

CHAYEI SARAH

Making Every Day Count

Sarah's Blueprint for Meaningful Living



Dedicated in loving memory of Susan Moses on the occasion of her yahrtzeit, 16 Cheshvan

לזכרון ולעילוי נשמת זמירה לאה בת צבי הלוי

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Chayei Sarah

Sarah dies at age 127 and is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron, which Abraham purchases from Ephron the Hittite for four hundred shekels of silver.

Abraham's servant Eliezer is sent, laden with gifts, to Charan, to find a wife for Isaac. At the village well, Eliezer asks G-d for a sign: when the maidens come to the well, he will ask for some water to drink; the woman who will offer to give his camels to drink as well shall be the one destined for his master's son.

Rebecca, the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel, appears at the well and passes the "test." Eliezer is invited to their home, where he repeats the story of the day's events. Rebecca returns with Eliezer to the land of Canaan, where they encounter Isaac praying in the field. Isaac marries Rebecca, loves her, and is comforted over the loss of his mother.

Abraham takes a new wife, Keturah (Hagar), and fathers six additional sons, but Isaac is designated as his only heir. Abraham dies at age 175 and is buried beside Sarah by his two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

Isaac and Rebecca endure twenty childless years, until their prayers are answered and Rebecca conceives. She experiences a difficult pregnancy as the “children struggle inside her”; G-d tells her that “there are two nations in your womb,” and that the younger will prevail over the elder.

Esau emerges first; Jacob is born clutching Esau’s heel. Esau grows up to be “a cunning hunter, a man of the field”; Jacob is “a wholesome man,” a dweller in the tents of learning. Isaac favors Esau; Rebecca loves Jacob. Returning exhausted and hungry from the hunt one day, Esau sells his birthright (his rights as the firstborn) to Jacob for a pot of red lentil stew.

In Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, Isaac presents Rebecca as his sister, out of fear that he will be killed by someone coveting her beauty. He farms the land, reopens the wells dug by his father Abraham, and digs a series of his own wells: over the first two there is strife with the Philistines, but the waters of the third well are enjoyed in tranquility.

Esau marries two Hittite women. Isaac grows old and blind, and expresses his desire to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father's favorite food, Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father. Jacob receives his father's blessings for "the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land" and mastery over his brother. When Esau returns and the deception is revealed, all Isaac can do for his weeping son is to predict that he will live by his sword, and that when Jacob falters, the younger brother will forfeit his supremacy over the elder.

Jacob leaves home for Charan to flee Esau's wrath and to find a wife in the family of his mother's brother, Laban. Esau marries a third wife—Machalath, the daughter of Ishmael.

The Life of Sarah

A Remarkable Life

TEXT 1

Bereishit (Genesis) 23:1–2

וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שְׁנַיִם חֲמֵי שָׂרָה:
וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֵא אַבְרָהָם לְסֹפֵד
לְשָׂרָה וּלְבַכְתָּהּ:

And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.

And Sarah died in Kiriath Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her.

TEXT 2

Rashi, ad loc.

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki

(Rashi)

1040–1105

Most noted biblical and Talmudic commentator.

Born in Troyes, France, Rashi studied in the famed *yeshivot* of Mainz and Worms. His commentaries on the Pentateuch and the Talmud, which focus on the straightforward meaning of the text, appear in virtually every edition of the Talmud and Bible.

“ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים”. לכך נכתב שנה בכל כלל וכלל, לומר לך שכל אחד נדרש לעצמו, בת מאה כבת עשרים לחטא, מה בת עשרים לא חטאה, שהרי אינה בת עונשין, אף בת מאה בלא חטא, ובת עשרים כבת שבע ליופי. “שני חיי שרה”. כלן שוין לטובה.

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years.” The reason that the word “years” was written after every numeral is to tell you that every numeral is to be expounded upon individually: when she was one hundred years old, she was like a twenty-year-old regarding sin. Just as a twenty-year-old has not sinned, because she is not liable to punishment, so, too, when she was one hundred years old, she was without sin. And when she was twenty, she was like a seven-year-old in beauty.

