

The Blessing of the Day of Death- Chayei Sarah

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Parashat Chayei Sarah פרשת חיי שרה

Torah: בְּרֵאשִׁית *Bereishiyt (Genesis) 23:1-25:18*

Full Kriyah

[1st Aliyah: 23:1-16, 2nd Aliyah: 23:17-24:9, 3rd Aliyah: 24:10-26, 4th Aliyah: 24:27-52, 5th Aliyah: 24:53-67, 6th Aliyah: 25:1-11, 7th Aliyah: 25:12-18]

In this week's Torah reading, Chayei Sarah, we read that Sarah dies and Abraham negotiates with the local Hittite owners to purchase the Cave of Machpela as a burial plot for his wife. Abraham's servant then travels to Aram to find a wife for Isaac. Isaac then marries Rivkah (Rebecca). Abraham marries another wife called Keturah and finally Abraham breathed his last and dies at a good old age & satisfied with life.

Parashat Chayei Sarah

1st Aliyah: Bereishiyt (Genesis) 23:1-16

Sarah dies at the age of 127 and Abraham procures after negotiations the family burial site in Hebron. Though Ephron the Hittite wished to give him the site he purchases the land finally paying 400 silver coins.

2nd Aliyah: Bereishiyt (Genesis) 23:17-24:9

Having acquired the land, Abraham buried Sarah in the Cave of Machpela. At this point, Abraham summoned his servant and charged him with the mission of finding a suitable wife for his son Yitschaq (Isaac) but not from the local Canaanite women.

3rd Aliyah: Bereishiyt (Genesis) 24:10 -26

The servant sits by a well and prays for a sign from YHWH. Rivkah (Rebecca) fulfils the sign by giving him and his Camels a drink and then he discovers that she is indeed Abraham's great niece.

4th Aliyah: Bereishiyt (Genesis) 24:27-52

Rebecca ran to tell her family about the man at the well, and her brother, Laban, went out, greeted the servant, and invited him to spend the night. The servant informs Rivkah's family of his mission and of the heavenly sign concerning her. Her family agrees that this match is divinely ordained & consents to the match.

5th Aliyah: Bereishiyt (Genesis) 24:53-67

Next morning after the engagement, the servant insisted on immediately returning to his master with the maiden in hand, and after Rebecca agreed, the two set out for Canaan. Isaac married Rebecca, loved her, and finally found consolation for the loss of his mother.

6th Aliyah: Bereishiyt (Genesis) 25:1-11

Abraham remarried and fathered several more children. Before his death, however, Abraham gave gifts to his other children and sent them all away, and bequeathed all the rest of his possessions to Isaac. Abraham died at the age of 175, and was buried by Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpela beside his wife, Sarah.

7th Aliyah: Bereishiyt (Genesis) 25:12-18

Ishmael's progeny are detailed in this section. Ishmael passed away at the age of 137.

Bereshiyth (Genesis) 23:1-25:18 [3rd, 4th& 5th Aliyah Bereshiyth 24:10- 67]

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The Blessing of the day of death



