

CHAYE SARAH

Marriage, Strengths, Foibles, and Sharing

The *Torah* portion *Chaye Sarah* opens with the sentence “And these are the life of Sarah, 100 years and 20 years and 7 years, the years of the life of Sarah.” The commentators all comment about why it says 100 years and 20 years and 7 years, but it is not generally known that the commentators also comment on the second part of that verse which says “the years of the life of Sarah.” We can understand, based on Rashi and other commentators, why it says 127 years and it divides up the 100 and the 20 and the 7, but why does it have to repeat “the years of the life of Sarah?” This is completely redundant.

We also learn that when Abraham came to Kiryas Abba to mourn Sarah, it says, “To mourn Sarah and to cry for her.” Why does it have to say to mourn for Sarah and to cry for her? It should say that Abraham first cries and then he eulogizes her. “*Lispod*” does not just mean “to mourn” but “to eulogize.” Therefore, it should first say he cried for Sarah and then eulogized her. Why does it say that Abraham eulogized her first and then cried for her?

What’s more, we learn later on after Abraham had purchased a field from Ephron, the Hittite, and after he had buried Sarah, “And Abraham was old stricken with old age and G-d blessed Abraham *BaKol* with everything.” What does it mean “with everything?” Some rabbis explain that it means with a son. Other rabbis explain it means with a daughter, and still other rabbis explain that it means that he was blessed with the kindness of Sarah. We know that after Sarah died, Abraham lived for 38 years, but G-d no longer talked to Abraham. In the last 38 years of his life, we do not find that G-d talked to Abraham at all. We know that Abraham was still a man of full physical powers because he remarried after Sarah died to a woman named Ketura, and he had six children with her. Abraham had a son by Hagar, Ishmael; one by Sarah, Yitzchak; and six by Ketura, but only one of the eight remained Jewish. The rabbis say that in order for the covenant to succeed, it takes a couple, not just a husband, but it takes a husband and wife, that Abraham alone could not transmit the covenant, that in a Jewish family, a husband and wife are both needed in order for Judaism to continue.

It is true that Abraham was a prophet, but the rabbis say that Sarah was special, too. She had *Ruach HaKodesh*. Abraham may have understood the teachings well and could explain the teachings but he did not know how to apply them as well as Sarah could in real life situations. Sarah intuitively knew how to apply the precepts of the Torah to every situation. She knew how to instinctively be kind and responsible to the people around her. She also sensed dangers that Abraham did not sense. She knew that Ishmael was trying to harm her son, Yitzchak. Ishmael would shoot targets close to Yitzchak. If Ishmael would miss and kill Yitzchak, Ishmael would have a ready-made alibi. After all, they were just playing, but Sarah knew that he was not just playing. So G-d told Abraham when it came to practical matters, "listen to her voice." Sarah was a co-equal with Abraham in the covenant, and when Sarah was not present, Abraham could not transmit the covenant. Hagar's child, Ishmael, was not able to continue on with the covenant, although we learn that at the end of Ishmael's life, he did do *Teshuva* and come back, but the six sons of Ketura never again did *Teshuva*. They never came back because there was no Sarah.

When G-d first made the covenant with Abraham, Abraham was 99 years, and G-d not only changed Abraham's name (originally it was Abram), but He also changed Sarah's name. From Sarai, she became Sarah. G-d added a "*Hay*" to her name as he did to Abraham's. "*Hay*" stands for the name of G-d. The rabbis say that the reason we repeat over here the "years of the life of Sarah" is because this is really the Sarah era. Abraham without Sarah was not able to accomplish much. It was Sarah who enabled him to perpetuate Judaism. It was Sarah who allowed him to spread Judaism. In fact, there is why it says "the souls that they made." Sarah was instrumental in making the converts to Judaism in Chorán that the Bible speaks about, and when Sarah passed on, Abraham knew he no longer had the strength to be the great leader that he had been up to now. That's why G-d had to bless him afterwards with Sarah's special kindness. That is what it means when it says he was blessed *BaKol* with this special kindness. But even then, he was not able to apply it the same way that Sarah did when Sarah lived that period of time that was really the Sarah era, not the Abraham era.

We also learn, in the *benching*, the grace after meals, after we say

that G-d should bless the master of this house and the mistress of this house, we say that G-d should bless us as He blessed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What does this mean? The rabbis explain it means that G-d should bless us with the kindness of Abraham. When a young couple enters into a relationship, they should remember that they have to be kind to each other. They have to realize that they complement each other. They should not try to dominate each other. If an introvert marries an extrovert, the extrovert should not try to destroy the introvert by making him or her perform and do things that are against his or her character. Remember, you complement each other, just like Abraham and Sarah complemented each other, that without the strengths of one, the other could not have succeeded. Therefore, when you enter into a marriage relationship, you have to complement each other. You are not supposed to destroy each other. If you try to dominate your spouse, you are quickly going to end your marriage. Even if you succeed in making your spouse into a dishrag, you will destroy your marriage because your spouse will no longer interest you.