“The years of the life of Sarah.” All of them equally good.

Full Days

TEXT 3

Bereishit (Genesis) 24:1

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וְה' בֵּרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל:

And Abraham was old, advanced in days, and G-d blessed Abraham with everything.

TEXT 4

Zohar, vol. 1, 129b

"אַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וְה' בֵּרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל." רַבִּי יְהוּדָה פָּתַח "אֲשֶׁרִי תִבְחַר וְתִקְרַב יִשְׁכֵּן חֲצַרְיָד", הַאִי קָרָא אֶתְמָה, אָבֵל זָפָא הוּא בַר נֶשׁ דְּאוֹרְחוּי אֶתְפִּשְׁרֵן קָמִי קוּדְשָׁא בְרִינָה הוּא וְאִיהוּ אֶתְרַעִי בִּיה לְקַרְבָּא לִיָּה לְגַבִּיָּה.

תָּא חֲזִי, אַבְרָהָם אֶתְקָרִיב לְגַבִּיָּה וְתַאוּבָתִיָּה דִּילִיָּה הָוָה כָּל יוֹמוֹי בְּהַאִי, וְלֹא אֶתְקָרִיב אַבְרָהָם בְּיוֹמָא חֲדָא אוּ בְּזַמְנָא חֲדָא, אֲלֵא עוּבְדוּי קָרִיבוּ לִיָּה בְּכָל יוֹמוֹי מִדְּרָגָא לְדְרָגָא, עַד דְּאֶסְתַּלַּק בְּדְרָגוּי. כִּד הָוָה סִיב וְעָאֵל בְּדְרָגִין עֲלֵאִין כְּדָקָא חֲזִי דְכַתִּיב וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן, וְכַדִּין בָּא בַּיָּמִים בְּאִינּוֹן יוֹמִין עֲלֵאִין בְּאִינּוֹן יוֹמִין יְדִיעָאן בְּרָזָא דְמַהִימְנוּתָא. וְה' בֵּרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל. דְּמַתְמָן נְפָקִין כָּל בְּרַכָּאן וְכָל טִיבוּ.

Zohar

The seminal work of kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. The *Zohar* is a mystical commentary on the Torah, written in Aramaic and Hebrew. According to the Arizal, the *Zohar* contains the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in the Land of Israel during the 2nd century. The *Zohar* has become one of the indispensable texts of traditional Judaism, alongside and nearly equal in stature to the Mishnah and Talmud.

"And Abraham was old, advanced in days, and G-d blessed Abraham with everything."

Rabbi Yehudah opened up and said, “Happy is the man You choose and bring near to dwell in Your courtyards.” This verse is explained, and praised is the man whose ways are correct before G-d, and he is desirable, so that G-d will desire to bring him close.

Come and see: Abraham was brought close to Him, and he desired the closeness of G-d all day. Abraham was not brought close to G-d for one day or on one occasion, but rather by his actions he grew closer to G-d for all his days, progressing from level to level until he reached lofty heights.

This, then, is the explanation of our verse. When Abraham “was old” and reached extremely lofty levels in his relationship with G-d, he was “advanced in days,” (lit., “He came with his days”)—he brought with him all his lofty days, the days of faith he experienced over the course of his life. “And G-d blessed Abraham with everything,” that these days of faith became the source of all blessing and goodness in Abraham’s life.

The Value of a Moment of Life

Life Takes Precedence

TEXT 5

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Shulchan Aruch HaRav 328:2

מי שיש לו חולי של סכנה מצוה לחלל עליו את השבת והזריז הרי זה משובח והשואל הרי זה שופך דמים והנשאל הרי זה מגונה שהיה לו לדרוש ברבים שמותר ואפילו ספק נפשות דוחה את השבת שנאמר אשר יעשה האדם וחי בהם מה תלמוד לומר וחי בהם כלומר ראה שיהא חי ודאי בעשיית המצות ולא שיבא על ידי כך לידי ספק סכנה.

