediately Adam descended tremendously from his level, and so did the worlds to where they are now . . . They became material, and so did Adam and Chava. Their "clothing" transformed from clothing of light to clothing of skin . . . (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 344-345)

In the future, the righteous will be dust, as it says, "The dust will return to the land as it was" (Koheles 12:7), and it says, "You are from dust and to dust you will return" (Bereishis 3:19); (Shabbos 152b). This will occur a moment before Techiyas HaMeisim, when those who are still living will die in order to dissolve the physicality of their bodies in order to transform them from clothing of skin to clothing of light. Death will not be the result of the Angel of Death then, G-d forbid, for that was destroyed completely (Succah 52a) . . . but by The Holy One, Blessed is He, Himself, in order to recreate them anew completely, like the body of Adam before the sin when he entered Gan Aiden. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 489)

I say for the most part because, according to the Talmud, the Jewish people accomplished this when they accepted Torah at Mt. Sinai:

When the Snake came to Chava he imparted to her zuhama. When Israel stood at Mt. Sinai, the zuhama ended. (Shabbos 146a)

and then de-accomplished it when they sinned through the golden calf. And the truth is, even then they had died and were brought back to life again anew, though they did not go through the stage

dissolving in the ground.

Part of the reason for the dissolution of the body is to rectify the soul. One of the pitfalls of life in this very physical world is that the soul itself can, over time, come to identify with the body. So much so, in fact, that it can mistake the well-being of the body for its own well-being, which often runs contrary to the well-being of the soul. Having to watch the body dissolve in the ground is lesson in the other direction.

Indeed, as the body rots, the soul of the person who lived like a body, making materialistic gain his priority in life, the soul believes that it is him, the soul, who is actually disappearing. Gradually, but surely, to the horror of the soul, it watches its end approach with dreaded and fearful anticipation, "kicking and screaming" the whole way, until one day it is all over.

"AHHHHHHHHH! WE'RE GONE!!!!" it screams out.

And then, it realizes, that it cannot be gone and also have a consciousness of not being there. At that time, as the recognition of what must have truly occurred hits the soul, it breathes a great sign of relief as it dawns on the soul that it was the body that went, not it. Alas, it is still alive, and always will be, and after having gone through that stage of Gihennom (there might be others, depending upon the sins done in the lifetimes), it awaits to inhabit a new version of its old body, one that has been created without the effects of the Original Snake.

Why all this process? Because, wherever we think we're headed, ultimately we're headed for the World-to-Come, and we're not yet dressed for the occasion. As one can imagine, the World-to-Come is not like anything we have, or can experience in this world.

### **SHABBOS DAY:**

*You descended and the mountains melted because of You. [People] have never heard, never observed, no eye had ever seen a god - except for You - that acted for those who trust in him. (Yeshayahu 64:2-3)*

On the simplest level, this posuk is talking about the Jewish people's revelation of G-d at Mt. Sinai in this world. On a deeper level, the posuk is understood by the Talmud to be talking about the final stage of history, Olam HaBah - the World-to-Come. Thus, the Talmud reads this verse a little differently:

Rebi Chiya bar Abba said in the name of Rebi Yochanan, "The glorious future of which all the prophets prophesied is only for him who marries his daughter to a talmid chacham, for him who does business with a talmid chacham, and for him who gives of his wealth to a talmid chacham. But, as for the scholars themselves, 'No eye has witnessed, G-d, besides You!' (Yeshayahu 64:3). Happy is he who waits for it." What is meant by "No eye has witnessed?" Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "This refers to the wine preserved in its grapes since the six days of creation." Rebi Shmuel bar Nachmeini said, "This refers to Aiden which no eye ever saw. And if you will ask, 'Where did Adam, the first man live?' It was only in the garden [of Aiden]. And if you say that 'Garden' and 'Aiden' are the same, it

says, 'And a river went out of Aiden to water the garden' (Bereishis 2:10), [which shows that] 'Garden' and 'Aiden' are two distinct places." (Brochos 34b)

Not even Moshe Rabbeinu's eye, because a prophet can only prophecize about what he has seen (Maharal, Gevuros Hashem).

