

Einav's Dvar Torah – Shabbat 27.11.2016 – Chayei Sarah

Shabbat shalom! This week's Parasha is חיי שרה. In this chapter, many important things happen. Usually the name of a parashah comes from the first few words of that parashah, however this one then begins with a strange irony. Chayei Sarah, the life of Sarah, coincidentally begins with Sarah dying. Is the most important event in Sarah's life really her death?!? Is Sarah only in this story as an opportunity for Avraham to buy his first piece of land in Israel?!

One idea that I explored was from "The Women's Torah Commentary", which I have quoted in previous Divrei Torah. The book says "From a patriarchal perspective, Abraham's actions after her death are what is crucial. Yet, if Sarah's life is in fact significant, what does this parasha's recording of her death tell us about her life?"

In order to answer that question, the book looks back at the occasion for Sarah's death and at her life.

One answer is found in a midrash on the cause of Sarah's death. Sarah dies at the age of 127, presumably of natural causes. The midrash, however, is interested in the fact that her death immediately follows the near sacrifice of Yitzchak. There is a connection between these two events, according to the midrash. Sarah dies of grief when she finds out what Avraham nearly did to Yitzchak, her only son. Sarah is overcome with grief at the עקידה, while Avraham is seen as the perfect servant of God, as he carries out his orders unflinchingly, even willing to sacrifice Sarah's only son.

Another interesting idea that I found is as follows. In the Torah it says "Now Sarah's life was 100 years and 20 years and 7 years, the years of Sarah's life". Instead of just saying 127, her age is split into three parts, three lives. Another midrash suggests that this symbolises the specific character traits you gain by being these different ages. At every point in her life, Sarah remained the same. She was always as innocent as a 7 year old, she had the determination, idealism and beauty of a 20 year old, and the wisdom and experience of a 100 year old. These qualities made up Sarah.

I'd just like to finish with one last thought. In the Torah, it says "And Abraham died...and Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpeilah". It is very interesting how the half brothers came back together to bury their father, the only family they shared. In a previous Dvar Torah that I gave, I mentioned how a lot of disagreements in the Torah are caused by sibling rivalry, such as Joseph and his brothers. I find it interesting that when Isaac and Ishmael come back together, after so long, there is nothing recorded about them. You would think that Ishmael would have a lot to be angry about, considering he and his mother were banished by Sarah herself. Even before Sarah sent them away, there was never any sibling rivalry recorded between the two half brothers, Isaac and Ishmael. With Sarah being gone, Ishmael felt like he could come back to bury his father, Avraham, together with Isaac. This links back to the beginning of the Parasha, where Sarah dies.

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