Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

NAALEH נעלה מי יעלה בהר ה'

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Gauging Goodness: Parshat Chayei Sarah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Our matriarch Sarah was such an extraordinary woman that when the Torah records her passing, the wording forces us to delve deeply into her life and extrapolate messages for our own lives. "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years: The years of Sarah's life." In a Torah which is always so sparing with its words, why does the Torah break down the years of Sarah's life into segments rather than just saying one hundred twenty seven years? Further, why the repetition of "Sarah's lifetime" and "Sarah's life?"

Rashi provides an answer to both our questions. First, that Sarah retained the positive elements of each stage of her life as she grew older and matured, and second, that all stages of Sarah's life were equally good. The Be'er Yitzchak adds that all her years were good in terms of health and prosperity.

Rashi's comment that all her years were equally good seems to be more inclusive than just health and prosperity. Yet that raises questions that many commentators ask, including Rabbi Gamliel Rabinowitz in Tiv Hatorah and Rabbi Weinberger zt"l in Shemen Hatov. We know that Sarah Imeinu suffered hardships and challenges during her life, most notably but not exclusively infertility. How can we then say that all her years were good? Rabbi Weinberger explains that Sarah's entire life was good because she accepted every challenge with love, while Rabbi Weinberger notes that each challenge presented an opportunity for growth, and within that context, Sarah retained the energy of her youth even as she entered the more thoughtful and mature phase of her life.

Often when we look back on our lives, we realize that what appeared bitter at the time, in hindsight, we realize it was sweet and a blessing. Sarah Imeinu didn't wait for hindsight. As she was going through the challenge, in real time, writes Rabbi Rabinowitz, Sarah Imeinu always believed it was good and positive. As Rabbi Schraga Grossbard zt"l notes, if one focuses on the spiritual rather than on the physical aspects of the world, one doesn't suffer the challenges the outside world puts on us. This however, is an unrealistic mindset for almost all people.

Along these line, Ohel Yehoshua reminds us that we are obligated to bless Hashem for the "bad" as well as for the good with joy, for nothing bad can come from Hashem. This is the real meaning of our morning blessing "... Who has provided me my every need." All that Hashem does for me, whether I perceive it as good or bad, is for my benefit, is what I need.

In Arise: Aspire, Rebbetzin Smiles develops this idea. Hashem has given me everything to become who I truly am meant to be, to become the best ME. This includes all my assets and talents, as well as every circumstance of my life, both positive and negative. Hashem recognizes what I need to fulfill my potential. When we acknowledge this, we realize that everything in our life is equally good, and we should accept it all with joy, whether we realize it at the time or not.

If we can shift our focus from "what's in it for me" to "how can this help me serve Hashem better," then we can discover why this is good for me, suggests Rabbi Schwadron zt"l in Lev Shalom. We then realize that the challenges are there to make me stronger as an athlete strengthens his muscles with ever more difficult challenges. We feel the pain, but if we appreciate the benefit, we can feel joy along with the pain. [Ask any woman anticipating the birth of her baby if she is happy in spite of the labor pains she is enduring. CKS] In the future, when we fully appreciate the pattern of our lives, [whether after death or in the era of Moshiach] we will no longer recite, "Boruch Dayan Haemes/Blessed is the true Judge," but only "Hatov veHameitiv/He Who is good and does [only] good."

Shifting focus from oneself to service for Hashem transforms our perspective on any challenge we face, writes Rabbi Dan Segal. That clarity of purpose gives us the strength to handle any challenges Hashem sends us, adds Rabbi Bayfus in Yalkut Lekach Tov.

Taking the long view, how we see the future is what empowers us for the present. Rabbi Yeshayahu Pinto zt"l presents the case of a Russian judge who lost favor with the elite rulers. In fleeing persecution, he ran to the river to hire a strongman to carry him across. Recognizing the judge, one human ferry began carrying the judge across the river. Part of the way across, the judge mentioned that when he will be back in favor, he would remember and reward his human carrier. Wait! "You are no longer politically powerful?" The ferryman suddenly felt weak and could no longer carry the judge's weight. Similarly, when we anticipate a positive, long term result, we can bear any hardship; when we see no reward, we cannot bear the pain of any challenge.