If someone is so sick that their life is in danger, it is a mitzvah to violate the Shabbat for their sake.

Whoever rushes to violate the Shabbat in this way is praiseworthy; whoever hesitates to ask whether it is permitted, it is as if he spills innocent blood. Furthermore, the Rabbi who is asked this question is dishonored by it, since he should have taught his entire community that it is permitted to violate the Shabbat to save a life.

Even in a situation where there's only a chance that a life will be saved, Shabbat is overridden, as the verse states, "These are my commandments that man

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (Alter Rebbe)
1745–1812

Chasidic rebbe, halachic authority, and founder of the Chabad movement. The Alter Rebbe was born in Liozna, Belarus, and was among the principal students of the Magid of Mezeritch. His numerous works include the *Tanya*, an early classic containing the fundamentals of Chabad Chasidism, and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, an expanded and reworked code of Jewish law.

should keep and live by them” [Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:5]. Why does it say, “live by them?” To teach us that a mitzvah should always be performed when there is a certainty for life, and it should never bring to a predicament that can lead to a question of death.

Every Single Moment

TEXT 6

Talmud Tractate Yoma, 85a

Babylonian Talmud

A literary work of monumental proportions that draws upon the legal, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and historical traditions of Judaism. The 37 tractates of the Babylonian Talmud contain the teachings of the Jewish sages from the period after the destruction of the Second Temple through the 5th century CE. It has served as the primary vehicle for the transmission of the Oral Law and the education of Jews over the centuries; it is the entry point for all subsequent legal, ethical, and theological Jewish scholarship.

“מצאווהו חי מפקחין ואם מת יניחוהו.” מצאווהו חי—פשיטא? לא!
צריכא, דאפילו לחיי שעה.

“If you find him alive, you must rescue him, but if he is dead, you must leave him.”

“If you found him alive” is obvious! [Why is the Mishnah repeating itself?]

But no, this repetition is indeed necessary, to teach us that even if the person we are rescuing will live only for a short time, we must still break the laws of Shabbat and rescue him.

TEXT 7

Rabbi Menachem Meiri, *Beit Habechirah* to Yoma, *ad loc.*

התחילו לפקוח ובדקו בחוטמו ומצאוהו חי משלימין בפיקוחו אף
על פי שנתברר שאי אפשר לו לחיות אפילו שעה אחת שבאותו
שעה ישוב בלבו ויתודה.

We begin to rescue him and check his breath to find that he is still alive, and we are obligated to complete our rescue. This is so even if it is clear to us that he will not survive the hour. In that one hour, he may have an opportunity to return to G-d and confess his transgressions before his Creator.

Rabbi Menachem Meiri
1249–1310

Talmudist and author. Meiri was born in Provence, France. His monumental work, *Beit Habechirah*, summarizes in a lucid style the discussions of the Talmud along with the commentaries of the major subsequent rabbis. Despite its stature, the work was largely unknown for many generations, and thus has had less influence on subsequent halachic development.

TEXT 8

Zohar, vol. I, 129b

זָכָאִין אֵינּוֹן מְאָרִיחוֹן דְּתְשׁוּבָה דְּהָא בְּשַׁעֲתָא חֲדָא בְּיוֹמָא חֲדָא
בְּרִגְעָא חֲדָא קְרִיבִין לְגַבִּי קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא, מִה דְּלֹא הָוֵה הָכִי אֶפִּילוּ
לְצַדִּיקִים גְּמוּרִים דְּאֵתְקְרִיבוּ גַבִּי קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא בְּכַמָּה שָׁנִין.

Glad are those who have mastered returning to G-d, for in one hour, one day, one moment, they are drawn close to G-d in a way that the completely righteous are unable to accomplish in several years.

