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PARSHA NOTES

CHAYEI SARAH 5782

R. Jonathan Sacks, Behind the Bima Bonus Episode

The critical moments that defined my faith was פרשת חיי שרה. It begins with the death of Sarah, there is Abraham having lost his life companion.

And what did he do at that moment? When he should have had a crisis of faith, he understood that God said, "walk on ahead of Me." So what did he do? He bought the first plot of land. He made sure his son got married, so that he would have Jewish grandchildren. And then in that strange episode, he takes an additional wife whose name is Ketura, and he has six more children who become the fathers of many nations. In other words, instead of expecting God to do it for him, he realized that God was expecting him to do the hard work for Hashem.

R. Jonathan Sacks, Chayei Sarah (5773) – Hopes and Fears

Abraham, the first bearer of the covenant, receives two promises – both stated five times. The first is of a land. . .The second was the promise of children.

What, though, is the reality by the time Sarah dies? Abraham owns no land and has only one son (he had another, Ishmael, but was told that he would not be the bearer of the covenant).

Yes, Abraham will have a land. He will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, or suddenly, or easily. Nor will they occur without human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower will bring them about. The divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that God will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation, from God to Abraham and his children that they should act. God will help them. The outcome will be what God said it would. But not without total commitment from Abraham's family against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable obstacles.

Breishis 23:2

וַתָּמֶת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבֶּעַ הַיָּדָיִם הַזֵּאת הַיְּהוּדָה הַזֶּה הָאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיֵּבֵא אַבְרָהָם לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבַכְתָּהּ:

Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her.

Why did Avraham first mourn and then cry?

R. Soloveitchik

There were two aspects to his relationship with her:

- His wife and partner
- Foremother of the people

His first and primary mission was to convey his connection to her as אִמְנוּ, our Foremother.

He first focused on her role as our foremother and the leader of the people. Only then did he cry and focus on his personal connection to her.

Sarah was the foremother of the Jewish people.

Notes:

Breishis 23:13

וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־עֶפְרָאִן בְּאָזְנֵי עַם־הָאָרֶץ לֵאמֹר אַךְ אִם־אַתָּה לֹו שְׁמַעְנִי נָתַתִּי כֶסֶף הַשְּׂדֵה קַח מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת־מֵתִי שָׁמָּה:

and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there."

*The laws of marriage are learned from this acquisition of Ephron's field.
What is the deeper connection?*

R. Weinfeld

Judaism views death not as closure, but as a point in a cycle.

Right when Sarah passes away, Avraham begins to think about the future of his offspring and descendants and helps Yitzchak find a suitable partner.

Marriage and death aren't disconnected.

Notes:

Breishis 24:16

וַהֲנִיחַ טַבַּת מִרְאָהּ מֵאֹד בְּתוֹלָהּ וְאִישׁ לֹא יָדָעָהּ וַתֵּרֶד הָעֵינָה וַתִּמְלֵא כַדָּהּ וַתַּעַל:

The maiden was very beautiful, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.

What was the key trait of Rivkah?

R. Sacks

Through chesed, Jews humanised fate as, they believed, God's chesed humanises the world.

It also added a word to the English language. In 1535 Myles Coverdale published the first-ever translation of the Hebrew Bible into English (the work had been begun by William Tyndale who paid for it with his life, burnt at the stake in 1536). It was when he came to the word chesed that he realised that there was no English word which captured its meaning. It was then that, to translate it, he coined the word "loving-kindness."

Chesed is a key trait of Jewish people.

Notes:
