



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת and חדוותא דזעיר אנפין collections of maamarim given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Seuda Shlishis and Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas Chayei Sarah 5767

When comparing the name of this week's *parsha*, Chayei Sarah, to the content of the *parsha*, we may think that it would have been more appropriate to call it "Petiras Sarah" since it speaks about her death.

The choice of the name Chayei Sarah, illustrates Chazal's statement צדיקים במיתתן קרויים חיים - Tzadikim, even when dead, are called alive. The explanation of this statement is that the true definition of *chaim* is a life of אלוקים חיים, a life of Torah, *tefillah*, and *avodah*. When someone is unable to perform any mitzvah or good deed, he is considered dead. Nonetheless, the life of a tzadik continues after his death, not only in *Olam Haba*, but even in *Olam Haze*. Through his *talmidim* and *talmidei talmidim* who follow in his path, and learn his Torah, the tzadik lives on, even after death.

This concept of צדיקים במיתתן קרויים חיים has a deep and important message that applies to all of us. A tzadik teaches Bnei Yisrael that they must continually be "alive", never ceasing to act no matter what. Even in times of terrible calamities, they remain חיים continuing their *avodas Hashem* in any way possible.

We see this in the life of Avraham Avinu. Sarah, his first wife, had just died. Chazal say (סנהדרין כ"ב), For someone whose first wife dies in his lifetime, it's as if the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed in his days. R. Alexandri says that the world becomes dark for him. R. Yossi says that his strides become shorter, R. Avahu says that his עצה (understanding and ability to advise) declines.



[1]

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Nevertheless, Avraham Avinu didn't sink into despair. He tried to do whatever needed to be done at the time. He acquired a gravesite for his wife, and then tried as hard as possible to find a match for Yitzchak. This is because Avraham Avinu was always **חי**. If he had let himself drown in the sorrow of his loss, he could have come *chas v'shalom* to the opposite of life. Therefore, Avraham strengthened himself with his connection to Hashem and did whatever he needed to do without looking back.

We can now reach a better understanding of the *pasuk*, וַיִּקַּם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ. In the Midrash Rabbah (בראשית נ"ח:ו) Chazal explain that this teaches us that Avraham saw the מלאך המוות מתריס כנגדו, the angel of death provoking him. This is difficult to understand. Why was the *Malach Hamaves* provoking Avraham particularly at that moment? We can now understand that the *Malach Hamaves* wanted to cause Avraham to drown in his sorrow after losing a wife, whose *ruach hakodesh* was even greater than her husband's. She died suddenly, just after having the *zechus* of her son going to the *akeidah*. That *zechus* didn't prevent her sudden death.

Avraham fought and repelled this attack of the *Malach Hamaves*. ויקם means that he picked himself up, despite the pain he felt after Sarah's death. Rather than drowning in that sorrow, he strengthened himself, and proceeded to do whatever needed to be done.

There is a wonderful lesson that I heard in the name of the *Lev Simcha zy*"a. He explained a story brought in the Yerushalmi (פאה פ"ח, ה"ח).

“R. Yochanan and R. Shimon ben Lakish were walking to the *mikvah* and a certain poor man approached them and asked for *tzedakah*. They told him that they would give him some money on their way back. When they made their way back, they found that he had died. They said, ‘Since we didn't have the merit of helping him during his lifetime, we will take care of him in his death’. As they were taking care of him, (preparing him for burial), they found that he had a wallet full of *dinarim*, and they understood that he really wasn't poor.”



[2]

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The *Lev Simcha zy”a* said that this story teaches us a very important lesson in the ways of *avodas Hashem*. Most people, after rejecting a poor man’s request for *tzedakah* and later finding him dead, would go insane from the pain and guilt. They wouldn’t have the strength to return to *avodas Hashem* and would mourn for the rest of their lives.

However, R. Yochanan and R. Shimon ben Lakish taught us the way we are meant to respond in such a situation. Even if someone made a terrible mistake that resulted in someone losing their life **רחמנא ליצלן**, he must set aside his feelings for the time being, and focus on what must be done now. He shouldn’t look back at what happened, and shouldn’t worry about what will be. By setting aside their guilt, and focusing on preparing the man for burial, they discovered that he actually wasn’t poor, and that they didn’t cause his death.

If they had fallen into depression, they wouldn’t have been capable of caring for his body, and would have spent the rest of their lives in a state of guilt and mourning.

We find the same *hanhagah* in the life of David Hamelech. Even in the most difficult periods of his life, such as when he had to flee from his own son Avshalom who sought to kill him, he said, **מְזִמּוֹר לְדוֹד בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי** אֲבִשָׁלוֹם בְּנֹו – A song of David when he ran away from his son Avshalom. Under those circumstances, it would have been natural for David Hamelech to be very sad. Instead, he taught us that a person has fulfill his mission by singing and thanking Hashem, no matter what is going on in life.

I heard a wonderful lesson about this from the Gerrer Rebbe, the *Pnei Menachem zy”a*. His maternal grandmother, Rebbetzin Biderman a”h, the daughter of the *Sfas Emes zy”a*, would often relate an interaction that she had with her father. There had been a tragic death in the family, and the entire family was in a state of pain and sorrow. The only exception was the *Sfas Emes*. He was full of *simcha* and enthusiasm as usual.



[3]

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She said that she couldn't hold back from asking her father how it was possible to be *b'simcha* at such a time. He answered, געשענישען זענען באשערט, דאס אגמת נפש מאכט זיך דער מענטש אליין.

In other words, anything that happens to us is decreed from by Hashem, and we don't have the ability to change it. However, the pain and agony we experience, both qualitatively and quantitatively, depends on how we choose to react.

All these lessons teach us to always be in a state of חיים, thanking and praising Hashem in all situations. ואי"ה כאשר נחזיק באלוקינו בדבר זה, נזכה. לשמוח שמחה שלימה בבוא לציון גואל בב"א.



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