Not Action, but Life Itself

TEXT 9

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen of Radin, *Biur Halachah to Orach Chayim 329:4*

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen Kagan
(*Chafetz Chayim*)
1839–1933

Pre-WWII Polish halachist and ethicist. Rabbi Kagan was the dean of the illustrious yeshiva in Radin, Poland. A prolific author on topics of halachah and ethical behavior, he is often called *Chafetz Chayim* after his first work, a comprehensive digest of laws pertaining to ethical speech. His magnum opus, on which he worked for 28 years, is *Mishnah Berurah*, a concise commentary on the first section of the Shulchan Aruch. He also authored *Bi'ur Halachah* on the Shulchan Aruch and numerous other works.

כתב המאירי ביומא וזה לשונו ואף על פי שנתברר שאי אפשר לו לחיות אפילו שעה אחת שבאותה שעה ישוב בלבו ויתודה, עד כאן לשונו. אמנם באמת נראה דכל זה הוא לטעמא בעלמא אבל לדינא לא תלוי כלל במצות דאין הטעם דדחינן מצוה אחת בשביל הרבה מצות אלא דחינן כל המצות בשביל חיים של ישראל וכדיליף לה שמואל מ"וחי בהם" כדכתב הרמב"ם פרק ב' מהלכות שבת שאין משפטי התורה נקמה בעולם אלא רחמים וחסד ושלום בעולם.

The Meiri writes, on Tractate Yoma, "In that one hour, he may have an opportunity to return to G-d and confess his transgressions before his Creator."

The reality is that this explanation of the reason why we violate Shabbat to save a person on the brink of death is simply a reasoning offered for the law. As a matter of practical legal decision, however, whether or not we rescue the individual does not depend on the mitzvot they are destined to perform; the logic is not predicated on the assumption that we set aside one mitzvah (that is, Shabbat) for the sake of many other mitzvot. Rather, it is simply that a Jewish life takes precedence over all other commandments.

As Samuel [in the Talmud] learns from the verse, “and live by them,” and as Maimonides writes in Chapter Two of the Laws of Shabbat: The dictates of Torah never bring vengeance but rather bring mercy, kindness, and peace into the world.

TEXT 10

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, Tashbatz 1:54

מחללין עליו שבת אפילו בשביל שעה אחת מפני שגדול הוא לפני המקום הצלת נפשות אפילו הצלה מועטת כחיי שעה שאפילו שבת שהיא שקולה כנגד כל התורה מחללין עליה.

We violate the Shabbat even to extend a person’s life for a short time, because saving a life is great in the eyes of G-d. To save a life for even a moment longer is more precious to G-d than Shabbat, which is compared to the entire Torah.

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (Rashbatz)

c. 1361–1444

Physician, poet, rabbi, and philosopher. Duran was a student of philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, and especially of medicine, which he practiced for a number of years in Palma, Spain. He left Spain in the aftermath of the 1391 massacres and moved to Algiers, where, in addition to practicing medicine, he later became the chief rabbi. Among his many works is *Magen Avot*, a philosophical commentary on Tractate Avot.

TEXT 11

Rashi to Tractate Sanhedrin, 74a

דכי אמר רחמנא לעבור על המצות משום וחי בהם משום דיקרה בעיניו נשמה של ישראל.

When the Merciful One tells us to transgress because of “and live by them,” it is because a Jewish soul is precious in His eyes.

The Psychology and Spirit of Everyday Meaning

1. The Heart Follows Behavior

TEXT 12

Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah 16

דע, כי האדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו, ולבו וכל מחשבתיו תמיד אחר מעשיו שהוא עוסק בהם אם טוב ואם רע, ואפילו רשע גמור בלבבו וכל יצר מחשבות לבו רק רע כל היום, אם יערה רוחו וישים השתדלותו ועסקו בהתמדה בתורה ובמצות, ואפילו שלא לשם שמים, מיד ינטה אל הטוב, ומתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה, ובכח מעשיו ימית היצר הרע, כי אחרי הפעלות נמשכים הלבבות.