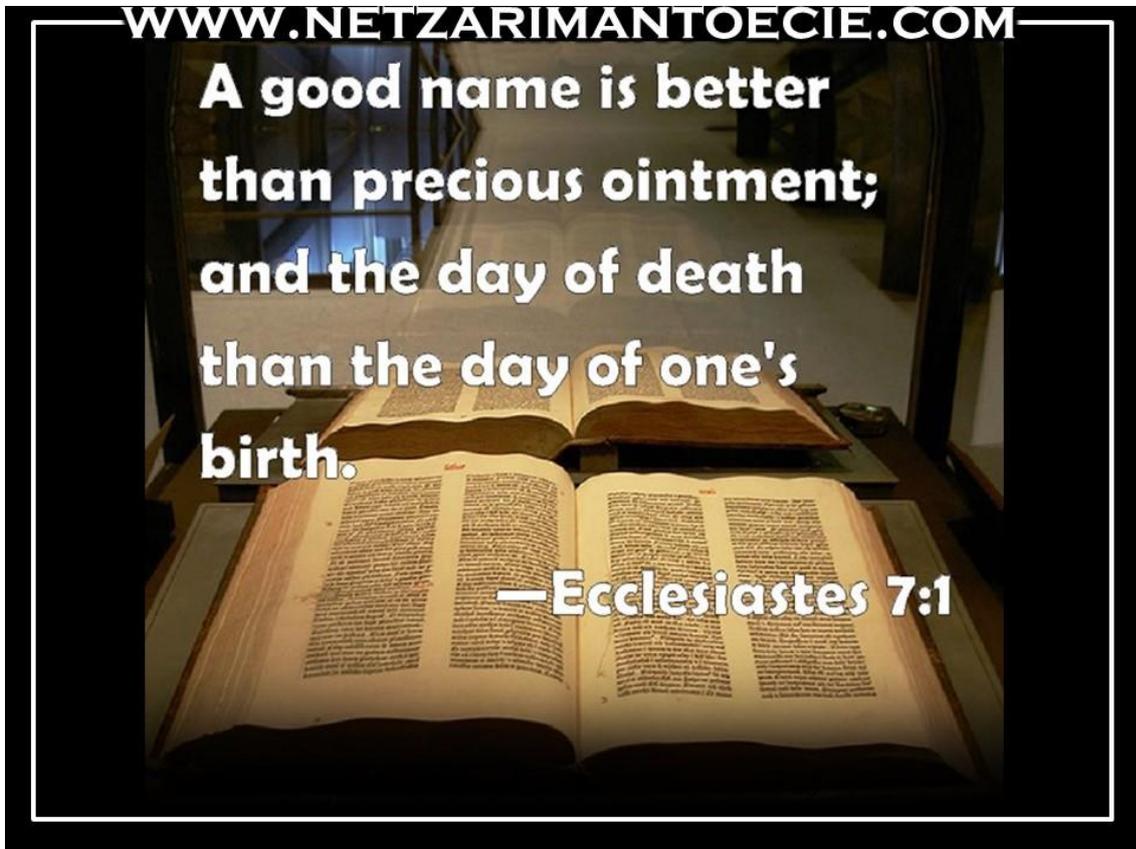
Chayei Sarah- The life of Sarah

Intro: This is a unique torah portion as it is attributed to Sarah however it begins with her death though it is called the life of Sarah. To understand this, we need to appreciate the words of Sh'lomoh (Solomon) found in:

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**A good name is better
than precious ointment;
and the day of death
than the day of one's
birth.**

—Ecclesiastes 7:1



Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one's birth;

It now becomes apparent I hope that we see that the full benefit of one's life can only be appreciated when that one passes because it enables us to fully appreciate the complete journey of life. If we have ever been to a Funeral of a loved one we notice that all the Eulogies surround the good that a person has done in life & whether they have fulfilled their purpose & transformed their world of influence until their completion and how that is completed is seen by how others responded. We know that Abraham responded well by his great desire to purchase the tomb in Hebron known as Machpelah which is the tomb of the Patriach's and Matriach's which is still in our day highly revered & honoured.

Sarah's Legacy:

This account of Sarah's death seems rather sorrowful if we read how that came about as found in the Book of Yasher after the offering up of Yitzchaq (Isaac) but this helps us understand that the scriptures generally just say she died shortly after these events but there is another side to this story that has remained hidden until we search the teaching of the Sages which is what we will now look at:

The Sages suggest that the "Imanot" (Mothers) could not overlap because they served a unique role before Yahweh which we will look at and so that is why Sarah needed to pass away before Rivkah (Rebecca) could replace her just as Rivkah had to pass away before Leah could assume her position.

There is however a profound reason! It is because there is a striking correlation between the role of the woman and the Kohen Ha Gadol (the High Priest). The Kohen Ha Gadol (High Priest) presided over the Beyth Ha Mikdash (the Temple) while the woman presided over the Mishkan (Tabernacle) of the home. The only difference between the Kohen (Priest) and the Woman lighting the Shabbat candles is the purpose. Her role in lighting the lamp is connected with Shalom Beyth (peace in the home). It is to do with the light of the Neshamah (the Soul) and so her role was to pray for her Husband & children at the time of the lighting of the Shabbat Candles to inspire & ignite the inner flame as she was a facilitator of set-apartness (Holiness) in the home.

