

LISTEN TO HER VOICE

"Sarah died in Kiryat-Arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her." - Genesis: 23:2

On this verse, the Zohar points out that Sarah represents the body and Abraham, the soul.

"Sarah died" - the body died.

"In Kiryat-Arba" - Arba (which means "four" in Hebrew) symbolizes the four basic elements of every physical being: fire, spirit, water and dust.

"Which is Hebron" - Hebron comes from the Hebrew word Mechubar, "connected." While the body is alive, these four elements are connected.

"And Abraham came to cry for her" - even after the soul leaves the body, they are still related and thus the soul cries over its separation.

There is another verse associated with Sarah, our Matriarch. It is very well known in my house and is often quoted by all the children from a young age, thanks to my mother who is also named after our matriarch Sarah (not a coincidence)! She used to declare loud and clear (and still does when she finds it necessary): *"Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice"* - Genesis 21:12. And my mother would add a comment to those biblical words: "The Rebbe said this applies to all Jewish women."

Regardless of the fact that every woman on earth would gladly accept this verse as a rule, a question still remains regarding what the Zohar says about Sarah representing the body, the physical and materialistic part of us. Is that the Torah vision? Should we always listen to our materialistic voices, and run after all our desires and ambitions? Doesn't the Torah teach us about souls, higher purposes, G-dly aspirations, selflessness and divine missions which lead us to a more spiritual life?

The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, brings an explanation from another verse to teach us how the body and soul should join forces, put aside years of war, and be capable of reaching their individual goals.

"When a Jew is walking on the road and he sees his enemy's donkey" - in Hebrew, donkey comes from the word chomer, "material." The soul sees her enemy, the body,

"lying under its burden" - struggling with the heavy load it is determined to carry through life, all the do's and don'ts of Torah and Jewish law, *"Help the donkey!"* - commands the Torah. Don't leave him on the road, don't take the load off of him, help him carry it. Don't leave the physical behind!

Be spiritual. Listen to Sarah. Listen to your body. Use it. Use your animalistic drives and earthly achievements for

G-dly missions. That's exactly what G-d wants from you.

Today it is hard to see the holiness in physicality, but we are still waiting for the days when all eyes will see the glory of G-d filling the whole universe. That's the legacy of our matriarchs and patriarchs; their experiences are eternal inspirations in our daily lives. They had an appetizer of the World-to-Come in this world. But we, too, can taste it a little.

*By Chany Vaknin
Chabad in Belo Horizonte, Brazil*

THE SULTAN'S SWORD

In the early 5400s (1640s), the sultan of the Ottoman Empire made a journey from his seat of government in far-off Turkey to places of importance in his domains.

He made his way to the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron (burial site of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jewish people, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Ya'akov and Leah, as well as of Adam and Chava, the first man and woman). He entered, adorned in his traditional ruling garb, including the golden sword, studded with diamonds and precious stones, which hung at his side. The Sultan wandered from room to room, finally entering the huge hall named after the Patriarch Yitzchak.

The center of attraction in the Yitzchak Hall is a small circular hole in the floor, near the wall shared with the smaller Avraham Hall. The hole is perhaps the most sacred spot in the entire illustrious structure above the burial caves of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, for it leads down into the caves themselves. Pilgrims from all over the world journey for weeks and months just to have the opportunity to stand by this small, dark, circular opening, leading into the cave, which according to tradition was excavated by Adam, the first man.

The Sultan leaned over the revered aperture, peering down into it. As he bent over, his precious sword fell from his side, down into the cavity in the ground. Hearing the clang of metal hitting the ground, the sultan realized that his sword lay in the caves underneath. The sultan called the officer of the guard and ordered him to lower a soldier through the hole into the caves below, to retrieve his sword. Quick to respond to the sultan's order, the officer selected a soldier nearby. Another soldier wrapped a rope around his waist and lowered the soldier into the underground cavern. No sooner had they done so when, without warning, piercing screams penetrated from inside the hole below. Quickly they pulled up the soldier, but he was dead. The sultan ordered that another soldier be lowered into the

caves. So it was, and his fate was precisely as his predecessor's.

The sultan continued to send soldiers into the caves, until it became apparent that all who enter the caves do not exit alive. The sultan turned to his hosts and exclaimed, "Who will return to me my sword?" The Arabs, looking at one another, answered without hesitating. "Why not send down a Jew? If he dies, none of us would care, and if not, you will have your precious saber back." So, the Jews were ordered on pain of death, to supply a volunteer to be lowered into the caves to return the sultan's sword to him.

The Jews of Hebron had heard what happened to the sultan's soldiers. How could they send one of their own to his death? They prayed and fasted, hoping to avert the decree. Realizing that they had no choice, they looked at one another. Who would dare to enter the sacred caves of the Patriarchs?