Even Adam didn't experience the level of Gan Aiden that we are destined to experience. How could he have had free-will and still be in Olam HaBah? How could there have been a snake still in the world that could act as the yetzer hara? And, even though Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai into Heaven, received Karnei Hod - beams of light - and no longer needed to eat or drink after he returned to the camp, it still did not come close to the ultimate experience of the World-to-Come.

Kesones Ohr - clothing of light - is the goal. And, we're not talking about the wardrobe in your closet either. Kesones Ohr is what our skin has to become to be able to rise from level to level and to receive the light of G-d. It's hard to believe in or relate to such a concept in such a very physical world as the one in which we live, but eventually, it will become difficult to relate to how the world could ever have been so physical and mundane in the first place.

Indeed:

*... In Olam HaBah after Yemos HaMoshiach, from the seventh millennium onward ... the bodies will literally be transformed to Nefashos (souls), and there will no longer be any physical eating. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 502)*

Difficult as it may be to believe, 5,790 years of history will only have been a pit stop along the way to far more important and internal realities. Though everyone lives in this world like it is all that counts, save a few knowing and righteous individuals, and even though the events of today are so overwhelming frightening and dominating, they mean little in the ultimate scheme of things. In fact, even though Techiyas HaMeisim - Resurrection of the Dead - may be between 210 to 214 years only, a mere 3.5 percent of 6000 years of history, it will make 95 percent of history seem like a passing dream (at times a nightmare) only, something that feels real at the time and to take up much time, but in fact, lasts only moments.

Thus, the Rambam made belief in Techiyas HaMeisim the thirteenth of the Thirteen Principles of Faith, and the following will explain why.

### **SEUDOS SHLISHIS:**

*I believe, with perfect faith, that the dead will be revived, at the time that it is the will of the Creator, blessed is His Name ... (Thirteen Principles of Faith)*

Even though the Rambam has referred to the resurrection of the dead in the Future Tense, it is not so obvious. Indeed, if one pays close attention to the wording of the Shemonah Esrai, he will notice that the Men of the Great Assembly, who standardized the prayer service over 2000 years ago,

referred to Techiyas HaMeisim in the Present Tense: Mechaye Meisim - He is reviving the dead. Is it a contradiction, or just two different levels of discussion. The Leshem answers this question at length:

We see from the rabbis that, among those whom they consider to have no portion in the World-to-Come, are those who do not believe that Techiyas HaMeisim is a Torah concept (Sanhedrin 90a). Thus, the Rambam, with the spirit of God that spoke through him, included faith in Techiyas HaMeisim as one of the "Thirteen Principles," which are the cornerstone of Torah. This seems remarkable! For what reason? As the R"Y Albo asked in his Sefer Ikarim, in his first essay (Chapter 3): "If a person believes in reward and punishment, but that it will be meted out in the World-to-Come and not that we will return in bodies after death, why does this matter so much to the Torah to the extent [that it considers belief in Techiyas HaMeisim] to be one of the fundamentals?" The truth is, because much rides on this, and without Techiyas HaMeisim it would seem that all of creation was only for toiling and misfortune, and for the destruction of the soul of all living beings, God forbid. For, if we consider how history has progressed from the time that God created man on earth, it has been the posuk say, "As for man - in glory he shall not rest . . ." (Tehillim 49:13). Adam did not repose in his glory even one night, and all the generations until the Flood in 1656 were destroyed, save for Noach and his family. And, the next ten generations from Noach to Avraham accomplished very little, except for a few select individuals in each generations. Yafes and Shem set up houses of study to teach the way of G-d but were unsuccessful; few followed after them . . . Faith in God did not become widespread until Avraham Avinu's time, once the 2000 years of Tohu came to an end in his fifty-secondth year, as mentioned in Avodah Zarah (9a). Indeed, the rabbis called it is called "2000 Years of Tohu," indicating that nothing worthwhile came from those generations. After this, during the 2000 Years of Torah [that followed], only Israel received Torah while the rest of the nations remained in a state of tohu, without any real purpose. Even the Jewish people [for the next 480 years] did not seem to have fulfilled the full will of God, since we see from the Torah that the main objective was to build the Temple. Only it is called the "Menuchah" (repose) and "Nachalah" (inheritance), as the Torah says, "until now you have not come to the repose or the inheritance" (Devarim 12:9), as it says in Zevachim (119a). As the Zohar says, only in Shlomo's time did the moon reach its completion, after the 15 generations from Avraham Avinu had been completed. Then Israel was successful to the upper level. Yet, the night that Shlomo completed the work of the Temple, he married the daughter of Pharaoh, and at that moment The Holy One, Blessed is He, thought to destroy Jerusalem . . . (Shabbos 56b). Not even one night passed peacefully, just as the posuk said, "As for man - in glory he shall not rest . . ." And how much more so has this been the case during this [last period of history called the] "2000 Years of Moshiach," of which 1,657 have already passed. Still we have yet to be redeemed! Thus we find that from the time of creation until 5658, the world has not merited to reach fulfilment for even a single day! It would appear as if all of creation was for nought. However, belief in Techiyas HaMeisim provides the correct answer. The depth of the matter is that Techiyas HaMeisim is not a hope of man alone, but for every aspect of creation as well from the time it was made until the end of history. All of it, all that every existed at any moment in time,

will eventually be renewed and return rectified in Techiyas HaMeisim . . . Every aspect of Techiyas HaMeisim that will come about for man, who is a miniature world unto himself, will come to be for every detail that ever existed throughout history. However, as we know from the Arizal, in truth, Techiyas HaMeisim takes place every moment. For, the Sparks and Broken Pieces from the Original Kings that died and broke, are constantly being elevated into some form in this world. As we see, new things are constantly being created in this world; there is not a moment when some new act is not occurring to some vessel of creation . . . The world is constantly at work to bring its potential into actuality for the sake of man, and in this way it is elevated by becoming attached to man, who is the most important aspect of creation. This is its life. All the potential that comes out in this world is from the Sparks and Broken Pieces that are relevant to Olam Asiyah (our physical world), and when man uses them for his benefit properly, that is, in the service of God, causing his soul to ascend to God, then his soul ascends with the reality of the Sparks and the Broken Pieces as well, which return to their sources [above]. There they are renewed, and light and blessing is added to them, literally resurrecting them . . . Thus, there is no moment when they are not being rectified and ascend, and that is the reason why they [the rabbis of the Men of the Great Assembly] worded the mention of Techiyas HaMeisim [in Shemonah Esrai] in the Present Tense . . . (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 505-7)

Thus, references to Sparks, Broken Pieces, and Kings aside, the Leshem is revealing that Techiyas HaMeisim is not only a future event, but it is an ongoing process as well. It's just that we can't see it. Instead, what we see is just the opposite, waste, death, destruction, even in history as late as 5764. However, as the Rambam points out, you have to know and believe that this will come to an end, and the world will begin anew - physically - with the type of utopian perfection we long for now but won't taste until later.

Yet, explains the Leshem, that does not mean that Techiyas HaMeisim is not already occurring. It is, on the spiritual level that is, beyond the range of our physical eyes to see. And even that's not entirely true, for the constant newness of things in creation for the benefit of man used in the service of G-d is something we can see, and is very much a part of the process of Techiyas HaMeisim.

That is why many of the blessings of Shemonah Esrai, including the building of Jerusalem and the ingathering of the exiles is written in Present Tense form. Until Moshiach comes, they are taking place, but on a spiritual plane, in spite of what our physical eyes and mind tell us.

However, after Yemos HaMoshiach, then Techiyas HaMeisim will take place on ALL levels, for all (good) aspects of creation. And then, as the posuk says, G-d will finally be happy with His creation, and creation will shine in its full glory.

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*Your children will recognize and know that their rest comes from You, and through their rest they will sanctify Your Name. (Minchah, Shabbos)*

These words from the Shemonah Esrai of Shabbos afternoon are interesting. The "rest" to which they

refer, obviously, is that of Shabbos. We ask G-d for a perfect rest, one that brings with it a sense of security and tranquility, and then we end off with the above words about the Children of Israel recognizing who their source of rest really is, and about the great sanctification of G-d's Name the rest creates. Why?

The reference to Shabbos is both general and specific. Shabbos is not only the seventh day of rest for Klal Yisroel, but it also represents the Jewish people's willingness to rely upon G-d, and His willingness to take care of all of our needs, especially when we rely upon Him so openly, no matter day of the week it is.

At the end of Parashas Beshallach, the nation of Amalek officially enters the history of the Jewish people for the first time. As to why, Rashi provides an elaborate explanation, providing an analogy about a father, son, and a dog; the father, of course represents G-d, the son, the Jewish people, and the dog always symbolizes Amalek. The father, who had been carrying the son on his shoulders, placed him down on the ground, at which time the dog bit him. But why would a father do that?

Because, explains Rashi, to teach the son a lesson. Having become accustomed to living above it all on his father's shoulders, the son forgot that it was his father that was carrying him. To remind him of this fact, he lowered his son into the world below, and as a result, the son became vulnerable to the attack of the dog.

Likewise, explains Rashi, when the Jewish people asked Moshe, "Is G-d with us or not?" it was as if they had forgotten that G-d had been carrying them until that point. It was as if they had forgotten how easily they had overcome and left Egypt, how easily their food and water was acquired, and how miraculously they had crossed the sea and watched the pursuing Egyptians drown. In short, they had become accustomed to living in the safe supernatural reality of being on G-d's shoulders.

So, G-d let them down into the world of Amalek, the very physical world of Amalek, and all of a sudden, the dog came and took a bite. This necessitated the appointment of a 3,000-man army, and a war fought with far more conventional means than they had had to employ until that time. Even Moshe Rabbeinu had to fend off exhaustion do his part to win the war.

But this had not been a punishment, but a lesson. It was meant as a reminder of just who it really was who took care of the needs of the Jewish people. It was to remind them of just how miraculous their existence had been until then, and was meant to be. It had been designed to inspire the Jewish people to want to return to their Father's shoulders once again, and get out of Amalek's reality once and for all.

Just as the rotting of the body teaches the soul that it is a soul and not a body, so too was the attack of Amalek, and any other nation for that matter, was designed to teach the Jewish people that they don't belong in the everyday mundane reality of the nations of the world. If we exist and survive and succeed, it is because G-d made it happen, and not the nations of the world.

Remember the Durban Conference? Remember how the Arab world tried to hijack that conference and make Zionism racism, and how appalled we were as well as other western nations? Did we ever imagine back then that 60 percent of Europe would find Israel the greatest threat to world peace, or that anti-Semitism would reach pre-1939 levels, and so quickly?

Not I. But it has, and Israel and Jews around the world face a level of isolation we have not known for decades. Gradually at first, and now quite quickly, those things that we Jews have attributed to our success and sense of security amongst the family of nations, if you can call it a family, have been taken away from us. The body around us is rotting, and with it, we feel as if we are dying and are in danger of death.

As G-d told Avraham, and we know from the prophecies, the time will come when the body of the Western world will dissolve completely, and like the confused soul, we will awaken to see that we have remained behind. Then, we will realize that our "rest" and "security" did not come from the nations of the world, but that G-d had been carrying is all along. And, we'll understand that all the anti-Semitism we experienced - the biting dog - was all because we doubted the Presence of G-d amongst us.

G-d willing, that time will come sooner than later.

Have a great Shabbos,

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