

Life Cycle: Death Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Chazal say each of the *avot* asked for something. Avraham asked for the appearance of old age because it commands recognition. Yitzchak asked for illness so that a person could have time to prepare for death. Yaakov asked for suffering so that a person could develop an identity beyond physicality.

The Torah view on aging and end of life isn't negative or apologetic. Yes, there's the loss of teeth and mobility and the general deterioration of the body. But it's all to compel the person to focus on who he really is. The Western outlook that if a person is no longer having fun or earning money then their time is no longer relevant, is a terrible disgrace of what being human is about. Old age is meant to be respected and the laws concerning the end of life reveal this. Saving a month or a day of life for a 95 year old is just as important as saving a month or day for a 25 year old.

When it appears, a person is about to die, it's a *mitzva* to help him recite the *vidui* confession if he is not frightened and alert enough to do so. Saying *vidui* doesn't cause death. Quite the opposite, it might give the person merit to continue living. Many people who have said the confession have lived and many have died without saying it. It says that Hashem will have mercy on one who admits and lets go of his sins. Although the person is physically not in a position to sin at this point, the fact that he openly states that this is no longer him puts him in a better position. The ill person should also say *Shema*. *Shema* is

about seeing the physical world and the next world, connected by Hashem's will. It's declaring that Hashem is one, and this world which seems to have its own purpose and energy is really being controlled by Him. Death then becomes less frightening. If a person lingers longer, there are various customs and prayers. If he person is in his death throes, one is not allowed to touch him. This is because any slight movement can cause the soul to leave the body and even a minute of a person's life is invaluable. Nobody really knows what is going on inside of a person. This could be his minute of inner *tefilah*.

The people who take care of the dead are called *Chevra Kadisha*, the Holy Society. Doing kindness for a dead person is considered a true kindness because the dead can never reciprocate. As soon as the person dies, his eyes should be closed and his face covered. If he died in an accident, the *Chevra Kadisha* will decide what blood needs to be buried. Sometimes the person will be buried in his clothing. The body is purified which is an enormous and positive statement about how Judaism views life. The soul has no way of being expressed in this world without a body. They are called two companions who can't separate. In the next world when the soul says, "I gave *tzedakah*," it includes the body. The eyes saw the poor man, the ears heard what he was saying, and the hand reached into the pocket to give him money. The body has intrinsic *kedusha* and this is why it is either immersed in a *mikva* or doused with water before burial. The body is dressed in *tachrichim*, simple white clothing similar to the

clothing worn by the *kohen gadol* when he entered the Holy of Holies. The idea behind this, says the Maharal, is that we want to glorify simplicity. A person's clothing is their cover. It's how people regard them. That's why we all wear uniforms that say- see me as cool or dignified or artistic or young or respectable. When you die there's no more uniforms. You take yourself with you and that's it.

Sometimes the funeral will be conducted in the person's home, which in former times was the norm. If the person was a respected *rosh yeshiva* they will bring the body to the *yeshiva*. The body is wrapped in a *talit* and placed on the floor, the first step in its journey back to earth. It should be left in the company of someone, ideally learning Mishnayot or saying *Tehilim*. At the eulogy, the soul hears everything said about them and it's a great comfort to hear that their life wasn't in vain and that people valued who they were and what they did. It's a great *mitzvah* to deliver a eulogy and it's important that it be true. The final step is *Kaddish*. The words of *Kaddish* have nothing to do with death. It speaks about Hashem's sanctity and how His name will be elevated and sanctified above all possible limitations of this world. This takes us back to the beginning of life. The beginning and end of life are circular. A person was born to this world to sanctify Hashem's name through his mission. A person leaves this world and goes on to the next world where his deeds stand testimony that they sanctified His name.

The Power of Women to Partner with Hashem Serach Bas Asher Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Serach lived for a long time, giving her an advantage others did not have. She was there when Yaakov and his family went down to Egypt. She was a first-hand witness to the Exodus and the miracles of the Splitting of the Sea. There is a tradition that she was among those who went into exile to Bavel in the first stage of *Cherish V'hamsagar*. At the start, the scholars went into exile and only years later did the rest of the people follow. This was a kindness from Hashem as they created a

spiritual infrastructure for the rest of the Jews who would later follow. Among the scholars and righteous people was Serach. She was about 1000 years old and there is a tradition that she is buried in Bavel. Serach saw the larger picture of Jewish history. Not only was she instrumental in making history happen, but she was also a witness of what happened. She could tell the people what was right and wrong and how Hashem had reacted in specific situations. That is why she was an important figure whom the people would approach with

questions.

We are told that Serach never died because that is what Yaakov blessed her with. Chazal tell us she went to Gan Eden alive accompanied by six hundred thousands angels. She is one of ten people who never died. Chazal describe that there are women in heaven who are righteous and teach Torah, but about Serach it is written that she has a special place on her own in *Gan Eden*.

Continued on page 2



The Power of Women to Partner with Hashem Serach Bas Asher Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Continued from page 1

The Navi in Shmuel Bet discusses a situation that Klal Yisrael faced and a woman is described there as an *isha chachama*, a wise woman. The commentators say it was Serach and she was at least 700 years old. David Hamelech was the king of the Jewish people when Sheva Ben Bichri rebelled against him. He runs into a city surrounded by a wall called Avel where Serach lived. Yoav, the general of David's army sentenced the whole city to death for giving shelter to the king's enemy. He was about to kill everyone when a wise woman came and told the people to inform Yoav that she wanted to speak to him. The Redak explains that Serach asked Yoav,

"Don't you know what is written in the Torah? I heard it from Moshe. When you come to fight against a city, the first thing you do is try to make peace, then you fight. This is true when you fight against other nations, how much more so when it is with your own people." Serach says, "I am *shlomei emunei Yisrael*, I am the representative of the people in this city who are at peace with David. Sheva rebelled and deserves death but not the whole city."

Halacha states that if a non-Jew approaches a Jewish city and says give us one of you or we will kill the whole city, one cannot give anyone because who will make the choice. Chazal

say, "Who told you your blood is more valuable than the blood of someone else." They must all let themselves be killed rather than give up someone. If they specify who they want, it depends on the situation. If it's completely clear that if they don't give him up, both the person and everyone else will be killed, then it's better to give him up. But if the person can be saved and they will be killed, they cannot give him up because it's a choice between him and them and they have no right to choose. If the people will protect Sheva, then Yoav has a right to kill them because they are rebelling against the king.

Agonut Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

The word *agonah* comes from the root word *ogun*-an anchor, something that holds the ship back. This is how we would define an *agonah*, someone who is held back. She is a chained woman who cannot marry someone else because her husband does not want to give her a divorce. Either he is stubborn or he disappeared and there is no definite evidence that he's dead. The woman is prevented from remarrying until there's definite proof that the husband died. This can happen to a man as well as to a woman. Rabbeinu Gershom, one of the first Rishonim, made two *cheirimim* threats of excommunication. Some say it only applies to Ashkenazim but everyone has the custom to follow it. The first *cherem* is that one may not marry two wives. The second *cherem*, instituted to enforce the first *cherem*, is that one cannot divorce one's wife against

her will.

The Shulchan Aruch in *halachot p'ria v'rivia* tells us that a man can in fact marry a number of wives but he has to be able to financially support them. The sages advised that a person shouldn't marry more than four wives. In a place where the custom is to marry one wife, one may not marry another wife. Today every civilized country has laws against polygomy. The opinion of the Shulchan Aruch is that *dinei d'malchusa dina* pertains only to things between the person and the administration. Disputes between two Jews are settled according to Jewish law. However Jewish law is affected by custom and according to the Rama *dinei d'malchusa* does not only pertain to things between the person and the administration but also to anything that affects two

Jews. Some opinions state that the *cherem* doesn't apply anymore because Rabbeinu Gershom only made the *gezeira* until the end of the fifth thousand year. However, all agree that whatever has turned into customary behavior obligates everyone and therefore the *cherem* is still valid. If the wife had an accident and is not mentally capable to accept a get or will not cooperate for some reason, the husband is an *aguna*, a chained man, unable to marry someone else. However, he can get a *Heter Meah Rabbanim*, 100 Rabbis, some say from three communities or three different countries, sign allowing the husband to marry a second wife. This *heter* is subject to the law of the land and where applicable one would need to get permission from the courts as well.