The word "*MeKol*" comes from the sentence which says that Yitzchak ate from everybody, which means that he was tolerant. We have to be tolerant of each other's foibles. Yitzchak was perhaps tolerant to a fault because he did not see any problems with his son, Esau, but you have to be tolerant of each other's foibles. Many times it is the little things that break the marriage. One spouse does not like the way the other puts the toothpaste back or the way the room is straightened up or the pillows are not fluffed up just right. Everyone has certain *Mishegasen* that annoy the other person, but you have to be tolerant of the other person's habits and not make a big fuss about them. If you do, you are going to endanger your marriage. I know that I can break any marriage in 20 minutes. All I have to do is harp on those things that the other person does not like. "Look how he is sitting at the table and how he does not handle his food right." You can get the other person so disgusted that it will end up in a big fight, but you have to be tolerant of each other's foibles.

Finally, with Yaacov it says that he had "*Kol*," "everything" therefore, Esau could take his present. When Yaacov made up with his brother, he gave him a big present. He did not have to give Esau a present. After all, Esau was a very rich person, but it shows that in a marriage, too, you have

to be willing to share. You have to be willing to accept your spouse's gift even if it is not given with a full heart. This does not just refer to money. I am constantly surprised how in many marriages how selfish the spouses are, how they do not want to give up anything. If a person is willing to go to the ballet with his wife, even though he does not like the ballet and even though she knows he is not doing it with a full heart, she should accept that sacrifice. Or *vice versa* where he wants her to go to the football game and he knows that she really does not want to go, but she is doing it to please him, he should accept her sacrifice. Each spouse has to be willing to give up things, even demand that a spouse should do things with a full heart. If you are not willing to sacrifice and compromise, it is no use getting into a marriage relationship. Abraham was blessed *BaKol*, Yitzchak *MeKol*, and Yaacov with *Kol*. We need all these blessings in order to have a wonderful relationship. We have to complement each other and not try to destroy each other. We have to be tolerant of each other's foibles, and we also have to be willing to accept each other's sacrifice and be willing to share what we have, even if the spouses are not doing it with a full heart.

That's why it says here that Abraham came to eulogize her and then to cry for her because he wanted everyone to know the importance of her and their relationship. Maybe people thought that it was only he who was carrying the whole relationship, but that was not true, so he had to first eulogize her, to make public Sarah's contributions, and then he cried for her. He eulogized for her publicly because she was no longer there to help him carry on, and he cried privately because he missed her so terribly much.

Later in this sedra, we learn how Eliezer went to Mesopotamia to get a wife for Yitzchak. It says he came to a "*B'er*" "well" of water, but then from then on we have the word "*Ayin*," used for the word "well." The rabbis say that the word "*Ayin*" can mean more than just a well. "*Ayin*" can mean "an appearance." Things are not always the way they seem, and some people stress appearances. Adonijah thought that all he had to do was look like a king, and he would be a king. But his father, David, even though he was sick, almost on his deathbed, did not have any trouble putting Adonijah's revolt down, even though Adonijah had gathered an army of the most prominent people in Israel because Adonijah did not under-

stand how to really use the levers of power. To him, everything was appearance.

When Eliezer found that Rifka was willing to give him drink and give water to his camels, he had to make sure that he saw the real Rifka, the real woman, and not just someone who was doing this for outward appearance, that what she was doing reflected an inner reality. Many times we find in a couple's relationship that the so-called strong person is really the weak one and that one who looks weak, who looks dependent, is really the strong one in the relationship, the one who is able to handle the problems of life, the one who is able to shore up the so-called strong one in the relationship. Abraham eulogized Sarah because he wanted the world to know that she was his main support, that she had great strengths the he needed. Any relationship, in order for it to be a true relationship, must be a relationship in which these are complementary strengths. Every young couple getting married should always realize this. They should always realize that they need the blessing of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The blessing that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had was this wonderful relationships they had with their spouses because they realized that their spouses complemented them and that they needed them.

I am reminded of the story of Adam and Eve. Eve looked at Adam and said, "You know, Adam, you should do something about your appearance. It's getting a little shabby. Why don't you spruce up a bit?" Adam said, "You know, Eve, that's a good idea. I was just now thinking of turning over a new leaf." A young couple when they get married are turning over a new leaf, a new page in their life, and what they need to do is realize that they are entering into a relationship which will cause them to be stronger and better, together because they are better than when they were along. They will also be more able to continue the covenant of our people together, because it takes couples to continue the covenant. A couple can only continue the covenant if it is willing to listen to the blessing of *BaKol*, *Mekol*, *Kol*, if they are willing to complement each other and not destroy each other, if they are willing to be tolerant of each other's foibles, if they are willing to share with each other and to accept the gifts that their spouse brings, even if it is not done with a full heart. If they will do these things, then surely they will be blessed as Abraham and Sarah were blessed and

Yitzhak and Rebecca were blessed and Yaacov and Leah were blessed so that the Jewish people will continue through 'till the *Mashiach* comes. Amen.