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## AVRAHAM MOURNS THE LOSS OF SARAH

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sin of Adam and Chavah.<sup>2</sup> We find this idea expressed in various other Midrashim as well, as can be seen from the following excerpts:

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- (2) Adam and Chavah ate from the Tree of Knowledge and made others eat from it as well, thus bringing death to the world.<sup>5</sup> Avraham and Sarah ate and caused others to eat, thus bringing life to the world, for the merit of their acts of *hachnasas orchim* (welcoming visitors) and *chesed* (lovingkindness) sustained the world.<sup>6</sup>
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6. Although after the Torah was given there were three pillars on which the world stood, at the present time it stood on only one pillar: that of lovingkindness. Avraham and Sarah's acts of *chesed* thus sustained the entire world. See *Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:12 with Alshich on *Parashas Lech Lecha* 12:10–13 above, and at greater length in *Alshich on Avos* (Feldheim, 2014), pp. 22–23.

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with them (to the Land of Israel)] the souls that they had made in Charan (Bereishis 12:5).<sup>8</sup>

- (4) Adam and Chavah caused the world to be cursed,<sup>9</sup> while Avraham and Sarah brought blessing to the world, as it says, [God said to Avraham,] “Through you all the families of the world will be blessed” (Bereishis 12:3).
- (5) Adam and Chavah caused the *Shechinah* to withdraw from the world, and Avraham and Sarah brought it back down again.<sup>10</sup>

Sarah rectified Chavah’s misdeeds in other ways as well. The Gemara tells us that Chavah succumbed to the seductions of the Snake, who “impregnated” her with a type of spiritual pollution (*Shabbos* 146a). In contrast, when Pharaoh, and later Avimelech, abducted Sarah and attempted to seduce her, she resisted them and, with Hashem’s help, they were unable to defile her. This then became another step in the rectification process.<sup>11</sup>

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8. *Bereishis Rabbah* 39:4 and 84:4 tell us that these souls are the people whom Avraham and Sarah had converted to the worship of God (see Rashi to verse). In effect, then, Avraham and Sarah corrected these souls and made them perfect again. As to how they accomplished this, *Bereishis Rabbah* 43:7 explains that Avraham and Sarah offered food and hospitality to all passersby. In exchange, they asked that their guests recognize God and thank Him for the food they were eating (see Rashi, *Bereishis* 21:33).

9. See *Bereishis* 3:16–19.

10. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 19:7, where the Midrash describes how Adam and Chavah caused the *Shechinah* to withdraw from the world and ascend to the first (lowest) of the seven firmaments. Future generations of sinners caused the *Shechinah* to withdraw further, one firmament at a time, until it was in the seventh (highest) firmament. Then Avraham arose and brought the *Shechinah* from the seventh firmament down to the sixth. Future generations of Avraham’s descendants brought it down further, one firmament at a time, until it was brought from the first firmament back to earth by Moses. See also Alshich above, *Parashas Lech Lecha* 14:19–20.

11. The Alshich adds that this extremely important result also helps explain why God allowed Sarah to be subjected to these terrible ordeals in the first place.

As noted above (footnote 2), the full rectification of Adam and Chavah’s sin will not occur until the End of Days. Indeed, the Alshich explains that it is precisely because further rectification was still necessary that Rivkah was subjected to a similar ordeal, with similar results (*Bereishis* 26:7ff). He adds that Kabbalistically speaking,

Sarah rectified Chavah's sin still further by keeping the three special mitzvos that are especially incumbent upon all Jewish women: the lighting of Shabbos candles, separating *challah*,<sup>12</sup> and observing the laws of *niddah*.<sup>13</sup> The Midrash explains how (specifically) these three mitzvos are connected to three aspects of Chavah's sin:<sup>14</sup>

Man's soul is compared to a flame, or light, as it says: 'נֵר ה' אֱדָרְךָ, *Man's soul is the candle of Hashem (Mishlei 20:27)*. By bringing death upon Adam, Chavah extinguished the "light of the world." Women therefore light Shabbos candles to bring light back into the world.

Adam is compared to *challah*: After God caused mist to "ascend from the earth and water the surface of the soil" (*Bereishis 2:6*), the first thing He did was "form man (Adam) from the dust of the ground" (*Bereishis 2:7*); [that is, He "separated" Adam from the dough-like mixture of earth and water and created Adam to serve Him]. Since Chavah brought ruin upon Adam (*challah*), women were commanded that the first thing they are to do when they mix flour and water and make dough is to "separate" *challah* from that dough [and give it to the Kohen who serves God in the Beis HaMikdash].

By bringing mortality and death upon Adam she is considered to have spilled his blood. Women shall bring atonement for Chavah's sin by observing the laws of *niddah*.

As to how we know (as stated above) that Sarah herself had

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all of the Patriarchs [and Matriarchs] had a connection with the soul of Adam [and Chavah, respectively], and could thus play an effective role in rectifying their failings.

12. When flour and water are mixed to make dough (assuming a large enough quantity is being made), there is a mitzvah to separate a small amount of the dough and give it to a Kohen. This small amount is called *challah*. (Nowadays we burn it instead of giving it to a Kohen.)

13. See Mishnah *Shabbos* 2:6.

14. The Alshich cites this Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishis 32*) briefly in a parallel discussion in his comments to *Bereishis 24:67*; we cite it here more fully. See also *Bereishis Rabbah 17:8* and Rashi, *Shabbos 32a* וְהָיָה הַיָּמִין נוֹטֵל וְשִׁמְתֶכֶם.

already partially rectified these three aspects of Chavah's sin through her fulfillment of these mitzvos, the Midrash<sup>15</sup> states the following:

- (1) The challah that Sarah baked stayed fresh all week.
- (2) The candles that she lit before Shabbos burned from one *Erev Shabbos* to the next.
- (3) The Cloud of Glory manifested itself at the entrance to her tent.

Clearly, Sarah merited these three miracles because of the care and zeal with which she observed the three parallel mitzvos of *challah*, Shabbos candles, and avoiding the spiritual impurity of *niddah*.<sup>16</sup>

One more preface is necessary in order to answer the questions asked above.

There were three possible reasons why Avraham should theoretically mourn Sarah's death:

- (1) The rectification of the world was curtailed.
- (2) Sarah suffered a great personal loss in that she died before her time.<sup>17</sup>
- (3) Avraham himself suffered an irreplaceable loss since, as the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 22a) states, "Whoever loses his first wife, it is as if the Beis HaMikdash has been destroyed in his lifetime."

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15. *Bereishis Rabbah* 60:16. See also Rashi, *Bereishis* 24:67.

16. The laws of *niddah* are referred to as פְּתָחֵי נִדְּהָ, "entrances" of *niddah* (*Avos* 3:18); this correlates to the "entrance" of the tent.

17. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 45:5. As the Alshich notes, the Midrash there explains that Sarah was supposed to live the same number of years as Avraham (175). But when Hagar became pregnant from Avraham and behaved contemptuously towards her, Sarah requested that God's judgment should be brought to bear against Avraham, saying, "Let God judge between me and you!" (*Bereishis* 16:5). For this she was punished and died early, at the age of 127.

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