The elderly rabbi of the community, the Kabbalist and sage Rabbi Avraham Azulai, author of Chesed L'Avraham, solved the dilemma. "I will enter the holy caves. Have no fear." And so it was. After praying and pleading before the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, Rabbi Avraham Azulai immersed himself in the Mikvah and dressed in white garments, the traditional dress of the dead. He set forth to the Cave of Machpelah.

With a rope tied around his waist, Rabbi Azulai was lowered into the cave. When his feet hit the ground, Rabbi Azulai looked around him and found, standing by his side, three bearded men. "We are your forefathers," they told him, "Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov." Rabbi Azulai was dumbfounded. Finally, he said to them, "Why should I leave here and go back above? I am elderly, and here I have found my forefathers. I desire only to stay here with you."

The Patriarchs insisted, "You must return the sword to the sultan. If not, the entire Jewish community of Hebron is liable to be wiped out. But have no fear. In another seven days you will return here, to be with us."

So, the saintly rabbi returned to the Yitzchak Hall, above the cave, and with him was the sultan's sword. The sultan was pleased. Upon seeing their beloved rabbi return alive, the Jews of Hebron declared the day a holiday. Rabbi Avraham Azulai spent the next week with his students, teaching them all the esoteric teachings of Torah. Day and night he learned with them, instructing them, imparting to them all that he knew.

Seven days after being lowered into the Cave of Machpelah, Rabbi Avraham Azulai returned his soul to his Maker, passing peacefully in his home. He was brought to rest in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron, overlooking the

PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH

18 - 24 Cheshvan 5786
9 - 15 November 2025

Torah: Genesis 23:1-25:18
Haftorah: Kings I 11:1-31

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Negative Mitzvah 297 Saving a Person in Mortal Peril

It is forbidden to abstain from offering assistance when perceiving one's fellow in mortal danger, or his property in danger of destruction.

Positive Mitzvah 182 Designating Cities of Refuge

We are commanded to designate six cities of refuge in the Land of Israel and prepare unobstructed and direct routes leading to them. These cities provided refuge [against avenging relatives] for individuals guilty of accidental manslaughter.

Aleph Institute

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center

5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412-421-0111

Fax: 412-521-5948

www.AlephNE.org
info@AlephNE.org



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*By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles
Ascent Institute, Safed, Israel*

ON JUDAISM AND ISLAM

The language of the Torah is, in Erich Auerbach's famous phrase, "fraught with background." Behind the events that are openly told are shadowy stories left for us to decipher. Hidden beneath the surface of Parshat Chayei Sarah, for example, is another story, alluded to only in a series of hints. There are three clues in the text.

The first occurs when Abraham's servant is returning with the woman who is to become Isaac's wife. As Rebecca sees Isaac in the distance, we are told that he is "coming from the way of Be'er-lahai-ro'i" to meditate in the field. The placement is surprising. Thus far we have situated the patriarchal family at Be'ersheva (south of Jerusalem), to which Abraham returns after the binding of Isaac, and Hebron (between Be'ersheva and Jerusalem), where Sarah dies and is buried. What is this third location, Be'er-lahai-ro'i, and what is its significance?

The second is the extraordinary final stage of Abraham's life. In chapter after chapter we read of the love and faithfulness Abraham and Sarah had for one another. Together they embarked on a long journey to an unknown destination. Together, they stood against the idolatry of their time. Twice, Sarah saved Abraham's life by pretending to be his sister. They hoped and prayed for a child and endured the long years of childlessness until Isaac was born. Then Sarah's life draws to a close. She dies. Abraham mourns and weeps for her and buys a cave in which she is buried, and he is to be buried beside her. We then expect to read that Abraham lived out the rest of his years alone before being placed beside "Sarah his wife" in the "Cave of Machpelah."

Unexpectedly, however, once Isaac is married, Abraham marries a woman named Keturah and has six children by her. We are told nothing else about this woman, and the significance of the episode is unclear. The Torah does not include mere incidental details. We have no idea, for example, what Abraham looked like. We do not even know the name of the servant he sent to find a wife for Isaac. Tradition tells us that it was Eliezer, but the Torah itself does not. What then is the significance of Abraham's second marriage and how is it related to the rest of the narrative? The third clue to the hidden story is revealed in the Torah's description of Abraham's death:

"And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was

gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the Cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased of the children of Het. There was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife." - Genesis 25:8-10

Ishmael's presence at the funeral is surprising. After all, he had been sent away into the desert years before, when Isaac was young. Until now, we have assumed that the two half-brothers have lived in total isolation from one another. Yet the Torah places them together at the funeral without a word of explanation.

The sages piece together these three puzzling details to form an enthralling story.

