

# IT'S ALL GOOD

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

It is very difficult to sum up the experiences, worth and influence of an individual purely in words. That is why many times at funerals people who hear eulogies of the deceased feel that somehow the words of the tribute really did not capture the essence of the individual being memorialized. In the Torah reading this week, Abraham is said to have eulogized his beloved wife Sarah. The Torah does not describe for us the words that he used in speaking about her. However, Rashi, in commenting as to why the Torah listed her life as consisting of 100 and then 20 and then seven years, states that all of her lives – the one that was 100, the one that was 20 and the one that was 7 – were devoted to goodness.

That simple statement is the true eulogy for our mother Sarah. Everything was for the good, and, therefore, all her life was devoted to being and creating good for her family and for others. When people say that the person was "a person of goodness", that phrase encompasses many details and many actions. However, enumerating an individual's actions of goodness is really unnecessary, because we understand what a person of goodness is and does. This is a state of mind, an emotion of the soul that drives human behavior and actions. When we say someone was or is a good person everyone immediately knows what is meant by that statement, and, therefore, no further explanations or illustrations are necessary.

We often mistakenly associate the trait of goodness with a certain weakness of character and a compromise of willpower. We think that good people must automatically be soft people, and in a world that is often harsh and hard, softness is not always a virtue. Nevertheless, when we review the life of our mother Sarah, we cannot help but be impressed by the fact that she was a strong-willed and powerful personality. She took severe and painful steps to safeguard her son Isaac from the ravages of his half-brother Ishmael.

Even when her husband Abraham seemed to be in doubt as to how to treat the matter, she stayed firm, and, eventually, the Lord, so to speak, told Abraham to listen and obey whatever Sarah instructed him to do. Goodness should never be seen as weakness. Rather, it is to be seen as the search for the ultimate benefit the person himself or herself and for the general society. In a good society, justice is done, and corrective measures are taken to make certain that evil will is not allowed to flourish or go unpunished and unchallenged.

This is the type of world that Abraham and Sarah were striving to build, and it was the influence of their personalities that marked their generation and gave it a stamp of goodness and purpose. That

task of accomplishing goodness has been the challenge to the Jewish people for millennia and remains our mission and goal in our time as well.

Shabbat shalom

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