



Sermon Tidbits

NOVEMBER 2, 2015

Parashat Chayei Sarah

A Lasting Legacy

And the life of Sarah (Genesis 23:1)

ויהיו חיי שרה (בראשית כג:א)

On November 5, 1995, following a peace rally in the square of Tel Aviv that would later bear his name, then Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin was assassinated by 25-year old law student Yigal Amir. His murder, followed by a series of devastating suicide bombings several years later, seemingly halted the progress toward a permanent peace agreement that Rabin began. While today the vision of peace in Israel seems farther away than ever, Rabin's actions before his death left a critical legacy.

Many commentaries note that while the name of the *parashah*—Chayei Sarah—“the Life of Sarah,” seems to indicate that the portion would contain details of the matriarch's life, Sarah in fact makes only the briefest of appearances, as she dies in the second verse: “And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba...” (23:2) The rest of the portion details her burial, the purchase of the Machpelah Cave, and the subsequent search for a wife for Isaac. Why then is the *parashah* named after Sarah when she is barely mentioned? We find a possible answer in the quality of the home that Rebecca builds together with Isaac. When Rebecca returns to Canaan we read that, “Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebecca, and she became his wife; and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted for his mother.” (24:67) Rashi explains that, “she [Rebecca] became like Sarah, his mother, for as long as Sarah lived, there was a light burning from one Sabbath eve to the next, and there was a blessing on the dough, and there was a cloud hanging over the tent, and when she died, these ceased. But when Rebecca entered [the tent] they returned.” Rebecca continued the spiritual values and legacy that Sarah initiated and inculcated in her son Isaac.

Describing the legacy of Yitzchak Rabin, Shimon Peres [wrote](#), “Rabin bequeathed to us a model of politics at its best. Politics whose essence is serving the public, serving the state, service that will influence coming generations. Rabin's legacy to the state in those years was courage, respect, and equality...Rabin the man will not return, but his legacy will stay with us as long as there are citizens in the state of Israel who fight for it. The murder took us back but it cannot stop the wheels of history.” Yitzchak Rabin dedicated his life to the fight for a secure and safe state of Israel. But, he also demonstrated willingness—when he believed that he had a credible partner—to take great risks and make difficult, painful sacrifices to forge peace with Israel's neighbors.

His legacy lives on today. Israel waits and yearns for a Palestinian leader who is serious about peace and who is willing to join in negotiating a fair and lasting agreement. For, every government leader agrees that if and when such a partner appears, Israel will be willing to follow Yitzchak Rabin's lead, and make the difficult choices for peace. While the goal might seem far in the distance, Rabin's leadership and legacy will live on long into the future. ■

An Eternal Jewish Landmark

And Abraham paid to Ephron (Genesis 25:16)

וישקול אברהם לעפרון (בראשית כה:טז)

U.S. outrage helped prevent UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization—from declaring the Western Wall an extension of the Al Aksa mosque, However [UNESCO](#) still passed a resolution

pushed by the Palestinians that both Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem and the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron be listed as Muslim sites.

One of the few places explicitly purchased by our ancestors is the Machpelah Cave—now known as the Cave of the Patriarchs—for which Abraham paid “four hundred shekels of silver.” (25:16) While it may be listed by UNESCO as a Muslim site, Palestinian claims can never erase historical fact, nor will they bring the two sides closer to peace.

The cynical Palestinian attempt to gain legitimacy through one-sided actions in an international forum and denying the Bible, will not bring the two sides closer to a peace agreement, in fact, it will only further tear two similar religions apart.

Ishmael's Repentance

Isaac and Ishmael his sons (Genesis 25:9)

יצחק וישמעאל בניו (בראשית כה:ט)

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed a wave of attacks against Israeli citizens across the Jewish state, especially in Jerusalem. These attacks have been fueled by numerous inflammatory and inaccurate statements about Israel and the Temple Mount by Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas and other Palestinian leaders. Recently the United States responded, sending a strong message to President Abbas that he must curtail the Palestinian incitement, condemn violence, and increase security cooperation with Israel. The U.S. State Department is cutting its economic aid to the Palestinian Authority from \$370 million to \$290 million annually. The decision to reduce aid follows Palestinian actions at the International Criminal Court (ICC) and a mandatory deduction for the PA's payment to Israeli-held prisoners. Additionally members of Congress placed a temporary hold on U.S. aid to the Palestinians until Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas takes serious steps to end incitement and quell violence. These measures are a forceful way of communicating to the Palestinians that they must repent and change their behavior if they want continued American support. Ishmael himself set the example for his descendants to emulate that repentance is possible.

After the birth of Isaac, we read that when Sarah “saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne unto Abraham, *metzachek*—‘making sport,’” (Genesis 21:9) she insisted that Abraham permanently banish Hagar and Ishmael from their home. What is the meaning of the term “making sport?” What did Ishmael do which so greatly concerned and worried Sarah that she took such drastic measures? Rashi (on verse 9) quoting the Midrash suggests that the phrase, “making sport,” “denotes murder,” i.e. that Ishmael, feeling threatened by his younger brother, “played” with him in a manner that endangered Isaac's life. Seeing that her son was in real danger, Sarah insisted that Abraham send Ishmael away. Yet, we later learn that Ishmael changed his ways. After Abraham's death, we read that “Ishmael and Isaac, his sons, buried him in the Cave of Machpelah.” (25:9) How did these two brothers reunite and what was Ishmael doing at the funeral? Rashi explains: “From here [we learn] that Ishmael repented...” He recognized the error of his ways and no longer felt the need to threaten his younger brother's physical well-being.

The Palestinians must similarly “repent,” and stop the dangerous, deadly incitement to violence as well as the glorification of terrorists who murder innocent civilians. It must halt its one-sided actions in international venues such as the International Criminal Court, and it must halt its ongoing payments to terrorists sitting in jail for acts of violence against Israelis. If Ishmael himself repented, the Palestinians certainly can as well. ■

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