First, they point out that Be'er-lahai-ro'i, the place from which Isaac was coming when Rebecca saw him, is mentioned once before: It is the spot where Hagar, pregnant and fleeing from Sarah, encountered an angel who told her to return. It is indeed she who gives the place its name, meaning "the well of the Living One who sees me." The Midrash thus says that Isaac went to Be'er-lahai-ro'i in search of Hagar. When Isaac heard that his father was seeking a wife for him, he said, "Shall I be married while my father lives alone? I will go and return Hagar to him."

Hence the sages' answer to the second question: who was Keturah? She was, they said, none other than Hagar herself. It is not unusual for people in the Torah to have more than one name: Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, had seven. Hagar was called Keturah because "her acts gave forth fragrance like incense (Ketoret)". This indeed integrates Abraham's second marriage as an essential component of the narrative.

Hagar did not end her days as an outcast. She returned, at Isaac's prompting and with Abraham's consent, to become the wife of her former master. This also changes the painful story of the banishment of Ishmael.

We know that Abraham did not want to send him away - Sarah's demand was "very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son." Nonetheless, G-d told Abraham to listen to his wife. There is, however, an extraordinary Midrash, in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, which tells of how Abraham twice visited his son. On the first occasion, Ishmael was not at home. His wife, not knowing Abraham's identity, refused the stranger bread and water. Ishmael, continues the Midrash, divorced her, and married a woman named Fatimah. This time, when Abraham visited, again not disclosing his identity, the woman gave him food and drink. The Midrash then says "Abraham stood and prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He, and Ishmael's house became filled with all

good things. When Ishmael returned, his wife told him about it, and Ishmael knew that his father still loved him." Father and son were reconciled.

The name of Ishmael's second wife, Fatimah, is highly significant. In the Koran, Fatimah is the daughter of Mohammad. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer is an eighth-century work, and it is here making an explicit, and positive, reference to Islam.

The hidden story of Chayei Sarah has immense consequence for our time. Jews and Arabs both trace their descent from Abraham - Jews through Isaac, Arabs through Ishmael. The fact that both sons stood together at their father's funeral tells us that they too were reunited.

Beneath the surface of the narrative in Chayei Sarah, the sages read the clues and pieced together a moving story of reconciliation between Abraham and Hagar on the one hand, Isaac and Ishmael on the other. Yes, there was conflict and separation; but that was the beginning, not the end. Between Judaism and Islam there can be friendship and mutual respect. Abraham loved both his sons and was laid to rest by both. There is hope for the future in this story of the past.

*By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks OBM
Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom,
5751-5773 (1991-2013)*

CHAYEI SARAH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Chayei Sarah," means "The life of Sarah" and it is found in Genesis 23:1. Sarah dies in 2084 (1677 BCE) at age 127 and is buried in the Cave of Machpelah (lit. "doubles", for the many couples buried there) 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 in 2123 (1638 BCE) at age 175 and is buried beside Sarah by his two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 18 Cheshvan 5786 - 9 November 2025 Pittsburgh Tree of Life Massacre (2018)

On Shabbat morning, Cheshvan 18, 5779 (Oct. 27, 2018), Pittsburgh's peaceful Jewish enclave of Squirrel Hill was shattered by gunshots as a crazed anti-Semite attacked worshippers at the Tree of Life congregation, killing 11. It was the deadliest attack on Jews on American soil. Reeling from the pain, Pittsburghers struggled to make sense of the tragedy that had befallen their city, and people around the world responded with an outpouring of love, support, Mitzvahs and faith.

Tuesday, 20 Cheshvan 5786 - 11 November 2025 Birth of Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch (1860)

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn (known by the acronym "Rashab"), was born on the 20th of Cheshvan of the year 5621 (1860).

Passing of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (2020)

An international religious leader, philosopher, and respected moral voice, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks was the author of over 30 books, served as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 5751 to 5773 (1991-2013) and took his seat in the British House of Lords in 5769 (2009).

Murder of Rabbi Zvi Kogan (2024)

Rabbi Zvi Kogan, a Chabad Shliach serving the Jews of Abu Dhabi, UAE, was abducted and

murdered by terrorists on 20 Cheshvan 5785 (2024). He was a nephew of Rabbi Gabi and Rivky Holzberg, Chabad emissaries in Mumbai, India who were likewise killed in a targeted terror attack in 5769 (2008).

Shabbat, 24 Cheshvan 5786 - 15 November 2025 Passing of Rabbi Avraham Azulai (1643)

Rabbi Avraham was a famous kabbalist who was born in Morocco, and lived in Hebron, Jerusalem, and Gaza. He authored Chesed L'Avraham and was the great-grandfather of Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (the Chida). He passed away on 24 Cheshvan 5404 (1643) and is buried in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron.