



Parshat Chayei Sarah

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

Editor: Sam. Eisikovits

eisikovits1@gmail.com

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Parshas [Chayei Sarah](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand | Series: **Rav Frand**

It says in the beginning of Parshas Chayei Sarah, “Sarah died in Kiryat-Arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her.” (Bereshis 23:2). The *sefer Me’orei Ohr* makes an interesting observation. In the entire Torah, there are only two *hespedim* (eulogies): One for Sora Imeinu and one for Yaakov Avinu. When Miriam died, a *hesped* is not mentioned. Likewise, when Aharon Hakohen died, the Torah says that “the entire House of Israel cried” but there is no mention of a *hesped*. Similarly, the Torah does not mention *hespedim* for Avraham or Yitzchak when they died. And again, although it says that the “House of Israel cried” for Moshe, there is no mention of a *hesped*.

Apparently, it was not such a common practice in Biblical times that *hespedim* were made when a person passed away. What then was so special about Sora that Avraham formally eulogized her? A famous Gemara in Sanhedrin discusses whether *hespedim* are primarily for the honor of the living or for the honor of those who have departed. Clearly, in a *hesped* we speak of the fine attributes of the deceased – but why do we do that? Is it to honor the dead or perhaps it is because when people hear the *hespedim*, they become inspired to live more meritorious lives themselves? As Shlomo says, “It is preferable to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting.” (Koheles 7:2).

At funerals, we hear things about people that we don’t necessarily know about them. Invariably, when I walk out of a funeral after

hearing the *hespedim*, I think to myself “You know, I never knew that about this person.” The purpose of *hesped* is to inform the audience who this deceased person was. Chazal say that the *hesped* that Avraham said for Sora was the chapter “A woman of valor who can find?” (Mishlei 31:10-31). That was the *hesped*, because if there was one defining attribute of Sora, it was that “Behold, she is in the tent.” (Bereshis 18:26). She was extremely *tzanua* (private). Therefore, we can assume that people really did not know much about Sora. It was not until her *hesped* that Avraham Avinu let the world know who she was. The author of Me’orei Ohr cites an incident involving Rav Yeruchem Levovitz. He was once in a *shtetel* and he heard that an old woman who lived by herself passed away. He was told that there probably would not be a *minyan* at her *levaya*. Even though Rav Yeruchem didn’t know the woman, he figured that this was somewhat akin to a *mes mitzvah* (because no one would be at her funeral). Therefore, even though he didn’t know her, the great Mirer Mashgiach went to this lady’s *levaya*. To everyone’s surprise, there was a large gathering of people there. It turned out to be a tremendous *levaya* and even people from other cities came.

Initially, people could not figure out why so many people came. It eventually emerged that unbeknownst to almost anyone, this woman did acts of chessed for dozens and dozens of people. Everyone, however, thought that “I am the only one for whom she does this.” So everyone said “She was so good to us, she would take care of us, she would give us money and give us food... so I need to go to her *levaya*.” Rav Yeruchem Levovitz – the great *Mashgiach* – did not want to let this event pass without sharing the *mussar* message within it to his *yeshiva talmidim* (students) in the Mir.

He returned to the *yeshiva* and told them: It is the way of people to not hide things from the public that are not valuable. A person's everyday silverware and dishes are never hidden away in a closet under lock and key. However, the fine china is stored behind the breakfront. The crystal gets hidden away even further and the gold is kept in the vault. We don't want anyone to see that.

We hide the things that are most dear and precious to us. The most precious things to this woman were the things she did for other people. As a result of that, she hid them, like people hide gold and silver. This is what Rav Yeruchem learned from that story of the old woman in the *shtetel*.

That is why Avraham Avinu felt the necessity to eulogize Sora. Everybody knew Avraham. "You are a prince of Elokim in our midst..." (Bereshis 23:6). Yitzchak was also well known. When Yosef died "he was the ruler throughout the Land of Egypt." Aharon and Moshe's greatness were known throughout the "entire House of Israel." Who needed to, and in fact, who would be able to say *hespedim*, on such great and well-known individuals?

However, Sora Imeinu's greatness, because of her incredible *tznius* and privacy, was not as well known.

Therefore, Avraham Avinu had to let the world know who she really was.

As far as the fact that Yaakov Avinu was also eulogized, the Me'orei Ohr explains that this was because Yaakov Avinu led a troubled life. He had to run away from his brother, who wanted to kill him. He had to put up with a cheating father-in-law for twenty-plus years. He had the aggravation of the apparent loss of his beloved son, Yosef. Everyone looked at Yaakov Avinu and thought, "*Nebach*, a troubled life." That is why this author suggests, there was also a necessity to eulogize Yaakov.

I think that perhaps there may be another reason why they said a *hesped* for Yaakov. The *pasuk* says “They came to Goren Ha’atad...” (Bereshis 50:10) The Gemara says that all the kings of Canaan took their crowns and put them on the coffin of Yaakov Avinu. Who was the *hesped* for? In that case, the *hesped* was for the benefit of the nations of the world. The “Jews” there were just Yaakov’s family, who already knew who he was. The purpose was so that everyone else would know who he was. In either event, there was a special necessity for saying a *hesped* in Yaakov’s case. But the bottom line is that *hespedim* are needed when there is a special reason to let the world at large know who this person was. With Avraham, Yitzchak, Moshe, Aharon, and Dovid, there was not such a need. It was the same with the other Matriarchs. But the world needed to know about Sora: “A woman of valor who can find?” because of her exceptional attribute of *tzniyus* / privacy.

The Role of Beauty

Parshas [Chayei Sarah](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

At the beginning of this week’s parsha, the verse says, “Sarah’s lifetime was one hundred years, and twenty years and seven years; the years of Sarah’s life” [Bereishis 23:1]. The Medrash quotes the *pasuk* “Hashem knows the days of the perfect, their inheritance will be forever” [Tehillim 37:18] and comments “Just as the righteous are ‘temimim’ [perfect / complete] so too are their years ‘temimim’”. Sarah was as beautiful as a 7-year-old at age 20, and at 100 her quantity of sins was equal to that of a 20 year old.

The Medrash is obviously addressing the strange way in which the *pasuk* states that Sarah lived to the age of 127. It is understandable why the Medrash wants to point out the

righteousness of Sarah. The longer we live, the more susceptible and open we are to sin. So we can readily understand the praise implicit in the statement that when she was 100, she was like a person who was only 20 in terms of the number of sins she had committed in her lifetime. This is a significant measure of piety that is worth knowing about our first matriarch.

But what is the point of the Medrash telling us that at twenty, Sarah was as beautiful as a 7-year-old? The Torah is not discussing someone who is entering a beauty pageant here. What is the point of this drasha (exegesis)? We are discussing our matriarch Sarah. Why is it significant to know that she had the beauty of a 7 year old when she was twenty?

Rav Mottel Katz, z"l, in his work *Be'er Mechokek* explains the very important concept of Biblical beauty. The Torah goes out of its way to describe the various matriarchs as being beautiful in appearance. This is not the type of description that we would expect to hear today in describing a prominent Rebbetzin or even in proposing a shidduch (marriage match) to a serious Rabbinical student. Even when someone is interested in "looks", it is still uncommon for one to stress "she is a beautiful girl" when discussing a potential match. We are supposedly above that. However, the Torah does point out that the matriarchs were beautiful people.

Our Sages state that ten measures of beauty descended to the world. Jerusalem took 90% of that beauty, and the rest of the world divided up the remaining 10% [Kidushin 49b]. Here again, the Gemara emphasizes that Jerusalem is the most beautiful city in the world. Why is it important that Jerusalem be a beautiful city? Would it be any less meaningful or holy for the Jewish people if Jerusalem were not the most beautiful city in the world?

The answer is that we, as human beings, are very influenced by our physical surroundings. Physical beauty can put a person in a frame of mind that is more receptive to the spirituality that exists. The Talmud says elsewhere, “three things broaden a person’s mind – a beautiful house, beautiful possessions, and a beautiful wife” [Brachos 57b]. What is the meaning of this Gemara? The meaning of the Gemara is that when a person lives in nice conditions and is not bogged down by physical distractions, he has the ability to be more receptive to matters of holiness.

A person who is in a beautiful home with beautiful furniture, beautiful surroundings, and a beautiful wife can have the freedom and peace of mind to devote himself to the higher tasks of life. The beautiful home, car, and wife are not ends in and of themselves. But they allow the person to rise above the impediments of physical distractions that sometimes get in the way of spiritual growth.

When a person enters Jerusalem and looks out upon the beautiful Judean Hills, his soul becomes more receptive to being influenced by the inherent sanctity of the place than what would be possible if Jerusalem had been an equally sanctified but less attractive city. Chazal tell us in the above quoted Medrash that the beauty of Sarah was like that of a 7-year-old. The beauty of a 20-year-old woman can sometimes be used for the wrong purposes in life. The beauty of a 7-year-old, on the other hand, has a certain purity and innocence. This is exactly the point made by Chazal. The beauty of Sarah was not used like the beauty of a 20-year-old woman can sometimes be used. It was used like the beauty of a 7-year-old girl — not for malevolent, not for prurient, and not for sensual purposes — but purposes of inspiration and aspiration, as our Sages say “Sarah converted the women.”

A Tale of Two People

This week's parsha contains the story with Eliezer, the servant of Avraham. The Torah spends a tremendous number of pasukim on the mission of Eliezer and how he faithfully carried out his master's instructions. Chazal are inspired to say "the conversation of the servants of the patriarchs is even preferable to the Torah discussions of their descendants" [Bereishis Rabbah 60].

Our Sages say that Eliezer wanted his daughter to be engaged to Yitzchak. However, Avraham rebuffed this suggestion, telling Eliezer that he was a slave, descended from Canaan, who was cursed. Therefore, "the one who is cursed cannot cling to the one who is blessed."

However, the Medrash at the end of the parsha says that since Eliezer faithfully carried out his mission, he left the category of "cursed" and entered the category of "blessed." Eliezer "shteiged" – he grew.

These last two parshios — Vayera and Chayei Sarah — can be a contrasting study of two people: A study of a person named Lot and a study of a person named Eliezer. They led very similar lives. They both had a close relationship with the patriarch Avraham and were members of his household. They both spent time with and learned from Avraham Avinu. And yet Lot decided to leave Avraham and make his fortune in Sodom. We know what happened to Lot. He ended his life engaging in incestuous relationships with his own daughters. On the other hand, Eliezer starts out as a cursed slave and yet ends up emerging from the category of cursedness and entering into the category of blessedness.

This is a lesson in the ability to seize opportunities. Chazal say that Eliezer recognized that he was cursed with the curse of Canaan and was therefore destined to be a slave. But even given that fate,

man still has some control over his destiny. One can be a slave to a wicked person, to a barbarian, to a terrible person, or one can be a slave to the greatest personality of the generation

— Avraham Avinu. Eliezer's attitude was, "I might as well try to make the best of a bad situation. If I need to be a slave, I might as well become a slave — and a faithful slave — to an Avraham Avinu."

He became the servant of Avraham and used that opportunity to learn and to grow. The man turned his life around. He went from being an 'Arur' to being a 'Baruch.'

Lot had the same opportunity. The curse of Canaan did not hang over his head. Nevertheless, because he went to try to make a fortune in Sodom, he lost everything and had no 'nachas', so to speak, from his children and his grandchildren.

Life presents us with opportunities. It is our choice whether to use these opportunities to grow and to bring ourselves into the realm of those who are blessed, or sadly, to go in the other direction and wind up like Lot.

Ketura and eastern spirituality

Written by J

Abraham marries Keturah at the end of Chayei Sarah, and Rashi tells us that this is Hagar. When the Torah refers to someone by introducing the figure with "Shmo" or "shma" ("His/her name is"), we know that the Torah is describing the person's essence. In this case, we know that Ketura was really Hagar, Abraham's concubine, but something about her essence involved incense, as Rashi tells us (the word Ketura is related to incense).

When I was in Bali, Indonesia I couldn't help but notice that everywhere I traveled, I could smell incense, because the Hindus there were constantly offering incense as a spiritual practice.

The Torah tells us that Abraham had 6 children with Keturah, but it is strange that the Torah does not simply say that Abraham had 8 kids in total (the number representing one beyond the limits of physicality) or, perhaps more fitting, 1 child with Sarah and 7 with Hagar. 7 represents physical completeness, so Abraham having 7 children with Hagar would make sense. However, perhaps the Torah is trying to make a point by specifically detailing 6 children from Ketura, 6 being one short of physical completion. The Zohar in this parsha notes that when the Torah writes that Abraham gave everything he had to Issac and gifts to the children of Ketura, the “gifts” must be spiritual gifts (for how could a father give everything material to one son and have anything else to give to others?).

According to the Zohar, these 6 children were sent “eastward to the east” taking with them the roots of Eastern meditation and spirituality, the essential roots of Hinduism and later Buddhism. However, although Eastern spirituality has a lot (incense, meditations, etc), it is inherently incomplete, hence the number 6. It is like having 6 days a week, and never having Shabbat, the most important day, the day we all aspire to reach through our work on the other 6 days of the week!

As Rabbi Orlovik notes, even the word for Hindu in Hebrew, Hodi, is spelled הודי. The letters here almost contain G-d’s name, yud-k-vuv-k, but the missing part is the dalet instead of the Hay. To make a dalet into a hay is quite easy; all that is necessary is to insert a yud into the bottom left side of the dalet. Dalet is 4, representing physicality (the 4 corners of the world), and yud is the only letter that hovers above the line of the page, representing spirituality, G-d’s oneness. Eastern spirituality almost has it all, but lacks the most essential part, the conclusion of everything we are trying to accomplish, the realization that at the end of the day, everything is a coherent unit, G’d is the source of all physical and spiritual powers, and G’d is one.

Once Yashar, always a yashar

Written by d fine

In parshas Vayera we pointed out that the Avos were called Yesharim due to their kind treatment of all people. There is another great example of this trait in our sedra. The psukim clearly illustrate that Avraham treats Efron with the utmost respect; he does not pressurise Efron nor lose his cool with him due to Efron's incessant changing the price of a burial plot for Sarah Imeinu. But if one looks below the surface, Avraham's attitude is even more amazing to witness. Not only did Avraham want to bury his wife as soon as possible, he was originally told that he would be given the ma'aras hamachpelah for free. However, Efron soon changed his mind and insisted on selling it to Avraham for a rather steep price. Not only that, but Efron insisted on having Avraham buy the field adjacent to the cave as well, refusing to give Avraham access to the cave without it (see the psukim). Moreover, Efron and Avraham were opposites. Avraham was the 'say little, do much' person, whilst Efron was the 'say a lot, do little' character, which meant that Avraham was full of humility, whilst Efron was boastful and arrogant. Indeed, whilst Avraham's name means 'father (figure) of all nations,' he humbly called himself 'dust and ashes.' In stark contrast, as Rav Moshe Feinstein points out, Efron was really a lowly nobody – his name connotes 'dust' – but he made himself out to be an important person.

So, despite the fact that Avraham was in a hurry to bury his wife, Efron was cheating him, and Efron's character and goals were the opposite of those of Avraham, Avraham still behaved in a respectful and kind manner to Efron. Now that's yashrus!

Fireworks have a big BANG but...

Written by Sammy Morhaim

Fireworks are very impressive, spreading fantastic colors across the night sky, but thinking about it, as a source of light, they're pretty useless. It's the lights

we use every day that we don't notice, that are the most beneficial. In this weeks Parsha, Rivka displays her innate character, her enthusiasm, her kindness. To an onlooker, she just seems like a sweet girl doing simple tasks in a pleasant way, nothing extraordinary or exceedingly special, yet she is the one to mother the next generation of Avraham and yitzchak's monotheistic ideals.

We often feel that greatness

lies only in tremendous acts which influence the masses. But in Hashem's eyes, and we see this throughout the Torah, greatness is attributed to people who do small things with the right attitude and consistency –

The Yetzer hora's most powerful tool is 'making us feel worthless' - learn from Rivka and not from fireworks...each of us is outstanding in our own LITTLE way..

Humor

I don't like how funerals are usually between 9-11 am. I'm not really a mourning person.

I saw an ad for burial plots, and thought to myself This is the last thing I need.

Where are mathematicians buried? The Symmetry.

Where are dead computer hackers buried? In decrypt.