So how do we as Jews define good and bad? In Finding Light in the Darkness, Rabbi Rosenblatt presents the Jewish view: Good is anything that brings us closer to God, that helps us perfect ourselves; bad is anything that distances us from God. From this perspective, everything is neither good nor bad inherently. Rather, it is how we use that gift or that challenge that will determine its value. [So many of the returned hostages have stated that being in captivity, in homes or in tunnels, has brought them closer to God, has brought more meaning to their lives. CKS] Pain? Yes. But the pain may be the means of delivering a valuable gift. The choice is ours. Painful does not mean bad.

This was the characteristic of Sarah Imainu, writes Rebbetzin Yemimah Mizrachi, citing Rav Yisroel of Salant. Sarah valued all her days and all her experiences equally. She accepted everything with equanimity. Interpreting Rashi homiletically, Rebbetzin Mizrachi uses the number one hundred and the number twenty, the most relevant of the years of Sarah's life, as referring to these chapters of Tehillim. Psalm 100 is a psalm of thanksgiving, thanking Hashem for the good He has bestowed upon us. In contrast, Psalm 20 appeals to Hashem for help in times of distress. Whatever situation Sarah was in, she accepted them equally, and used them to grow in service to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. As Rebbetzin Smiles says, Hashem has provided me all tzarki/I need, an acronym for ki tzar/for it is narrow, oppressive. Like Sarah, I can use these difficult times to come closer to Hashem.

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In Siach Mordechai, Rabbi Kukis notes that there are two perspectives in Blessing Hashem. One can say, "Whatever God does, He does for good," or one can say, "This too is for the good." The difference, explains Rabbi Kukis, is that in the first, one's mind is occupied with the pain, and only later admits the good of a past occurrence when the challenge is resolved, as in during an illness versus after the cure. The illness itself did not seem to be "good." In contrast, even while going through a challenge or difficulty, one acknowledges that this difficulty itself is good and is meant to bring me closer to God.

To illustrate, Rav Kukis cites the incident where Rabbi Akiva, traveling on a donkey, bringing with him a rooster as his alarm clock and a candle for night learning, was denied a place to sleep in town. Spending the night in the forest, wild animals killed his rooster and his donkey, and a wind blew out his candle. All night he suffered his losses. Only in the morning when Rabbi Akiva awoke and found the town had been raided by marauders and its population killed did Rabbi Akiva reflect and state, "Man must habituate himself to always say that whatever Hashem does is for the good."

In contrast, Nachum Ish Gamzu was wont to declare in whatever difficulty he found himself, "Gam zu letovah/This [suffering itself] is also for the good." This was the quality of Sarah Imeinu who could declare all is for the good in the midst of her suffering. The suffering brought her closer to Hashem and a catalyst for prayer. Similarly, Hashem may put us in difficult situations to help us grow. Through the challenges we discover our strengths and become better people. Sarah understood that her challenges were for her good.

Shaul Rosenblatt is a model for this mindset. Having lost a young wife to cancer and raising four young children, he penned Finding Light in the Darkness as a guide to living. It is certainly easier to see the bad in traumatic events, but he urges us to search for the good in every situation. As an example, if your house burns down, it is natural to focus on the financial and logistical challenges. But perhaps one can also see that the fire has strengthened the family bonds, or has given him a deeper appreciation of his blessings. If one trains himself to say, "Gam zu letovah," in all circumstances, one will be able to find the good, the silver lining in every cloud.[After all, God is found ba'arafel, in the darkest cloud. CKS]

The Nesivos Shalom points out that all these parshiot about Avraham and Sarah are meant to teach us the importance of chesed. The rebuilding of this world began with Avraham Avinu who introduced the constant practice of chesed into a broken world. As it says in Tehillim, olam chesed yiboneh/the world is built on kindness. Citing the Shla"h Hakodosh, the Slonimer Rebbe teaches that one is obligated to do at least one act of chesed every day, whether it is physical help, emotional support, or financial aid. Even a simple smile can be a tremendous act of chesed. When one does chesed, one draws down chesed from above. A day without chesed is a day not lived. Every day in the lives of Avraham and Sarah were thus fully lived.