ואפילו אם יהיה אדם צדיק גמור ולבבו ישר ותמים, חפץ בתורה ובמצות, אם יעסק תמיד בדברים של דפי, כאלו תאמר דרך משל שהכריחו המלך ומנהו באמנות רעה, באמת אם כל עסקו תמיד כל היום באותו אמנות, ישוב לזמן מן הזמנים מצדקת לבו להיות רשע גמור, כי ידוע הדבר ואמת שכל האדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו, כמו שאמרנו. ועל כן אמרו חכמים ז"ל (מכות כג, ב) רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות, כדי להתפיס בהן כל מחשבותינו ולהיות בהן כל עסקינו להטיב לנו באחריתנו. כי מתוך הפעלות הטובות אנחנו נפעלים להיות טובים וזוכים לחיי עד.

Sefer Hachinuch

A work on the biblical commandments. Four aspects of every mitzvah are discussed in this work: the definition of the mitzvah; ethical lessons that can be deduced from the mitzvah; basic laws pertaining to the observance of the mitzvah; and who is obligated to perform the mitzvah, and when. The work was composed in the 13th century by an anonymous author who refers to himself as "the Levite of Barcelona." It has been widely thought that this referred to Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Barcelona (Re'ah); however, this view has been contested.

Know that a person is conditioned by his own actions; his heart and thoughts always follow after the actions that he does, whether good or bad. And even he who at heart is a complete sinner and desires only evil, if his spirit shall be enlightened and he will put his efforts and actions to persist in Torah and mitzvot—even if not for the sake of Heaven—he shall immediately be swayed to the good.

And from that which is not for its own sake comes that which is for its own sake; for the hearts are drawn after the actions. [The opposite is also true:] A person can be perfectly righteous and his or her heart straight and innocent, desiring of Torah and mitzvot. Yet, if he or she shall constantly deal with improper things, you could compare it to someone who was forced by the king to work a wicked craft: if he or she constantly works in that wicked craft—eventually, from a righteous place, they will have become completely evil. For it is a demonstrable truth that every person is conditioned by his actions, as has been stated.

The sages, may their memory be blessed, said about this, “G-d wanted to grant merits to Israel, therefore he gave them many laws and commandments,” to occupy all of our thoughts and all our deeds, to benefit us in the World to Come.

TEXT 13

Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, Tzavaat Harivash 1:1

להיות תמים בעבודתו יתברך עבודה תמה, [ועיקר שלא לשכוח הדברים] ללמוד בכל יום שיעור מוסר הן רב הן מעט. ולראות תמיד לדבק את עצמו במדות טובות והנהגות ישרות, ושלא להניח שום יום מעשיות מצוה בו הן קלה הן חמורה, וסימנך הוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, פירוש זהיר מלשון והמשכילים יזהירו <כזוהר>, רוצה לומר הנשמה תאיר ותזהיר ממצוה קלה כבחמורה, כי רחמנא לבא בעי.

וזהו פירוש "שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע", שומר מלשון ואביו שמר את הדבה, היינו מצפה, כן צריך להיות ממתין ומצפה מבוקר עד ערב אולי יזדמן לו איזה מצוה, וסימנך חסד אל כל היום.

**Rabbi Yisrael
Baal Shem Tov**
(Besht)

1698–1760

Founder of the Chasidic movement. Born in Slutsk, Belarus, the Baal Shem Tov was orphaned as a child. He served as a teacher's assistant and clay digger before founding the Chasidic movement and revolutionizing the Jewish world with his emphasis on prayer, joy, and love for every Jew, regardless of his or her level of Torah knowledge.

One should be sincere and consistent in their divine service. The main thing is not to forget to learn from ethical works every day, whether a large amount or a little. One should also always seek to attach him- or herself to good character traits and upright behavior, and not allow any day to pass without performing a mitzvah, whether small or large. You should remember that it says, "Be cautious with a light mitzvah as you are with a strenuous one." one" [Ethics of the Fathers 2:1]. Read "cautious" (zahir) as "illuminating" (zohar)—that is, your soul is illuminated by a light mitzvah just as it is by a strenuous one, for G-d desires the heart.

Remember that it is said, “One who keeps a mitzvah will never know from evil.” Read “keeps” as “awaits”; that is, you should await the opportunity to perform a mitzvah from evening until morning, as the verse states, “G-d is kind all day.”

