

SARAH'S LEGACY LIVES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1051 – Fulfilling P'ru U'revu -- With Boys or Girls. Good Shabbos.

"Chayei Sarah" – An Appropriate Name for The Parsha?

At the beginning of the *parsha*, the Torah says that Sarah lived to be 127 years old. It seems very peculiar that the name of the *parsha* is "*Chayei Sarah*" [the life of Sarah] when Sarah dies in its very first *pasuk*. Of course, it might not be appropriate to name the *parsha* "the death of Sarah" (*Misas Sarah*) but perhaps the *parsha* could have had a more fitting name, as this **is** the story of her death and burial, not her life.

The truth of the matter is that we find a similar peculiarity in *Parshas Vayechi* (which literally means "And he lived"). There too, the very first *pasuk* of the *parsha* says that Yaakov lived for 147 years, and it is basically about Yaakov's death, rather than his life.

What is the significance of these *parsha* name choices? The sefer *Milchomos Yehudah* cites a Medrash from the beginning of our *parsha*. The Medrash on the first *pasuk* in Chayei Sarah quotes the *pasuk* in Tehillim, "*Yodeah Hashem yemei temimim; v'nachalasm l'olam teeheyeh*" [*Hashem* is aware of the days of those who are perfect, their legacy shall last forever] [Psalms 37:18]. The point of this Medrash is that even though a person may die, in a certain sense, he continues to live on. If a person lives a full and complete life (*yemei temimim*) – a life that is full of Torah and full of *mitzvos* and *ma'asim tovim* [good deeds], full of children and full of grandchildren – then that person indeed keeps on living. That is what the end of this *pasuk* refers to – their legacy shall last forever."

Sarah is *Imeinu* ["our mother"]. We have Three Patriarchs and Four Matriarchs. *Klal Yisrael* was built on the shoulders of the Matriarchs. So all of us are here today by virtue of the lives of *Avraham Avinu* and *Sarah Imeinu*. Is there a greater "legacy", is there a greater "eternity" than having been the matriarch of an entire nation?

In spite of the fact that Sarah lived 127 years and then she died, it is still appropriate to call this *parsha* "*Chayei Sarah*" – because Sarah is very much alive, even after the 127 years of her life.

I recently heard an idea which expresses the same concept. During this past *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* (September 2010), Rebbetzin Kulefsky passed away. She was the widow of Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky who was one of the premier *Maggidei Shiur* [Talmud teachers] in all of America and, at the end of his life, was actually the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Ner Yisroel. At her *levaya*, Rav Moshe Glustein from Montreal, a *mechutan* of the Kulefskys, shared a very interesting thought from Rav Chatzkel Abramsky.

The *pasuk* in Tehillim says, "For in his death he will take nothing with him, (when he goes down into the grave) his honor will not follow him." [Psalms 49:18] The simple reading of this *pasuk* articulates the well-known maxim "You can't take it with you," according to which this *pasuk* has a very sobering message. Whatever we accumulate in this world, we will not be able to take it with us.

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky put an opposite spin on this *pasuk*. Rav Abramsky said, this *pasuk* is teaching something to which we should aspire: When a person goes to the grave, he is not going to take everything with him, because he is going to leave it here on earth! What is he going to leave on earth? His legacy! He is going to leave his children, his grandchildren, and his good deeds (*ma'asim tovim*). He is going to leave all that he accomplished in this world.

"You are not going to take anything with you" – meaning, do not worry! Your accomplishments will not descend to the grave with you. Nothing follows you to the grave. It all remains here, so that which you have accomplished here in this world can be built on and will continue. Throughout a person's lifetime, he needs to try to build this legacy, so he will have something to leave over after 120 years! "*Lo yered acharav k'vodo*" means – Do not think that when you leave this world, your honor will vanish. No! On the contrary! Honor does NOT follow a person to the grave. His honor will remain in this world – in the children he leaves over and in the dividends paid by the growth of institutions he has built and contributed to during his lifetime.

With this idea, Rav Glustein cited an insight from Rav Chaim Shmuelelevitz, which, again, presents a totally unique interpretation of a well-known passage. When we console a mourner, we say the words "*HaMakom Yenachem Eschem...*" [May the Omnipresent Comfort you...]. Many times at funerals, speakers will try to homiletically explain why we say "**HaMakom** Yenachem Eschem..." *HaMakom* is one of the Names describing *Hashem*, but why is that particular Name used on this occasion, as opposed to so many other Names indicative of other Divine Attributes?