This is the essence of a Jew, for a Jewish neshamah has a soul that wants to cleave to Hashem. While Man differs from animals in that he has a spiritual soul along with a physical body, one can easily be content with a self centered life. But a Jew, writes Rabbi Kluger, wants to emulate Hashem, to have his soul connect to Hashem, to give, as Hashem always gives.

This is the purpose of education, writes Rabbi Eisenberger in L'Yom HaShabos. When a baby is born, it is totally self centered on his personal needs. But if he remains so, always looking inward, focusing only at his own desires, his selfishness will lead to dark moods and depression. But if he begins to look outward, to how he can bring happiness to others, his own happiness will include their happiness, and his happiness increase. Avraham and Sarah were always looking outward to increase the happiness of others. They brought the happiness of others into the circle of their own happiness.. While Avraham greeted the guests, Sarah prepared all the food. That is how the days of her life were all equally good, because she remained focused on making the lives of others "good."

It is this point that Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l uses to explain Rashi, that all the years of Sarah's life were letovah, for the good. Whatever the personal circumstances of her life were at the time, she nevertheless sought to bring goodness into the world, she lived her life for the purpose of good. This, too, is the role each of us must embrace. In a world full of darkness and hate, we must strive to bring light and joy to the world through acts of chesed. We, too, must make every day and every year of our live relevant and fully lives.

Parshat Chaya Sarah: Chevron Connecting Us All

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Zohar tells us that the *Me'arat Hamachpeila* is called the double cave because it connects this world to the next. It is a counterpart to the city of Yerushalayim. However, if we examine Jewish law, the strictures of sanctity pertain only to Yerushalayim and not to Chevron. Why is this so?

Rav Wolfson in his book Emunat Itecha explains a concept of *itgalya*, revelation and *itkasya*, concealment. Every physical thing in this world has its equivalent in the next world. We can easily perceive our biological and emotional soul, but the counterpart to this is in the hidden world, the upper levels of our soul, chaya and yechida. The Divine Presence also comes to us on two levels, b'itgalya, in a revealed way and *b'itkasya,* in a concealed manner. Yerushalayim is *hitgalut*, where we can sense Hashem's revealed presence. When the Beit Hamikdash stood, people entered its holy environs and emerged

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prophets because they felt Hashem's presence in such an intense way. Likewise, when we invest our hearts and minds into the study of Torah, we feel the Divine Presence close beside us. Rav Soloveitchik used to learn by himself but he often said, "I have a *chavruta*." He sensed the *Shechina* studying Torah with him. Intense prayer in shul elicits the same feeling of spiritual closeness.

Chevron and the Mearat Hamachpeila is *itkasya*, concealed holiness. Although Hashem's presence is there too, it is hidden, just as the Avot are buried deep within the ground.

Hashem created the world using three energies: place, time, and soul. Chassidut draws a parallel between them. There's a miniature *Mearat Hamachpela* inside each of us. When we begin *Shemone Esrei* we invoke the names of the *Avot*. We ask Hashem to listen to us the way he listened to our forefathers because they and we are one. Our revealed prayers go through Yerushalayim, but our inner supplications pass through the hidden burial cave of the Avot in Chevron.

Yerushalayim was destroyed because its holiness was exposed. Chevron remains with us forever precisely because it is concealed. Similarly, the part of our soul that is connected to the Avot can never be defiled no matter how far we've fallen. On the revealed level, our soul may be tainted, but deep within we remain pure because we are bonded to the Avot. Chevron comes from the root word *chibur*, connection. It signifies hope and redemption. King David's dynasty began in Chevron and in the future, Mashiach will redeem us with the power of this holy city.