2. Think It Through— New Life Every Day!

TEXT 14

Siddur, Modeh Ani

Siddur

The siddur is the Jewish prayer book. It was originally developed by the sages of the Great Assembly in the 4th century BCE, and later reconstructed by Rabban Gamliel after the destruction of the Second Temple. Various authorities continued to add prayers, from then until contemporary times.

It includes praise of G-d, requests for personal and national needs, selections of the Bible, and much else. Various Jewish communities have slightly different versions of the siddur.

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם, שֶׁחֲזַרְתָּ בִּי נַשְׁמָתִי בְּחַמְלָה.
רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ.

*I give thanks before You, living and eternal King, that
You have returned my soul to me with mercy. Great is
Your faith!*

TEXT 15

Siddur, Birchat Keriat Shema

לֵא-ל בָּרוּךְ נְעִימוֹת יִתְנוּ, לְמֶלֶךְ אֵל חַי וְקַיִם, זְמִירוֹת יֹאמְרוּ וְתִשְׁבְּחוֹת
יִשְׁמְיעוּ, כִּי הוּא לְבָדוּ מְרוֹם וְקָדוֹשׁ, פּוֹעֵל גְּבוּרוֹת, עוֹשֶׂה חֲדָשׁוֹת, בְּעַל

מִלְחָמוֹת, זוֹרַע צְדָקוֹת, מְצַמֵּיחַ יְשׁוּעוֹת, בּוֹרָא רְפוּאוֹת, נוֹרָא תְהִלּוֹת,
אֲדוֹן הַנְּפִלְאוֹת, הַמְחַדֵּשׁ בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם תְּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית.

The angels offer sweet melodies to the blessed G-d, to the Almighty King, living and abiding; they recite songs and pronounce praise, for He alone is exalted and holy, performing mighty deeds, bringing about innovation, the master of wars. He sows righteousness, causes deliverance to sprout forth, and creates cures. He is awesome in praise, the Master of wonders Who in His goodness renews every day, continuously, the work of creation.

To Each Day, a Meaning

TEXT 16

Zohar, vol. 3, 84b

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה, שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים מְאִי עֲבִידְתִּיהוּ. אָמַר רַבִּי
יוֹסִי, כְּתִיב כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה ה' אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, וְלֹא
כְּתִיב בְּשֵׁשֶׁת. וְהָא אֻקְמוּהָ, וְכָל יוֹמָא וְיוֹמָא עֲבִיד עֲבִידְתִּיהָ, וְאֶקְרוּן
יוֹמֵי מְלָאכָה.

“For six days you shall work.” work” [Shemot (Exodus) 20:9]. What is the work of the six days? Said Rabbi Yosi, the verse literally says, “Six days did G-d create the Heaven and the Earth,” rather than “in six

days.” This establishes that every single day has its own unique work.

True Life Every Day

TEXT 17

Rabbeinu Bechaye to Bereishit 23:1

**Rabbeinu Bechaye
ben Asher**
c. 1265–1340

Biblical commentator. Rabbeinu Bechaye lived in Spain and was a disciple of Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet, known as Rashba. He is best known for his multifaceted commentary on the Torah, which interprets the text on literal, midrashic, philosophical, and kabbalistic levels. Rabbeinu Bechaye also wrote *Kad Hakemach*, a work on philosophy and ethics.

ועל דרך המדרש מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים, בת מאה כבת עשרים לחטא, ובת עשרים כבת שבע ליופי. ובאורו שהיה יפיה הולך ומוסיף בהיותה בת עשרים שהוא זמן העמידה, כמו בת שבע שהוא זמן התוספת, בשכבר ידעת כי זמנו של אדם ג' חלקים, נערות, ובחרות, וזקנה. הנערות הוא זמן התוספת והעלוי, הבחרות הוא זמן העמידה בתכונה אחת, הזקנה הוא זמן החסרון והירידה.

