

ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת חיי שרה

23 NOVEMBER 2024

AVRAHAM MOURNS THE LOSS OF SARAH

Chapter 23

1) The life of Sarah was a hundred years and twenty years and seven years — the years of the life of Sarah.

א) אַיִהִיו חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה.

2) Sarah died in Kiryas Arba which is Chevron in the land of Canaan and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her.

ב) וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֵא אַבְרָהָם לְסֹפֵד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבַכְתָּהּ.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the verse end with the words *the years of the life of Sarah*? What does this add to what has already been said?
2. Why is it necessary to mention two names for the place she died: *Kiryas Arba* and *Chevron*?
3. Since it was obvious who Avraham was coming to eulogize, why does it say "to eulogize Sarah" instead of "to eulogize **her**"?

Bereishis Rabbah (14:6) states that Avraham (and Sarah, as we see below) came to the world to rectify the damage caused to the world by the sin of Adam and Chavah. To give just one example, by eating from the Tree of Knowledge and causing Adam to eat, Chavah brought death to the world. Avraham and Sarah ate and caused others to eat, thus bringing life to the world, for the merit of their acts of *hachnasas orchim* and *chesed* alone sustained the world (before the Torah was given).

Sarah rectified Chava's misdeeds in other ways as well, such as by keeping the three mitzvos that are especially incumbent upon all Jewish women: the lighting of Shabbos candles, separating *challah*, and observing the laws of *niddah*. (Indeed, in the merit of these mitzvot, Sarah's candles stayed lit from one erev Shabbos to the next, the *challah* she baked stayed fresh all week, and the Cloud of Glory manifested itself at the entrance to her tent.)

The Yalkut Shimoni (*Bereishis* 32) explains how these three mitzvos are connected to three aspects of Chava's sin: Man's soul is compared to a flame, or light, as it says: גַּר ה' נְשַׁמַּת אָדָם, *Man's soul is the candle of Hashem* (*Mishlei* 20:27). By bringing death upon Adam, Chava extinguished the "light of the world." Women therefore light Shabbos candles to bring light back into the world. Adam is also compared to *challah*, in that God formed Adam from the ground, "separating" him from the dough-like mixture of earth and water on the ground. Since Chava 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). Finally, by bringing mortality and death upon Adam she is considered to have spilled his blood, so women shall bring atonement for Chava's sin by observing the laws of *niddah*.

Now, Avraham could have had three reasons for mourning Sarah:

1. The rectification of the world was curtailed – But this was not so, as Rivka had already been born and she took over this role from Sarah. We see this from the fact that the three miracles (candles, *challah* and Clouds of Glory) returned when Yitzchak married her.
2. Sarah suffered a great personal loss in that she died before her time [as she was supposed to live as many years as Avraham (175) but she was punished for the incident with Hagar] – But this would only be appropriate had Sarah not been able to complete her self-perfection because she lacked the mitzvos that she would have performed in those last years of her life, and she did not need her full quota of years to bring herself to a state of perfection. That is the meaning of the (seemingly unnecessary) phrase at the end of the verse, “*the years of the life of Sarah.*” The Torah writes these extra words to tell us that Sarah accomplished all she was supposed to accomplish, despite her shortened life. Her 127 years were all *the years* necessary to fulfill the purpose of *the life of Sarah*. **[This answers Question 1.]**
3. Her death was an enormous loss to Avraham personally, as the Gemara states that losing one’s wife is like the Beis HaMikdash has been destroyed in his lifetime – But this did not apply in Avraham’s case, for as our Sages also tell us, the Avos were the vehicle through which the Divine Presence could be perceived in the world (i.e., playing the same role as the Beis HaMikdash). Therefore, even after Sarah died, for Avraham the “Beis HaMikdash” was still there.

So why did Avraham need to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her? The answer to this question is given in the next verse: *Sarah died in Kiryas Arba which is Chevron*. We asked why the verse needs to give two names to the same place. The answer may be that the word “Chevron” is based on the word חיבור, which means “connection” or “attachment.” The city Kiryas Arba – or more specifically, *Me’aras HaMachpelah*, which is located there – is the place where the physical world is connected and attached to the higher spiritual worlds. It is the gateway to Gan Eden. The verse is accordingly to be understood as saying that because of Sarah’s great righteousness, upon her death she immediately became connected and attached (חיבור/הקְבָרוֹן) to the higher worlds and to Gan Eden Above by being buried in Kiryas Arba (i.e., *Me’aras HaMachpelah*). **[This answers Question 2.]**

It is for this reason that the Torah states to eulogize Sarah rather than to eulogize “*her.*” The emphasis on her name tells us that Avraham was coming to eulogize her only because of who she was (and not for any of the other reasons). She was Sarah, the great *tzaddekes* – connected to the highest worlds – and there is an obligation to mourn the death of a *tzaddik*. **[This answers Question 3.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKadosh” (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

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