Chevron is called *Kiryat Arba*, the city of four giants. They represent the four evils in the world: jealousy, desire, honor, and forbidden speech. These in turn correspond to the four exiles: Bavel, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Chevron appears evil on the outside, however, deep within one can find its hidden sanctity. The righteous Avot are the counterpart to the four evil giants. Their influence hovers over us in every corner of exile. No matter what evil we encounter, we remain connected to Hashem and the merit of the Avot.

Yerushalayim is revealed while Chevron is hidden. Every Jew has a *beit hamikdash* in his heart. When he's inspired, he can feel Hashem's presence *b'itgalya,* in an open way. But there are also times of *itkasya*, concealment, periods when it is hard to connect with Hashem. During those times we can hold on to the *Machpela*, where His presence remains forever no matter what level we're at. The Beit Hamikdash in Yerushalayim was destroyed, but in a sense it continues to exist in Chevron, in *Mearat Hamachpeila*, and in the heart of every Jew.

Hilchot Shabbat: Final Halachot of Havdala #17

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

Havdala is recited twice, the first time in Maariv with the blessing of *Ata Chonantanu* and again over a cup of wine.

Why do we say *Havdala* in the blessing of *Atah Chonen*? The Yerushalmi in Brachot says, *"Im ein da'at havdala minayin*." Without intellect, it is impossible to distinguish between different things. To make *Havdala*, one needs a measure of intellect. On Shabbat we are focused solely on spirituality. We don't ask for any physical needs. *Havdala* serves as a sanction to begin working again. Therefore, *Ata Chonantanu* is inserted before the first supplication of mercy in order to allow us to engage in further requests.

If you forget *Ata Chonantanu*, you don't have to recite it again, if you will be reciting *Havdala* over wine. If you didn't say either of them, you must recite the prayer in *Shachrit*. The Mishna Berura cites the Magen Avraham that the makeup prayer would be the second prayer. Rav Akiva Eiger disagrees. *Ata Chonantanu* should be inserted in the first prayer because one needs its sanction to engage in further supplications.

One should not eat, drink, or do work before *Havdala*. If you are in the middle of a bread meal that you started before the end of Shabbat you can continue eating without reciting *Havdala*, but if it is just a fruit or cake meal, you must stop before *bein hashmoshot*, thirty minutes before the stars appear. Once Shabbat ends, one should say '*Baruch hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol*' and then work is permitted. Women who generally don't daven Maariv should be careful to say this. Why can't we eat or do work before *Havdala*? On some level it's still Shabbat, until it is formally concluded. In addition, Chazal wanted to be sure we wouldn't forget to make *Havdala*.

The cup for *Havdala* must not be *pagum* (flawed). It is filled until the wine overflows, showing our confidence in Hashem's beneficence.

The Mishna Berura mentions that women shouldn't drink the wine because it is possible that they are not obligated in the blessing over the flame and there's a *hefsek* (break) between *Hagafen* and the drinking.

Many poskim maintain that one cannot fulfill *Havdalah* over the phone. Rav Moshe ruled that where there is no choice, it is permitted.

We smell sweet smelling spices to give us a lift after losing our *neshama yeteirah*, (extra soul). According to the Mishna Berura, one should not make a blessing on the spices if one can't smell.

One should use an *avuka*, a candle with multiple wicks for the blessing on the flame. Most poskim do not consider electricity to be *aish* (fire), but some rule that an incandescent bulb does fall under this category.

There is a custom to escort the Shabbat out with a bread meal, called Melave Malka. One should eat as soon after Shabbat as possible so that it's noticeable that it's not just a regular meal. If one is very full then one should at least eat fruit or *mezonot*. Our sages tell us that the *luz* bone is nourished with the food of Melave Malka. The resurrection of the dead will begin from this bone. Melave Malka highlights the sanctity of Shabbat. Shabbat is not just a one day affair. It's a reservoir of holiness that flows over into the coming week.

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