

*Shiur L'Yom Sheni*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Chayei Sarah:*** **Genesis 23:1-20**
 Haftarah: **I Kings 1:1-10**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Corinthians 15:35-38**

Avraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah.

[Genesis 23:19]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 116:1-4;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition No. 2, *Teshuvah* [The Prayer of Return]

Vayihyu chayei Sarah me'ah shanah v'esrim shanah v'sheva shanim – i.e. And Sarah's life was 100 years, and 20 years, and 7 years. **Genesis 23:1.**

Get ready *Avraham avinu* – you are about to face your toughest challenge yet. When you and Yitzchak return from Moriyah, the love of your life will not be running out to greet you. Your beloved Sarah's appointed season of mortal life is over; her days as your *ezer kenegdo* are done. You will hear her laugh no more. She will never walk by your side or lean on your arm again. Careful now – the world is watching. You are going to be asked to apply the *asah tzedekah u'mishpat*² discipline the Holy One has been teaching you in the context of intense, unexpected, and unexplained bereavement. Generations will be affected by how you conduct yourself in the face of this challenge. You are called to set the example regarding how a son/daughter of the covenant should navigate through the process of grief. Your 'mourning pattern' is going to set the standard for millions who follow you on the narrow road, past the green pastures and still waters, all the way to the valley of the shadow of death. Hold fast to what you have. Do not let your *emunah* waver. Do not let your hope fail. Do not allow your love for the Creator and His Handiwork to wane. Do not let your *shalom* escape you. Do not let your testimony of His Goodness fall silent? Do not let your dedication to the Grand Plan of redemption and restoration flag. Gird up your loins, dear friend of God – and take one step at a time. Let the One to Whom you have committed your life empower you to transcend this trial as you have all those that preceded, and come out of *Emek Baka* – i.e. the *Valley of Weeping* – smiling through the tears.

The Most Unwelcome Visitor Has Come to Call

Vatamot Sarah – i.e. and Sarah died. **Genesis 23:2a.** We are not told the specific cause

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² This Hebrew phrase comes from Genesis 18:19, and was translated by the King James translators as 'do righteousness and justice'. More literally, it means to blaze a trail and/or lay a foundation for others that furthers the Grand Kingdom-of-Heaven build-out Plan.

of our matriarch's demise. Nor are we told if she suffered. We are not told if an angel ministered to her in her last hours. We are not told if she prayed or saw a vision just before the light of her life went out. We are not told her last words – or even if anyone was there to hear them. We are told only what we need to know - where she was, and that after her death, Avraham our father 'came to' her, 'eulogized' her, and 'wept' for her.

The Life of Sarah

Why does the Writer of Torah divide Sarah's life into three 'epochs' – the first being 100 years in length [in Hebrew, *meah shanah*], the second being 20 years [in Hebrew, *es'rim shanah*] and the third consisting of 7 years [in Hebrew, *sheva sh'nim*]. Why make us 'do the math'? Why not just say that *Sarah lived 127 years*? Is there a subtle or subliminal message here? If nothing else these words remind us that our days on earth as we know it are numbered by the Holy One. Mortal life is very short - and very, very temporary.

Sarah's life, Torah tells us, was **100 years**, then **20 years**, then an additional **7 years** – totaling 127. Our lives will most likely be substantially shorter. So ... isn't right *now* the time to become *a friend of God* like our ancestor Avraham? Is not right *now* the time to embrace the covenant the Holy One cut with Avraham and his descendants? Is not this our time to learn through that covenant to love and to fear and to worship and to serve Him as He desires?

Is not *today* the day to run into the Compassionate One's arms like a prodigal son runs to his father? Is not today the day to ask the Creator for a God-encounter such as Avram had? Is not today the day to ask Him to cut [and perpetually renew] *b'rit* with you as he did with Avraham? Is not today the day to ask Him to impart to you as He did to Avraham and Sarah eternal, imperishable, and incorruptible *zara* [seed] – seed from the *Etz Chayim* [Tree of Life] in the center of His Garden of Delight? Yes, Dear Reader. Now is the time. Today is the day. No better offer or opportunity is going to come along. So wait no longer. Ask Him *today*.

Coming Face to Face With the Ultimate Sounds of Silence

In this week's parsha a pivotal generation of the Holy One's people approach and, in some cases, cross the threshold of death. We will hear the ultimate sounds of silence. Moments of silence will turn into days – and weeks – and years. As will be made clear in all our readings for the week however, our focus is not to be upon death – but is instead to be upon the business of *carrying on life*³. The covenant

³ The themes of death and its aftermath will form the subject matter for this week's haftarah as well. In *Melachim* [Kings] we will see David, the greatest of all the kings of Israel, old, weakened, and ready to die, and will witness the events which led to the coronation of his son *Shlomo* [Solomon] as his successor.

love of the Holy One is going to prove far, far, stronger than death, and far, far more unyielding than the grave. Death, where is your sting?

Ode to Sarah Imanu

Have you heard it? The faint whispers of a melancholy refrain are being released into the atmosphere. The sound of muted minor chords of an ancient eulogy are issuing forth from Hebron. A patriarch's lament is wafting on the wind. Whose heart is breaking? It is the heart of our father Avraham. Sarah, the beautiful, beloved bride of his youth – the light of his life for many, many decades, and the dotting mother of his miracle child - is no more. She who retained stunning beauty through at least her 90s and turned the heads of kings as well as Avraham all her life has departed the fragile orb of earth. Our beloved ancestor/matriarch gave Avraham no farewell kiss. She gave Yitzchak no farewell blessing. She suffered no known illness or noticeable decline. She just responded to a silent cue, and exited, stage left.

Good-bye beloved Matriarch. You have taught us what it looked like to run the race of faith well. You not only suckled Yitzchak on 90-year-old breasts; you have nurtured us all. In your quiet wisdom you have released a taste of '*on earth as it is in Heaven*' for all generations. One day millions of us whom you never met in person will greet you and tell you how truly thankful we are to you for all you have done for us. And all the Redeemed of the Holy One will *laugh with you*.

Before getting into the text of the parsha, therefore, let us prepare our hearts for a few moments by focusing upon what we already know from previous *parshot* about '*the life of Sarah*'. It is of course altogether right and proper that we mourn the loss of those who have gone before us – they who taught us *tzedekah u'mishpat*, blazed a clear trail for us to follow, and modeled what walking with the Holy One along that trail looks like in real time. Let us bless Sarah in her *going out* as well as in her *coming in*.

Pausing to Savor Both the Hello and the Goodbye

As we all know by now, when we were introduced to Avram's wife by the narrative of Torah, her name was not **Sarah** [*sin, resh, hey*, pronounced *saw-raw'*], usually translated as ruler/governor [in feminine form], but *Sarai* [*sin, resh, yod*, pronounced *saw-rah'-ee*], meaning '*my princess*'. The verb root of both of the names by which our beloved matriarch is known is *sarar*⁴, meaning *to rule or govern by delegated power or authority*. The Hebraic pictograph/hieroglyphic formed by the

⁴ Sarar is *sin, resh, resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #8323.

letters *shin*, *resh*, and *resh*, is that of the most common physical manifestation of the Presence of the Holy One - *i.e.* ascending flames of fire - empowering one king, who then empowers another person to act on his behalf.

To make the name **Sarai** one drops the last *resh*, replacing it with a *yod*. This is a pictograph/hieroglyphic of *a king extending his hand*. This illustrates the reality that Sarai was the Holy One's [and Avraham's] *hands extended* – a vessel through which the King of Kings, and his designated representative on earth, distributed both *good gifts* and *judgment* to mankind. To then go further and make the name become **Sarah** both the *resh* at the end of the verb root *sarar*, and the *yod* at the end of the name Sarai, have to be dropped - replaced with a *hey*, which is a symbolic picture of a window (as of revelation) in a tent. The word thus formed is a pictograph/hieroglyphic of *the Holy One's king revealed* – made visible - *to the world*.

Sarai was merely a vessel used by the Holy One in one generation; **Sarah** was the *mother of Yitzchak*, the child of promise, who transcends generations. In the birth and life of Yitzchak is the picture of *the government of the Holy One*. The message is this: the woman who would become our matriarch started out as merely a *princess* - a kingdom delegate or ambassador with no ruling authority; she became, however, by the Holy One's prophetic empowerment, much, much more – she became the *queen mother*, and ruled the household of the covenant people by power delegated to her by Avraham.

Our first introduction to the woman we now know so affectionately as our matriarch **Sarah** came at the end of parsha **Noach**. At that time she had just been '*taken as a wife*' by a descendant of Shem who was then known as Avram. **Genesis 11:29**. We are not told anything whatever about her lineage. We do not know who her father was, who her mother was, or if she had siblings. All we were told about her in that brief introduction was that '***Sarai was barren; she had no child***. **Genesis 11:30**. Sarai bore that label – and the wounded identity that went with it - many, many years. But she did not by any means carry it to her grave. She was set gloriously free of it.

The Sarah we all know now, and remember fondly, was not merely the wife of Avraham, you see. And she was by no means barren. The Sarah we know and whose blessed memory we cherish was the mother of *Yitzchak* (Isaac) – the prototypical *miraculous child of promise*. Of the Sarah we all know, whose life we pause now to remember, it could truly have been said:

***Sing, O barren - You who have not borne! Break forth into singing,
and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child!***

*For more are the children of the desolate
than the children of the married woman, says the Holy One.
Enlarge the place of your tent,
And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare;
Lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.
For you will expand to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will inherit the nations
and make the desolate cities inhabited. Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;
neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame;
For you will forget the shame of your youth,
and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore.*
[Isaiah 54:1-4]

The Effect of a Matriarch's Passing

The death of Sarah effectively passes *the torch* of the covenant household from Avraham to Yitzchak. After Sarah's passing, though Avraham will live and walk faithfully with the Holy One 37 more years he *will never have another recorded God-encounter*. Oh, he too will finish the race of faith strong and well. But alas after Sarah's passing Avraham's only remaining Biblically noteworthy covenant responsibility will be to procure Rivkah as a bride for Yitzchak.

Something about *Sarah's presence in Avraham's household* seemed to open windows of Divine revelation to him. Rivkah's presence in Sarah's tent will do the same for Yitzchak. In the grand design of the Holy One it seems a matriarch's presence does things like that. So please *cherish the precious matriarchs* the Holy One gives to your family - and to your generation - while you have them with you, Dear Reader. Without the nurture and influence of true mothers in Israel the best and most learned of us have a tendency to think, speak, look and act more like the lost boys of Neverwood than the sons of the Living God we are called to be.

Never, never, never underestimate the value of a matriarch, Dear Reader. Matriarchs are *the glue that hold a household of faith together*. How well a culture recognizes, honors, and walks in the wisdom of its current generation of matriarchs on the one hand, and how well it chooses, nurtures, and trains up its next generation of matriarchs on the other hand are perhaps THE TWO MOST CRITICAL SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS that will determine how strong that culture will become and what kind of impact it will have on the world.

Sarah has rightly come to be regarded as *the mother of all Israel*. As Avraham is recognized as *the father of all who believe*, Sarah is rightly considered *the mother of all who follow after God*. She is a Beloved kinswoman of Jew and Gentile alike. She is a part of the spiritual ancestry of all followers of the One True God.

*Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praises her, saying:
“Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all.”
Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
but a woman who fears the Holy One, she shall be praised.*
[Proverbs 31:28-30]

The Kind of Grieving Our Beloved Patriarch Modeled For Us

The circumstances of Sarah’s death are reported by Torah as follows:

V’tamot Sarah b’Kiryat Arba hi Chevron
Sarah died in Kiryat Arba⁵, also known as Hebron

b’eretz Kena’an
in the land of Canaan.

V’yavo Avraham lis’pod l’Sarah v’livekotah
Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her.
[Genesis 23:2]

Death can make us mourn; but it cannot, unless we let it, make us hate. It can put a lament on our lips, but it cannot, unless we let it, put despair in our souls, anger in our hearts, or blame on our tongues. We have a covenant with the Creator of the Universe. In Him, and through Him, and for Him life – and hope, and love, and laughter – will go on. *Oseh shalom!*

There is, you see, a deeper reality that we are supposed to perceive in the course of mourning our dead than pondering who is to blame, or why it came so soon, how God could allow it, or how badly we, or others, hurt. The deeper reality lies in death’s teaching that is for us, the living, to learn from its sudden, unexpected onset to [1] appreciate the precious gift of life, [2] be thankful for every heartbeat and every breath we are given, and [3] to love more selflessly, more gently, more extravagantly, and yet more wisely than ever before, because we now realize just how quickly our own window of opportunity may close. Responding with anger, offense, outrage, blame, and/or despair post-mortem are the exact opposite of the lesson we are supposed to learn - and, in fact, accomplish only the glorification of the wrongdoer, the disease, the sadness, or the cause of death instead of releasing the cure. We in the covenant grieve when our loved ones die ... but we do not by any means grieve *as those who have no hope*.

⁵ *Kiryat Arba* was the original name for Hebron. **Joshua 14:15, Judges 1:10**. The name *Kiryat Arba* literally means 'City of the Four,' or 'City of Arba.' Some say that Arba was the father of a number of giants who lived there (Joshua 15:13, 21:11). Others say that it was given this name because of the four pairs buried there: Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak [Isaac] and Rivkah [Rebecca], and Ya’akov [Jacob] and Leah [*B’reshit Rabbah* 58; Rashi].

Avraham ‘Comes To’ Sarah

Torah begins by telling us that after she died Avraham ‘came to’ Sarah [in Hebrew the phrase is *v’yavo Avraham*]. Why did he have to ‘come to’ her? Was Avraham not *there with her* when she died? And if he was not there with her ... well, *where was he?*

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as ‘came to’ in verse 2 is a form of the verb *bo*⁶. This verb is first used in Torah in Genesis 2:19 to describe the movement the Holy One caused the animals of the earth to make in order that they passed before Adam, for him to name them/describe their essence. It is there said that “*The Holy One brought [bo] them to Adam to see what he would name them ...*” The same verb is used in Genesis 2:22 to describe the movement the Holy One caused Chava, the woman He made from Adam’s ‘rib’, to make in order that Adam would see her. It is there said “[He] *brought [bo] her to the man.*” Again in the case of Sarah the Holy One caused the movement. This time it was Avraham that was moved. The Holy One *moved* him. And he was *indeed moved*.

Some of the sages note that Torah has informed us earlier that Avraham was now residing in Beersheva, yet Sarah did not die there, but in *Kiryat Arba* [Hebron], several miles away. Some have speculated, based upon this information, that Avraham was separated from Sarah just prior to her death — with him living in Beersheva, and her living in Hebron. Hebrew *midrash* portrays Sarah’s death as the result of being told by Ha-Satan [the Adversary] that Avraham had taken her beloved Yitzchak up to Moriyah, bound him, and killed him.

Whatever the circumstances, the Holy One caused Avraham to go to Hebron. Thus it can be said that Avraham ‘came’ [*bo*] to Sarah upon her death. He had not been with her, apparently, when her spirit departed.

The Piercing Cry of a Broken, Bereaved Human Heart

What Avraham is said to have done when he ‘came’ to Sarah is to ‘eulogize’ or ‘mourn’ for her. The Hebrew phrase our English Bibles translate as ‘to eulogize’, ‘to mourn’ is *lis’pod*. The verb root of this phrase is *safad*⁷. This verb is usually translated to *wail*, or to *lament*. The Hebrew word picture is that of a falling and rising again [*samech*] of the mouth [*peh/feh*], at a doorway [*dalet*]. It is a perfect picture of a person wailing in mourning. The doorway [*dalet*] in the most literal sense means the door of the tent or house where the death occurred. In a figurative sense however it symbolizes the ‘doorway’ of life – the gateway of the world to come. The deceased has *passed through that doorway*. The survivor sits just

⁶ Bo is *beit, vav, alef*. Strong’s Hebrew word #935, it is pronounced *bow* as in *rainbow*.

⁷ Safad is *samech, peh/feh, dalet*, Strong’s Hebrew word #5594, it is pronounced *saw-fawd*’.

outside of it - and wails. And everywhere the wailing is heard, the frenzied activity of the world comes to at least a momentary halt. For if there is anything on earth that touches us all it is the piercing cry of a totally broken, devastatingly bereaved human heart. There, but for the grace of the Holy One, go you and I.

No Sweeter Tears

The next thing Torah tells us Avraham did concerning Sarah was to ‘weep’ for her [Hebrew, *v'l'vekotah*]. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as weep in this verse is *baka*⁸ – meaning *to shed tears*. The first Biblical usage of this verb describes what Hagar did after depositing Yish'mael under a bush or tree for shade, as she surrendered his future and/or his soul to the Holy One. See Genesis 21:16: “... *she lifted up her voice, and she wept.*”

The Hebraic word picture the verb *baka* presents is that of *the household's spirit being released*. Avraham came to *release* Sarah – to *let go of her* – and *surrender her* to the Holy One forever. With her, of course, went the spirit of the household. As Psalm 84 says:

*Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Tziyon.
As they pass through the Emek Baca, and they make it a place of springs;
The early rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Tziyon.*

[Psalm 84:5-7]

Avraham did not take the death of Sarah without emotion. He *grieved* - and he did so bitterly and demonstratively. *But* he did not grieve as those who have no hope. And even in his grief Avraham set about to assure that Sarah has a permanent burial place in Eretz Yisrael.

The Purchase of Machpelah— The First Fruits of the Land

Interestingly enough Avraham is the first person we meet in Torah who buried anyone. Many are the persons whose deaths have been mentioned. But this is the first specific reference to *burial*. Avraham did not build a pyre and cremate Sarah. He did not set her remains adrift on a river. He did not leave her body out in the open to biodegrade. Primarily in Avraham's honor the sages say that one of the most significant *mitzvot* a man can perform is to ‘*escort the dead*’ [meaning, provide the dead a respectful burial].

Avraham did not wallow in his grief for very long. He set out on a quest to procure an appropriate place to bury his wife's remains.

Ger-v'toshav anochi imachem tenu

'I am an immigrant and a sojourner among you,' he said.

⁸ Baka is *beit, kaf, hey*. Strong's Hebrew word #1058, it is pronounced *baw-kaw'*.

li achuzat-kever imachem

'Sell me property for a burial place with you

v'ekberah meti milef'nei

so that I can bury my dead near to me.'

Avraham then negotiated with one of the local residents, a descendant of Chet [commonly known as a 'Hittite'] named Efron, to purchase a burial plot for Sarah in the vicinity of Hebron. The specific location was to be a cave called *Machpelah*⁹, at the end of a field, in the middle of an orchard.

V'yakom sedeh Efron asher b'Machpelah

Ephron's field in Machpelah

asher lifnei Mamre

adjoining Mamre thus became [Avraham's] uncontested property

ha-sadeh v'ha-me'arah asher-bo v'chol ha-etz

the field, its cave, and every tree

asher b'sadeh asher b'chol gevulo saviv

within the field and around it.

L'Avraham l'miknah l'eynei v'nei-Chet

It was Abraham's purchase with all the children of Heth

B'chol ba'ey sha'ar iro

who came to the city gate as eyewitnesses.

V'yakom ha-sadeh v'ha-me'arah asher-bo l'Avraham

This is how the field and its cave became the uncontested property of Avraham

l'achuzat-kaver me'et b'nei-Chet

as a burial site¹⁰, purchased from the children of Chet.

The cave of *Machpelah* [the word means 'double'] with its adjoining field and orchard is the first parcel of real estate acquired by our people. Avraham purchased this field from Efron the descendant of Chet¹¹ for 400 shekels of silver [a veritable fortune]¹². Later Avraham's grandson Ya'akov will purchase a plot of land near

⁹ *Machpelah* is *mem, kaf, peh, lamed, hey*⁹. Strong's Hebrew word #4375, it is pronounced *mawk-pay-law*'.

¹⁰ Avraham, Yitzchak, Rivkah, Ya'akov, and Leah were all eventually buried on this site along with Sarah. See Genesis 25:9, 49:29-32, and 50:13.

¹¹ *Chet* [usually transliterated as Heth] is *chet, tav*, Strong's Hebrew word # 2845, pronounced *khayt*. The Hebrew word means 'terror'. The name refers to a son of *Cham*, and to a particular branch of Kena'ani known to most English-speakers as 'Hittites'. From this group of people would UriYah, the first husband of Bat-sheva [Bathsheba], be born.

¹² Based on this four hundred silver shekels figure, 16th century sage Rabbi Yitzchak bar Yehudah (author of *Paaneach Raza*) made an interesting calculation: As per Leviticus 27:16, said he, the value of land in biblical times was 50 silver shekels for a *cur*, or 75,000 square *amot* ("cubits"). Thus, the area purchased by Abraham was eight *cur*, or 600,000 square cubits. A square cubit is the approximate area occupied by an upright human being.

Shechem. A third piece of land – *the threshing floor of Onan* (the site of the Holy Temple) - will be purchased much, much later by Avraham and Ya'akov's descendant David. These three parcels of land were acquired *by purchase*. The rest of Eretz Yisrael was acquired *directly from the Hand of the Holy One*. It is, interestingly enough, these three *purchased* areas – Hebron¹³, Shechem [known today as Nablus], and Jerusalem – that have consistently provided the most controversy with the other peoples of the region. What our ancestors purchased with silver has many times over has been paid for again in blood.

The Passing of the Torch: To Everything there is a Season

For a little over two weeks now we have been regaled by Torah with magnificent stories of Avraham and Sarah and their walk with the Holy One. We have however come to a critical moment in the narrative. Sarah is dead. Avraham is old and tired and lonely. So, what happens now? What is to become of the covenant the Holy One established with Avraham and Sarah back in the latter chapters of parsha *Lech Lecha*?

The question is this: *Will the lessons our patriarch and matriarch learned over the course of their lives die with them, or are the Divine Sparks of Light they uncovered and emanated during the course of their covenant walk transferable to the generations that will follow them?* Put another way the question might be: *Was all that we have been reading just a nice story about two old wandering Arameans – or can the covenant experience of Avraham and Sarah survive their death and form a pool of living water from which sustenance can be drawn by Yitzchak, and by Ya'akov, and by Moshe, and by David, and by Daniel, and by Yeshua of Natzret, and ultimately by US [and, for that matter, by our children] as well?*

It is one thing for an individual to personally *walk with the Holy One* for a few weeks or months or years. As wonderful as that experience is, it is entirely *another* thing to not only personally walk with the Holy One, but to actually pass the values and experiences and ways of relating to people and Creation which one learns from

The generation of Hebrews that left Egypt and received the Torah at Mount Sinai numbered some 600,000 heads of households. Our sages tell us that the Jewish nation consists of 600,000 souls, that the soul of every Jew who ever lived is an offshoot of one of these 600,000 "general" souls. Thus the Torah contains 600,000 letters (counting the spaces between letters), for each Jew possesses something of the Torah, and thus in connection with the first purchase of the Land of Israel Avraham paid not just for himself, but for every individual Jew. The first plot of land obtained by a Jew included a share for every Hebrew soul.

¹³ During the Arab riots of 1929 thousands of Hebron's Arabs stormed into the old Jewish quarter in Hebron, massacred as many Jewish residents of the area, and committed as many atrocities against them as they could. Those who miraculously survived the massacre had to flee for their lives. No Jewish community was re-established in Hebron until the Six-Day war in June, 1965.

walking with the Holy One on to one's children and one's children's children.

This leads us to meditate on the idea of something near and dear to my heart – the *challenge* of ‘passing the torch’ to the next generation.

The Challenge of Handing Off the Baton of the Covenant

Shaul of Tarsus, knowing his audience, often used analogies and metaphors from the Greco-Roman influenced world of athletics to help drive his spiritual points home. *See e.g., I Corinthians 9:24-27, and Philippians 3:14.* Please indulge me while I give that technique a try.

One of my favorite athletic activities when I was young was track and field. I ran in every event I could - *sprints* [100, 200, and 400 meters], *runs* [800 meters, 1mile, and 2 miles], and *relays*. Among these, the most challenging races were always the *relays* – those races in which every runner must carry a baton, and must, upon completion of his assigned portion of the race, hand that baton off to the next runner on their team. The reason these races were the most challenging was not that the participants had to run harder than in individual races. The reason was that, in addition to running their best race, the runners also have to make a smooth, successful ‘hand-off’ to the next runner on their team. Drop the baton and your team is disqualified. Fail to coordinate your initial steps with the steps of the person handing off the baton to you, or your final steps with the person to whom you are handing off the baton, and you lose precious time - and probably the race.

Even before the first runner nears the completion of his assigned distance, therefore, the next runner takes off running hard with one hand extended backward, anticipating the passing of the baton. The goal is for him to get up to about 3/4 of his sprint speed before the prior racer, still running at full speed, runs up from behind and slips the baton into his extended hand.

The “hand-off” of the baton is the critical factor in any relay race. A person may be a great individual racer, with dazzling speed – but if he can’t make an effective, seamless ‘hand-off’ to the next in line to run ... well, no one is really going to care how fast and furious he ran his allotted portion of the course.

Consider how this applies in the spiritual context. Some people can absolutely dazzle others with their spiritual activity. They run circles around the rest of us. They give ‘ministry’ 100% effort 100% of the time. They teach, they sing, they pray, they feed the hungry, they visit the sick, they care for the widow, the fatherless, the poor and the stranger, they console the bereaved, they counsel the confused, and they cajole the wayward toward *teshuvah*.

Impressive, right? But fast-forward a generation. Are the children and grandchildren they left behind still walking in the spiritual heritage of their dazzling forbearer? Did they make a successful ‘hand-off’ of spiritual things – or did they just run a fast and furious race to their own personal finish line, with nothing more in mind than achieving their own *personal best* time? Verily, I say unto you – *they have their reward*¹⁴.

For Avraham and Sarah, and for you and for me, the question becomes whether when we leave this earth we will just leave the sons and daughters and grandchildren which come behind us a little money or property, a box of dusty photographs, and hopefully a good name – or will leave them something *more*, something *spiritual*, something *eternal*? Will we leave our children an estate – or a *heritage*?

When Paul Simon was a very young songwriter, before he penned such masterpieces as “*The Boxer*”, “*Bridge Over Troubled Water*”, and “*Sounds of Silence*”, Simon wrote a nice little piece of bittersweet poetry he called simply ‘*Kathy’s Song*’. The poignant final stanza of that poem read as follows:

*... And as I watch the drops of rain ... weave their weary paths and die ...
I know that I am like the rain ... there but for the grace of you go I.*

At the end of your life on earth, will your spiritual walk be like the drops of rain that Simon’s character watched ‘*weave their weary paths and die*’? Upon what does the answer to this question depend? The answer depends upon *one thing, and one thing alone* - whether the center of gravity of your life is, or is not, the eternal COVENANT the Holy One cut with Avraham in Genesis 15 and 17. You see, in the spiritual world, while the passing of the torch is something that requires participation by both the father and the son, the mother and the daughter, the most important Actor in the process is none of those – it is the Holy One, the Covenant-Keeper Who is faithful to renew His covenant with every generation if they will simply receive it.

It is For Us the Living ...

Parsha *Chayei Sarah* is, as its name declares, *not about dying* but about *living*. It is, of course, as I stated earlier in this shiur, altogether right and proper that we mourn the loss of those who have gone before us. As will become clear when we get into the particulars of the readings for the week from the Torah and the haftarah, however, our focus is not to be upon the *trauma* of death – but upon the *transcendence* of death by people who *carry on with life*.

¹⁴ See Matthew 6:2, 5.

The point of focus toward which Torah points us in *Chayei Sarah*, you see, is not the moment or manner or Sarah's *death*, but the kind of life she lived and bequeathed to others as a living legacy. The unmistakable message of the parsha *ha-shavua* is not that Avraham and Sarah *died* – but that *when they died the b'rit the Holy One cut with Avraham and Sarah did not die with them*.

The subject matter of the parsha is a proof text for the *continuity*, indeed the *eternality*, of the covenant under which Sarah and Avraham found life. *The critical lesson of Chayei Sarah is that the b'rit need not – indeed will not - die with us either. Chayei Sarah - the life of Sarah – is a scepter that is passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, in this parsha we not only see Yitzchak, the son of Avraham and Sarah, assume his father's position as the carrier of the glory of the Holy One, but we also see Yitzchak take a bride, paving the way for yet another generation to be born.*

The Torch of Sarah's Life is the Source Of the Light to the Nations

We who call Avraham our father and Sarah our mother are called to be a light to the nations/peoples of the earth. The calling transcends not only *geography* but *generations*. The torch we are to use to provide the light is the same torch Avraham and Sarah carried– the torch through which the *b'rit* was cut in Genesis 15:17. *The light of that torch is still as bright today as it ever was. The question, until Messiah returns, is not just who will carry it – but who will pass it on to the next generation. Run hard, reach out your hand, and take the torch, Beloved.*

Questions For Today's Study

1. According to today's aliyah:

- [A] How old was Sarah when she died?
- [B] What were the two different names of the place where Sarah died - and what does each of those names mean?
- [C] What “people group” was occupying the place where Sarah died?
- [D] What was the name of the man who owned the piece of land Avraham wanted for a burial site for Sarah?
- [E] What price did Avraham pay for the burial site?
- [F] Where, and for what, had Avraham obtained the silver to use to purchase the tomb?
- [G] What was included in Avraham's purchase besides the cave in which he buried Sarah?
- [H] What was the name of the cave where Sarah was buried?
- [I] What does that name mean?

2. In today's haftarah we see David well advanced in years, and we see one of his sons "itching" to take over.

[A] What physical problem did David have in his later years?

[B] Who was Abishag?

[C] From what city was Abishag?

[D] Which one of David's sons was the eldest at the time of his old age?

[E] Which one of David's sons set himself up as king, without asking his father or the Holy One?

[F] What does verse 6 say about why this son was so presumptuous?

[G] What difference in Adoniyah's life do you think it would have made if, throughout his youth, his father had interfered with him and asked him "Why do you behave as you do?"

[H] With which leaders of Israel did Adoniyah conspire to take over the throne?

[I] Which leaders of Israel did Adoniyah avoid, and leave out of his plot?

[J] What happened at the *Stone of Zohelet*?

[K] What do you think Adoniyah planned to do with his younger half-brother Shlomo [Solomon]?

3. In today's reading from the writings of the *talmidim* of Yeshua of Natzret Shaul [Paul] of Tarsus discusses the Hebraic perspective on death.

[A] To what phenomenon of the Holy One's Creation [some call it "nature", but thereby deny the Holy One glory] does Shaul liken death and resurrection?

[B] How do you think one who is resurrected [as Messiah Yeshua was resurrected] is going to be different from the way he or she was before death?

*May you know the Holy One and be one with Messiah.
May you have full, abundant, and eternal life here and now
as well as in every stage of the World to Come.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 116:1-4

I love the Holy One, because He has heard my voice and my supplications.

*Because He has inclined His ear to me,
for this cause I will call upon Him as long as I live.*

*The pains of death surrounded me,
and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow.
Then I called upon the name of the Holy One:*

"O Holy One, I implore You, deliver my soul!"