It has been thought by the sages that in fact there were three signs of the Shechinah (the presence) upon the home of the Patriachs:

1. The lamp burned from Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat that never went out,
2. The bread remained fresh for a week representing the Lechem Hapanim (the bread of the presence)
3. The cloud was positioned over the tent reflecting the presence of the Shechinah,

We often fail to see just how uniquely blessed the Patriarchal families were, thinking that the Shechinah (the presence) did not appear until the days of Mosheh but from this understanding we see the special place that they played in the message of YHWH to the world.

From all this I hope we can see the vital & honoured role these women played as they represented what would later be the Kohanim (Priests) especially the Kohen Ha Gadol (High Priest) in the Mishkan (the Tabernacle). I hope this also shows the great honour women of the home should feel today when they perform the lighting of the Shabbat Candles since there is no Beyth Ha Mikdash (Temple) today. Also, since they had this honoured position of being the High Priest in the home the sages suggest that we can now understand that their passing was necessary for the next to resume her position just as there can be only one high Priest at a time but this is not so for the Avot (Patriarchal Fathers) who did overlap.

Sarah's Successor:

Hopefully now we come to understand why in this Torah portion much time is spent concerning the discovery of Rivkah (Rebecca). From the information derived above we can now begin to fully grasp the uniqueness of choosing a successor unlike the Patriarchal successors which were their sons who could be instructed in the life of their Fathers, while the Matriarch's were literally discovered. When Eliezer the elder servant of Abraham was dispatched to find a suitable mate for Yitzchaq (Isaac) he set his priority on her character. In asking YHWH to make his Mission a success Eliezer set up a test of character & kindness.

However, we find that Abraham's kindred were no less idol worshippers than the Canaanites so a daughter of such a family could shed layers of religious impurity, so the virtues of Abraham & that of Sarah could never be educated into them so the test of character became such a priority since from good character truth can be more readily received.

Based on this thought, one must beware of bad character traits even more than he is zealous in the commandments for by being a virtuous person he will readily perform the commandments.

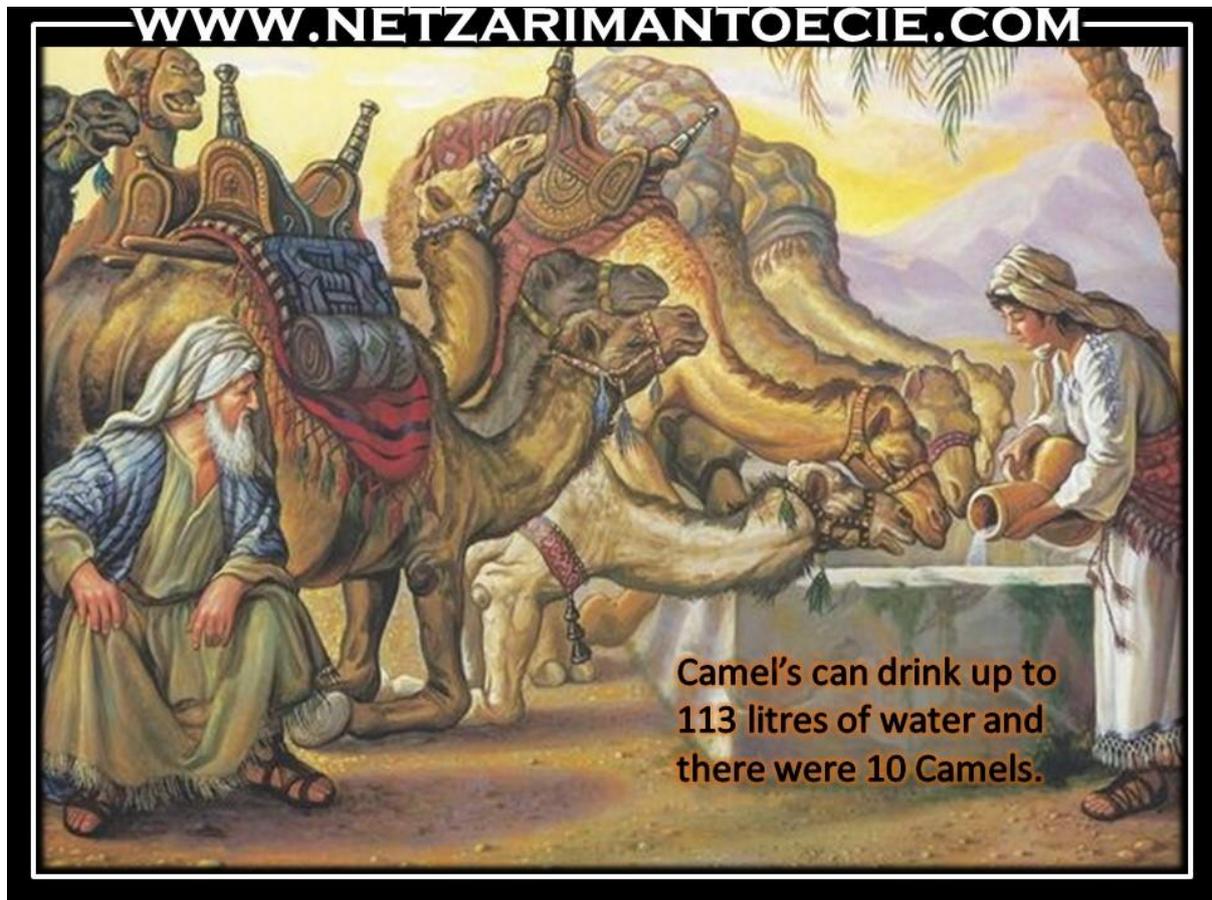
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Quote: The sages say that modesty & humility lead one to divine inspiration & the Shechinah resting upon one. Understand this well- how the performance of the commandments is moral excellence & vice versa