As the Midrash explains, “A hundred years and twenty years and seven years. When she was a hundred, she was as twenty in sin, and when she was twenty she was as seven in beauty.”

The meaning of this comparison is that her beauty waxed and grew when she was twenty, which is normally the time of stable adulthood, just like a seven-year-old is still growing. The days of a human being are divided into youth, adulthood, and old age. Youth is a time of growth and ascension, adulthood is normally a time of stability at one level, and old age is a time of withering and descent.

TEXT 18

*The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,
Likutei Sichot 35, pp. 92–93*

ולכאורה הדברים תמוהים: כיצד אפשר לומר שכל קכ"ז השנים של שרה היו "שוין לטובה"? הרי מובן, שאין להשוות את מעמדה ומצבה בהיותה באור כשדים, וכן בחרן, לגבי מעמדה ומצבה לאחר שבהא "אל הארץ אשר אראך", ולאידך — בקכ"ז שנה אלו נכלל גם הזמן שהיתה בבית פרעה וכן בבית אבימלך וכו'.

אך הביאור בזה—בפשטות: "חיי שרה" פירושו—הענינים שבהם חייתה שרה, ו"חיי שרה" היו "שוין לטובה", במשך כל שנותי [על דרך הנ"ל מזהר בפירוש "בא בימים" שנאמר אצל אברהם, שכל יום ויום הי' שלם בעבודת ה'].

דהנה מובן, שהמשמעות האמיתית ד"חיי שרה" לא היו חיי הגוף שלה (אכילה ושינה וכיוצא בזה) — דלא בענינים אלו "חייתה" שרה אמנו. ופשיטא, כאשר היתה בבית פרעה או בבית אבימלך, הרי הצד הבלתי רצוי שבזה לא הי' חלק מ"חיי שרה" [שהרי אדרבה, היתה סגורה בבית פרעה ובית אבימלך גרם לה צער גדול].

אלא "חיי שרה" הם החיים הרוחניים שלה, החל מג' המצוות המיוחדות לנשי ישראל, כמובא בפרש"י פרשתנו "נר דלוק מערב שבת לערב שבת, וברכה מצויה בעיסה, וענן קשור על האהל" (כמבואר במפרשים שהם כנגד ג' המצוות שהדלקת נר שבת, חלה ונדה).

וחיים אלו היו "שוין לטובה" כל רגע ורגע בהיותה עלי אדמות. וזוהי ההדגשה "ויהיו חיי שרה גו" — דאף שימי ושני שרה, כללו הרבה חילוקים ושינויים במעמדה ומצבה, אבל "חיי שרה" היו באופן שווה במשך כל ימי חיי, "כולן שוין לטובה".

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson 1902–1994

The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as "the Lubavitcher Rebbe," or simply as "the Rebbe." Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe's scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.

It seems very strange: How is it possible that all 127 years of Sarah's life were equal in goodness? Certainly we cannot compare her state and standing in Ur Kasdim or Charan to that following her arrival in "the land that I shall show you," which was spiritually much loftier. Contrarily, her 127 years included the time spent in the house of Pharaoh and the house of Avimelech!

Rather, the explanation is, at the simple level, that "the life of Sarah," the name of our parsha, implies those matters in which Sarah was truly alive. And it was in these matters that her years were equal in goodness for all her days, like the Zohar about Abraham that says each and every one of his days was perfect in the worship of G-d.

The "life of Sarah" in truth refers not to her bodily life, sleeping and eating or the like. It was not in these matters that Sarah was truly alive. Certainly, the undesirable aspects of dwelling in the house of Pharaoh and the house of Avimelech were not part of the true "life of Sarah," and on the contrary, these things caused her much pain.

Instead, the true "life of Sarah" is her spiritual life. . . . This sort of life, the spiritual life, was equal for Sarah every moment she was on this earth.

And indeed, this is the lesson of the first verse of our parsha—that even though the days and years of our

matriarch Sarah included many distinctions and differences in her state and standing, the true “life of Sarah” was consistent all her days; they were all equally good.

