

Parashat Chayyei Sarah

Shayna Smith

Pazit bat Rachel v'Zelig

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<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.23.1-16?lang=bi>

Summary

This week's *Torah* portion is *Parashat Chayyei Sarah*. I will be reading Genesis Chapter 23 Verses 1-3.

When *Sarah* dies at the age of 127, *Avraham* returns to *Hevron* to purchase a burial place for her. He buys the Cave of *Makhpelah* and the surrounding fields for full price, even though the owner tries to sell them to him for a discount. This is the first piece of land purchased by a Hebrew in what will one day be the land of Israel. *Avraham* buries *Sarah* there and mourns for her.

Avraham later sends his servant back to his family to find a wife for his son, *Yitzhak*, instructing him not to take a Canaanite woman. *Avraham* also tells his servant that if the woman he finds does not want to go back to the land of Canaan with him, he absolutely must not take *Yitzchak* back to meet her.

The servant prays for guidance and decides to choose a woman who demonstrates great *hesed*, loving-kindness. He comes to a well, and there he meets *Rivka*. She offers him water and then she also offers water to his camels. She then proceeds to haul water for his ten camels until they can drink no more. *Rivka* agrees to marry *Yitzhak* and travel to *Canaan*. When she sees *Yitzhak*, she falls off of her camel. The two marry. *Avraham* dies at the age of 175, and *Yishma'el* and *Yitzhak* come together to bury him next to *Sarah* in the Cave of *Makhpelah*.

Questions

1) I noticed that one of the letters in the last word of the second verse I read today was small. This verse translates as, “Sarah died in the town of *Kiryat Arba*, which is Hevron, in the Land of Canaan. Avraham spoke about her and then cried over her.” The *kaf* of the word *livkotah*, which means “he cried over her,” is smaller than all of the other letters in that word. What might we learn from one of the letters in the word “he cried over her” being smaller than the others? <<Pick 3>>

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch taught that this meant that Avraham did not show all of his feelings to everyone. He hid some of his crying. Avraham’s feelings were so big that he had to do some of his crying at home. This makes sense to me because, when a loved one dies, people often have feelings that they only express at home.

2) Later in this *parasha*, Avraham sends his servant back to the City of *Nahor* in the Land of Canaan to find someone to marry *Yitzhak*. The servant agrees and when he arrives and settles by the town’s well. He prays to G.d for help, saying that the first person who he asks for water and who responds by offering water to him AND to all his camels will be the person who he asks to return with him to marry *Yitzhak*. When the servant asks her for water, *Rivka* responds by offering water to him and all of his camels. What can a person can learn from a test like this? What do you think the servant sees in *Rivka* when he asks her for water she responds by offering water to him and to all of his camels? <<pick 3>>

I think he sees that she is kind and helpful--for people and for animals. This is important because it shows that she’ll be a kind partner for Yitzchak and that she will help with work that needs to be done around their home.

3) After a long trip by camel Avraham's servant and Rivka arrive. Rivka sees Yitzchak, then falls off her camel. When she asks the servant about the man she sees, he answers that the man is his master--meaning *Yitzchak*. Why do you think Rivkah fell off her camel right after seeing Yitzchak? How might her fall from the camel be connected with seeing Yitzchak? <<Pick 3>>

You really have to pay attention when you ride a camel. It's not a smooth ride. I rode one at Grant's farm. I was so high up off the ground, and it swayed side to side. My mom was scared because she was sitting on the hump. I bet that when Rivka saw Yitzchak suddenly the idea of getting married felt real. She probably felt so excited and nervous that she was distracted from riding the camel and fell. I can relate, because I sometimes get so excited about reading Torah that I forget how to chant a word or where I am in my reading.

The word "cry" ["*v'livkotab*"] may have been written with a small *kaf* to suggest that the full measure of his weeping was kept private. His grief was infinite, but the full measure of his pain was concealed in his heart and in the privacy of his home.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on Genesis 23:2

Usually crying comes before a eulogy - but here it is reversed - because usually, mourning becomes less and less and as days go by, the dead person is forgotten. Abraham felt the loss of this righteous woman more and more in her absence; he felt the absence of her Torah and her good deeds that had been lost for all generations, and this is why "eulogy" is written before "crying."

Kli Yakar (16th c. Poland/17th c. Czechoslovakia) on Genesis 23:2