

Chayei Sarah – 5783

I admit that, after reading this week's parsha and several commentaries, I was stumped on a place to start my writing for today. On the surface, it would appear that the major focus of the story is Abraham's desire to secure a proper wife for his son Isaac after losing his beloved wife Sarah. We read about the death of Sarah, presumably so the midrash suggests after learning of her son Isaac's near-death experience. We are told of Abraham's desire to find a suitable burial place for Sarah given that he has been a nomad and never been rooted to one place. Once Sarah is buried, Abraham calls upon his most senior and trusted servant to take a journey back to Abraham's starting point and look for a suitable partner for Isaac understanding that he needed to ensure Isaac married not only well but with the right kind of woman. He wanted a woman who would be a proper helpmate to Isaac. We learn through the rest of the parsha that the woman is to be Rebecca.

Here is where I found my inspiration. The text tells us that Eliezer, the servant, immediately focussed his attentions on Rebecca because she had such generosity of spirit that she not only welcomed Eliezer profusely and rushed to give him water to drink. But she also insisted on tending to the needs of the animals, the beasts that accompanied Eliezer on his journey. The text, on the surface, implies that this generosity of spirit was what indicated to Eliezer that Rebecca was the one. It makes sense to assume that Rebecca presented as a fine, well-bred woman who would make an excellent match for Isaac. But is that really the only quality that Abraham was expecting from his future daughter-in-law. I would argue NO. What do we, as parents, wish from our children after we are gone? What do we hope will

be the legacy we leave for our children? What must Abraham have wanted more than anything as he contemplated his son Isaac's life after he was gone?

Throughout this parsha, we read of the respect accorded Abraham by the peoples he found himself among. Was that respect based upon just the fact that he was an old and venerable man of wealth? While the sages remind us that Abraham is the first person in the bible that is described as being old and from that, they deduce that he was wise and worthy of great honour. After all, he had broken with his own familial background, went with Sara in search of some place HaShem had told him would be his legacy, repeatedly battled with HaShem and throughout indicated his faith and acceptance of the one true God. His faith had been sorely tested and his journey through life had made him wise. It has to be that what he wanted as much as if not more than anything else was to ensure that his son Isaac carried through his life that same faith. Abraham wanted a partner for Isaac that would be as suitable a role model as his mother Sarah had been. Eliezer knew instinctively that Rebecca was more than up to the challenge.

But one final trial she was put through sealed the deal, so to speak. When asked by her family if she would accept marriage with Abraham, she quickly agreed. After all she was marrying into a very wealthy family. But then she was asked if she would wait ten days before going off on her journey to Isaac's home. She was prepared to go immediately, just as Abraham did not question and wait when called by HaShem to Lech Lecha. I found myself being reminded of Ruth's response to her mother-in-law Naomi in a similar situation. Whither thou goest, I go. Your people will be my people. And that is essentially what Rebecca is saying about a future life with Isaac and about the journey she would have to make to get there.

So off she goes, we might be able to say, into the wild blue yonder, into the home and religious beliefs of her husband. It is this idea of a journey in which we leave everything behind and embrace the future that I think is so key to the story at this point, with potent reminders for us as Jews. Our forefathers left the lands of their birth – Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Russian, North Africa, and so forth – and came to the new world. Most of them almost immediately changed their style of dress, adopted their new languages, learned new ways of making a living. But the one thing they did not change was their faith nor the ways in which they practiced it. They adopted their faith to the new circumstances they found themselves in, but they kept the essence of their Judaism and then worked hard to pass that legacy on to their children. Like Abraham, Rebecca made a journey into the unknown but relied on her faith in HaShem and the rightness of what she was doing to take with her and give her strength. I think Rebecca now is showing us that, like Abraham, life is a journey worth living and taking risks for as long as we continue to have faith in the benevolence of the divine. I like to believe that while our children have chosen new ways to practice our faith, they still believe and remain proud of the legacy passed down to them through the generations. We have to leave it to faith that so it will continue *me dor le dor*, from generation to generation. Shabbat Shalom.