

Our Torah portion for the week is *Chayyei Sarah* -- The Life of Sarah. Or -- the Hebrew is ambiguous -- it could equally well be read as "The Lives of Sarah". Sarah -- the archetypal mother of Judaism, and the Jewish people.

And while the parsha begins by recounting the years of Sarah's earthly life -- 100 years, and 20 years, and 7 years -- immediately afterward we learn that she dies, and is eulogized and mourned by her beloved Abraham, who then proceeds with the business of acquiring an appropriate burial place -- the Cave of *Makhpeilah*. Here, too, will Abraham himself be buried, as well as future generations of our founding family, as they are each, in Torah's words, "gathered up unto their people".

*Makhpeilah* -- an intriguing name. The Hebrew root means "double" -- the Cave with a double chamber. And while this is the first mention of burial in Torah, rabbinic midrash holds that this same cave is the burial place of none other than the very first people, adam and chava, Adam and Eve themselves.

*Makhpeilah* -- the place of doubling -- hinting, perhaps, at the double nature of life itself -- or even, of death. As Torah quotes Avraham's first words after Sarah's death, "*Ger v'toshav anochi*" -- *ger* -- a stranger, a sojourner -- as well as *toshav* -- a dweller -- am I". While on the one hand, this ground is indeed that place I dwell ... it is also true, on the other hand, that I am always in some ways a stranger, just passing through.

Of both Abraham and Sarah it is written that they were "*z'keinim, ba'im ba-yamim*" -- *zakein* -- old, aged, elders. Here we have yet another first in Torah -- even though many of their predecessors are said to have lived much longer in calendar time -- this is the first mention of elder-hood, from which we may well infer that Torah wants to tell us something, not about age, but rather about the accumulation of wisdom. And perhaps there's clue in the phrase which follows, "*ba ba-yamim*" -- which is often translated something like "along in years" -- but literally means something like "coming into the days".

One chassidic rabbi, the *Chiddushei haRim*, understands the meaning of "coming into days" as recognizing the unique opportunities, challenges, and gifts -- of each and every single day. This day, today, is not like any other day that has ever been, or ever will be. If we were to live this day, today, as if it were yesterday, or tomorrow, would we not indeed be missing the mark, and missing out on living -- and giving -- as fully as we possibly can. This quality of giving careful attention to the unique call of each day is encoded into the text of no less than the *Shema* itself. We are instructed to heed those things "*asher anochi m'tzavekha hayom*" -- "which the Divine I is commanding you today". Indeed, this is one of the most important qualities which comprise the legacy which is the spiritual inheritance that Sarah and Abraham have handed down to us -- through time and space -- to this very day.

With *Chayyei Sarah*, we arrive at the physical center of the first book of Torah, *Bereishit*, Genesis, the book of beginnings. And here in this parsha -- right alongside the inevitability of physical death and burial -- we find the beginning of another new idea -- the idea of continuing life through the imparting of values and tradition to the next generation. Though in the most basic physical sense, mother Sarah is dead and buried,

Torah tradition alludes also to the re-emergence of Sarah's eternal spiritual light.

And how is that? Perhaps you already know --

... As her beloved son Isaac / Yitzchak joins with his new-found bride Rebekkah in their tent of comfort and joy -- the light of Sarah's life -- and love -- is dramatically rekindled -- and once again it becomes apparent, for all to behold. And so it is to this very day -- through us, her children, and through our children -- and those we teach and inspire -- that Sarah's eternal light shines on, and on, ... and on.

So this Shabbat and always, may we all be blessed to live each and every day fully, as builders of the days to come: for peace and prosperity; for comfort and healing; and for joy and celebration, and let us say: Ameyn.