[Sha'arei Kedushah 2:2]

The choosing of a potential bride for Yitzchaq:

As wonderful as the story of Eliezer discovering Rivkah (Rebecca) is, we must not miss some of the unique revelations that come our way. It has been suggested that this was in fact the 1st time that Rivkah (Rebecca) had gone to draw water since she was the daughter of a wealthy family & could have had servants carry the Jug but remarkably she carried it, in unknown anticipation of the test which Eliezer was about to subject her to.



Though it was indeed customary to give a stranger a drink, to water his ten camels was indeed a great stretch, since it is known that a Camel had the capacity to drink 113 litres of water & there were 10 Camels, such was Rivkah's (Rebecca's) sense of charity.

As we read this story one unusual feature should confront us. Why is the Torah explicitly repeating Eliezer's description of the events that led him to discover Rivkah (Rebecca) but most importantly: **Why are the details different each time he tells the story?**

Has Eliezer a short memory or is there more we need to know? Is it possible that the Torah wants us to note the discrepancies because this is the story hidden in the story?

On the encounter with Rivkah (Rebecca) we find Eliezer acknowledging the kindness he sees by recalling the events that show the character of Abraham emphasising the aspects of kindness, truth & faith but we see a dramatic shift when he comes to the home of her Father Bethuel and is confronted by Laban. It also seems very notable that though Rivkah told the family of her encounter she does not instruct them on any of the details thereby

Eliezer on understanding the environment he has entered, changes his story. This is suggested because it is not Lavan that provides for the Camels as revealed in verse 32 but Eliezer the man himself. What was it that Eliezer saw when he was confronted by Lavan? Could it be that he perceived a character contrary to what he saw in Rivkah (Rebecca) therefore his story took upon very different focal dimensions with different emphasis?



The beauty of Rivkah (Rebecca) however cannot be underestimated as she is a young woman who has grown up in a world where wealth & prestige were everything yet her beauty shines through with her untainted, humble, generous character revealing the goodness of a character that is genuine and is unswayed even in a totally Pagan & selfish environment not unlike Abraham in Ur. We understand this environment from the times we meet Lavan who is portrayed as a schemer as with Jacob, dwelling in a family of idol worshippers. Therefore the 2nd time we hear the details from Eliezer he speaks of how YHWH has so richly blessed his Master & that all this wealth belonged to Yitzchaq (Isaac) and that Eliezer had given an oath to take a wife from his master's Father's house which is not quite correct. He then adds the divine sign to add providence to the story knowing whom he was dealing with.