Rav Chaim Shmuelelevitz says *HaMakom* does NOT refer to *Hashem* in this passage. The word *makom* literally means "place." *HaMakom Yenachem Eschem* means the place that the deceased created for him or herself in Gan Eden should be the biggest consolation! When a person reaches *Gan Eden* and *Hashem* gives him his rightful reward for all he did in this world, that MAKOM (place in Gan Eden) will be the biggest consolation for having had to leave this world.

This is another dimension to the idea that "his honor will not descend with him to the grave." In other words, do not think the honor is all lost. The honor will remain – in this world (by the legacy left) and

in the world to come (by the *MAKOM* earned in *Gan Eden*).

This then is why the parsha is called **Chayei Sarah**. In spite of the fact that indeed it deals with Sarah's death, in truth, Sarah is still very much alive. This is because *Hashem* is aware of the days of those who are *temimim* and the legacy they leave behind is *l'olam va'ed* [forever and ever]. *Sarah Imenu* is still very much alive and it is appropriate to refer to our parsha as **Chayei Sarah**!

Where's the Chinuch?

Rabbi Leibel Hyman, z"l (who was a Rav in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem) commented that the *parshios* of *Lech Lecha*, *Vayera*, and *Chayei Sarah* are the *parshios* which contain the story of Avraham Avinu's life. *Toldos* contains the story of Yitzchak's life. Then *Vayetzei*, *Vayishlach*, *Vayeshev*, *Miketz*, *Vayigash*, and *Vayechi* contain the story of Yakov Avinu and his twelve sons.

We are now finishing the "book" of Avraham Avinu. These three *parshios* (*Lech Lecha*, *Vayera*, *Chayei Sarah*) contain dialogues between Avraham and many different individuals. He has dialogues with the Kings of Egypt, Gerar, and Sodom. He has dialogues with Sarah and with Hagar. He has dialogues with Lot and Eliezer. Avraham has been engaged in many types of conversation. In this week's *parsha*, too, Avraham has an extended dialogue with the Children of Ches, negotiating the purchase of a burial plot for his wife.

The narrative of Avraham's life is one of interaction. Avraham Avinu, the Torah teaches, was the greatest pedagogue – a master *mechanech*! The *pasuk* says, "For I know him that he commands his children and household that they should keep the way of *Hashem* to do righteousness and justice..." [Bereishis 18:19]. Rashi interprets this *pasuk* to say: G-d says: "I love Avraham Avinu because he will train his children to follow the ways of *Hashem*..." This is why *Hashem* chose Avraham—because of his pedagogic abilities!

So let us ask ourselves a question. There are three *parshios* detailing the life of Avraham Avinu. They contain all these many dialogues. How many times did Avraham Avinu talk to Yitzchak in all the *pesukim* in the Chumash? The answer is—once. One time, for a total of fifteen words!

Of all that transpired over all these *parshios*, the Torah only shares 15 words that this great teacher and educator, the role model for all future fathers in terms of how to raise their children in the ways of *Hashem*, spoke with his son! Does this advocate a pedagogic approach that "the less said the better?" Unlikely!

Apparently, Avraham never told his son, "Listen, you need to get up for minyan." Fifteen words! Where is the *Chinuch* [education]? Where, when, and how did he implement the role of, "For I know him that he has commanded his children and members of his household to keep the ways of

Hashem"? We cannot say he did not do it or that he was not successful in this endeavor because we know that he was extremely successful. How do we know that? We know that because when he tells Yitzchak to literally put his neck on the Mizbayach "because I am about to slaughter you," Yitzchak does not question him. He does not say, "Daddy, maybe you did not hear right."

After all, it was an astonishing request! Yitzchak did not object. He did not ask any questions. Not only did he go willingly, *Chazal* say that Yitzchak told Avraham "Tie me to the Mizbayach tightly, lest I flinch and invalidate the slaughter." How does someone raise a son to react like that? Obviously, Avraham must have been a master educator. So where did it happen?

The answer is that although Avraham may not have talked much to his son, he acted very much. Avraham acted and Yitzchak observed. Yitzchak saw how to treat guests. He saw how to draw those who were distant from *Hashem* to become near to Him. Yitzchak saw all that Avraham *Avinu* did. He saw how he talked to his wife. This is the interpretation of, "I know that he commands his children and household after him..."

There is an expression "You can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?" Avraham *Avinu* walked the walk. Yitzchak observing his father all these years had a profound impression. This is how the education took place in Avraham's household. This is the interpretation of "commanding his children and household to follow in the ways of Hashem to do righteousness and justice."

There is a gentleman in this audience who asked that I not use his name, but he told me that he makes a point – at least a few times a week – to have his *Chavrusa* [Torah study partner] come over to his house to learn with him (rather than meeting in a *shul* or *Beis Medrash*). He wants to show his children what it means "Daddy is learning with a *Chavrusa*."

He told me that one time he was not feeling well and he needed to daven at home. His daughter, who was five years old at the time, saw him put on *Tallis* and *Tefillin* for the first time asked, "What is that?" I am not advocating davening at home, but the point is well taken. Children need to see it. The way to educate is by demonstration, by living, by acting, by being.

Yesterday, I spent a long day on trains and I took along a *sefer* called B'Mechitzas Rabbeinu about the life of someone who lived next door to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in Monsey, NY for many years. He wrote a beautiful *sefer* which I was reading on the train. Here we can see *S'yata D'Shmaya* [Divine Assistance]. I had no idea if I would ever have a chance to use the material I came across in this *sefer* but here we are on the very next night, and an idea I saw there fits in very appropriately.

Rav Yaakov said a very interesting thing (and I do not mean this to cast aspersions on the way we do things today, because it is obviously a different era): Rav Yaakov said that when he learned in Slabodka, there was no dormitory there. That was the way it was in most European Yeshivos until Rav Meir Shapiro started the Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin, where there was a dormitory and a dining room, which were both novel innovations.

How did *Yeshiva Bochrim* eat in prior times? There was an institution call "*Stancia*." This means the Yeshiva would assign every *bochur* a family with whom he would stay. He would sleep there; he would eat there; he would live with this family. Obviously, the Yeshivas would select appropriate families, and this is how the *bochrim* lived. Rav Yaakov explained, "Do you know why the Alter of Slabodka did not build a dormitory? It was not because of financial considerations and not because of the great effort it would have required. He wanted *bochrim* who were away from home learning in Yeshiva to live with families. He wanted them to see how people live! Dormitories and dining rooms are wonderful things but they are institutions. In an institutional life, you do not see how a husband talks to a wife, how parents talk with children, or how families deal with crises. The Alter – who was "The Master Educator" specifically wanted young yeshiva students to live in houses with regular families. He wanted to expose them to what life is all about.

When Rav Ruderman came to Slabodka, he was twelve years old. When *bochrim* came to Slabodka, they were young. So where was their home life? The answer is that they observed home life in the "*stancias*."

This is the essence of the above mentioned thought on the *parsha*. The way Avraham Avinu educated his son Yitzchak was by living it and by Yitzchak seeing it.

We are all familiar with the terminology *ma'aseh Avos siman l'Banim* [the actions of the patriarchs foreshadow that of the descendants]. Rav Leibel Hyman emphasizes ***ma'aseh*** Avos – the **actions** of the fathers *siman l'Banim* will determine the destiny of the character of their offspring.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Chayei Sarah is provided below:

- # 030 - The Shadchan in Halacha
- # 072 - Superstition in Halacha
- # 121 - The Jewish Cemetery
- # 168 - The Laws and Customs of the Hespel
- # 214 - Pilegesh: An Alternative to Marriage?
- # 258 - Intrusion on Another's Shidduch
- # 304 - The "Mazik" of a Child: Is He Responsible?
- # 348 - Determining the Salary of the Shadchan
- # 392 - Purchasing a Burial Plot

- # 436 - Daughters: Shidduchim & Parental Wishes
- # 480 - Calling Off an Engagement
- # 524 - The Badekin
- # 568 - Feeding Your Animals
- # 612 - Dating Etiquette
- # 656 - Getting Paid for Mitzvos
- # 700 - More Mincha Insight
- # 744 - Turning 20: A Scary Birthday
- # 788 - Be Careful What You Ask For
- # 832 - Burying a Man Next to A Woman - Is This a Problem?
- # 876 - Kavanah in the First Bracha of Sh'monei Esrei
- # 920 - Shidduchim - Check Out the Brothers
- # 963 - Taking a Niftar to Eretz Yisroel: When Does Aveilus Begin...?
- #1007 - The Obligation to Marry Off Children: How Far Must You Go?
- #1051 - Fulfilling P'ru U'revu -- With Boys or Girls
- #1094 - Oops! I Already Davened Mincha
- #1137 - I'll Buy Your Esrog/Tefillin & Make You An Offer You Can't Refuse
- #1180 - Shadchan Shailos
- #1268 - Should Rabbis Be Paid For Performing Weddings?

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