What so greatly demonstrates the exceedingly pure, generous heart of Rivkah is her great willingness to depart from a wealthy, prestigious, idol worshipping house to a land she has not known, to a betrothed she has not even met, to embrace an Elohim whom she has not worshipped but she did it full of hope & expectancy and it is to these character traits that YHWH is drawn, since we read how he rewards her with the lineage of our beloved King &

Saviour Yahshua so these words found in the Brit Chadashah (the New Testament) should become a real inspiration for all of us in :

Gal 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

The Complimentary Nature of the Matriarchs

To fully grasp how both Sarah & Rivkah (Rebecca) fulfil their roles, we need to see their unique different personalities. We come to see Sarah as strong and decisive but was she kind and generous but then Rivkah was kind & generous but was she strong & decisive. Both are however doing the same through being complimentary to their husbands since Abraham was kind & generous & Yitzchaq (Isaac) had a strong leaning towards Esau & possibly was less focussed on the characteristics of care & compassion. Both woman saw what their husbands could not see and served in their roles to fulfil their purposes for the good. In so doing Rivkah was a perfect image of Sarah which brought Yitzchaq comfort after his mother. It is also thought that the true mark that Rivkah (Rebecca) had taken the place of Sarah was when the Shechinah (the Presence) once again settled over the tent the home of Sarah and so Yitzchaq was then comforted over the loss of his Mother.

The Significance of Character:

The great truth within this portion of Torah is reflected on the value of Character since Torah remains without value if it is unable to transform the character but even more we discover that the personality that is characterised by charity, gentleness and generosity is far more pliable and able to receive instruction and be transformed while a person rigid in his theology is forever inflexible and unable to change. This is Yahshua's thought in the verses concerned with the New wine in:

Luke 5:38 But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. 39 And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.' ”

Therefore, we find the Brit Chadashah especially the letters of Sha'ul (Paul) are heavily focussed on characteristics, that from a worldly prospective would be deemed as weak as we read concerning the fruit of the Ruach (Spirit) in:

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

This sense of Character is also applied to Sarah by Kepha (Peter) when speaking of the relationship of Husbands and wives which have the role of complimenting each other but Sarah reveals herself to be of a great Character in these words which today may seem hard to duplicate but they reveal real dedication to Abraham but even more so to YHWH who gave the promise in these words:

Kepha Aleph (1 Peter) 3:3-6 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of YHWH. 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in YHWH also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Adon (Master), whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any amazement.

This of course is not limited to wives but Kepha (Peter) teaches that the husband must be understanding, giving honour to His wife that his prayers may not be hindered. What is truly apparent throughout the scriptures whether in the Tanach (Old Testament) or the Brit Chadashah (the New Testament) is that a compassionate, tender-hearted courteous person is attractive to YHWH and is a light to those whom YHWH will call to be his in a world apposed to all that bears the truth.

Conclusion:

I hope that we can see that the statement of Sh'lomoh (Solomon) in fact can be seen as positive because it is about the legacy of one's life since at birth one has neither done good nor evil but at one's final rest the benefit of one's life can truly be established. It was through Sarah that the promises of Elohim would finally see the seed come into the world that would crush Ha Satan's head. Therefore, if we look to Yahshua the promised seed we discover that the day of his death was the most revered day in history that divided history between the promised redemption and the fulfilling of the promise which brought to the whole human race such blessing as cannot be numbered. It is therefore this encouragement through the lives of the faithful that we too can see our lives as significant and hope by our character that we too may present ourselves as acceptable to YHWH and at our passing that we might have made a unique contribution in the plan of redemption for the world. We will never fully know what our effect has been in the World until the final revelation of Yahweh at the Judgement seat but if we do not give up we will receive such blessing and hear the words of the Master the say: **"Well done good & faithful servant."**