

Did Abraham Have a Daughter?

PARSHA INSIGHTS - CHAYAI SARAH (5758)

Avraham and Pru Urevu - What About His (Not So Well-Known) Daughter?

“Then again Avraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah” (25:1). Keep in mind that Avraham’s original wife, Sarah *Imeinu* [Sarah our foremother], had passed away earlier in our *parsha* [Torah portion](23:2). *Beraishis Rabba* in the end of 61:3 connects Avraham’s actions to a famous *pasuk* [verse] in *Koheles* [Ecclesiastes] 11:6, which states, “Sow your seed in the morning, but do not rest your hand in the evening”. This is known as the concept of “*la’erev*”, which means “in the evening”. In other words, states our *Midrash*, even if you had children in your younger years (“morning”), remarry (if necessary) in your older years - the evening of your life, and bear more children. Avraham fulfilled this edict by marrying Keturah and fathering more children later in life.

It seems from this *Midrash* that the only reason Avraham needed to marry Keturah after Sarah’s death was to fulfill the concept of “*la’erev*” - to remarry and have more children in the latter part of life. If not for this consideration, it would have been fine, as it appears, for Avraham to remain single. If so, it must be assumed that Avraham had already fulfilled the *mitzvah* [commandment] of *pru urevu* [multiplying and having a minimum number of children]. *Bais Shamai* holds that two sons are sufficient for this, while *Bais Hillel* requires a son and a daughter (*Mishna* in *Yevamos* 61B).

Such is the observation of the Gerer Rebbe, the *Sfas Emes*, on our *pasuk*. In the edition of the *Sfas Emes* published in Yerushalaim in 1975, on page 34, it is stated as follows. This *Chazal* [commentary by our Sages], which connects Avraham’s second marriage to the idea of fathering more children toward the sunset of life, but it does **not** say that he remarried in order to have the correct number of children, must be going according to the opinion that Avraham *Avinu* already had a daughter before marrying Keturah. In *Bava Basra* 16B, a bit past the middle of the page, it says that two opinions among the sages agree that Avraham did have a daughter. This can be learned from a *pasuk* earlier in today’s *parsha* (24:1), that “Hashem had blessed Avraham in EVERYTHING”.

☞ One of these two opinions holds that the name of the daughter was “*Bakol*”, like the word that means “in everything”. These opinions in the *Gemara* conclude that for his blessings to be complete, he must have had a daughter. Even though he already had Yitzchok, his *bracha* [blessing] reached its climax when a female was born to him (*Aitz Yosef* on *Bava Basra* 16B). All this would be going like *Bais Hillel*, that one needs a daughter and a son to fulfill *pru urevu*. Or perhaps, says the *Sfas Emes*, Avraham did like *Bais Shamai*, that two sons are enough for *pru urevu*. Since Yishmael and Yitzchok were both born already, the only need to marry later in life was for the consideration of “*la’erev*”, to continue procreating even in one’s more advanced years.

So far we have established, according to the *Sfas Emes*, that the *Midrash* attributing Avraham’s second marriage to “*la’erev*” indicates that he must have already fulfilled the *mitzvah* of having a certain number of children. Either he held like *Bais Shamai*, that it was sufficient to have Yishmael and Yitzchok, or like *Bais Hillel*, and he must have had a daughter, as in the above mentioned *Gemara Bava Basra*. The Gerer Rebbe provides other possible approaches, but the ones we have listed will be fine for us now.

In Sivan 5739 (1979), Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zatzal* [of blessed memory], wrote a fascinating response to a question from Rav Efraim Greenblatt of Memphis, and it had a lot to do with today’s *parsha* - the topic of Avraham *Avinu*’s daughter. The *teshuva* [return response] from Reb Moshe is in *Orach Chaim* 4, page 63, section 6.

Rav Greenblatt, a prominent *posek* [decider of Jewish law] and *talmid* [student] of Rav Feinstein, saw it brought down in the *sefer* [book] of the *Maharil Diskin* (Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin), based on earlier sources, that the daughter of Avraham *Avinu* died on the same day that Sarah died. This all originates in the *Gemara Bava Basra* 16B, which we examined in some detail before, which assumes that Avraham had a daughter according to two opinions. Did she actually die on the same day as Sarah *Imeinu*? Rav Greenblatt inquired about this from his revered *rebbe* [rabbi/teacher].

“I did not see (this information about her dying) in the *Midrashim* which I possess”, answered Reb Moshe. But Reb Moshe adds that this is not necessarily a proof; just because it was not seen in these *seforim* [books], it is not definitely false. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein adds that it is highly unlikely that such a tragedy occurred in Avraham’s family. “But it is something which would seem impossible, that Avraham *Avinu* would be punished with such a severe punishment, or even a small punishment, if it was not clearly stated in the *psukim* [verses] of the Torah...” This is especially true, states the *Igros Moshe*, since the sages in the *Gemara* learn about Avraham’s daughter from the *pasuk* we quoted above, that Hashem blessed Avraham “*bakol*” [in everything]. If the daughter passed away during Avraham’s lifetime, what kind of magnificent *bracha* could this have been? Also, it seems impossible that this daughter could have died on the day Sarah died. How so? The order of the *psukim* teaches us this. The death of Sarah is recorded right in the beginning of our *parsha*, in 23:2. The birth of the daughter to Avraham is in 24:1, AFTER Sarah died! Consequently, this daughter could NOT have died on the same day Sarah died.

In conclusion, states Reb Moshe, “It is clear that it is some type of error...as we see that it is not found in the words of our rabbis, the *rishonim* [early commentators]”. Reb Moshe adds that, “Until now, I have not seen the *sefer* of the *Maharil Diskin* on *Chumash* [Five Books of the Torah], but I will attempt, *b’li neder* [without a vow], to see it”.

We see from all this that at least according to two opinions in the *Gemara*, Avraham *Avinu* fulfilled *pru urevu* by having sons and a daughter. Or, he might have done the *mitzvah* by having two sons, like *Bais Shamai’s* opinion in *Yevamos* 61B. Either way, remarks Rav Moshe Feinstein, it is highly unlikely that this daughter died in Avraham’s lifetime. Avraham remarried later in life, and this indicates his fulfillment of “*la’erev*”, the need to continue having children even after fulfilling *pru urevu*.

These intriguing words of Torah, from the written and oral texts, from the holy words of our *gedolim* [great Torah scholars], are sure to impress and enlighten us all.

By Rabbi Moshe Heigh

☞ The Jewlight staff notes that there is another *d’var Torah* [lesson] relating to this subject. Copies of the essay are available by clicking the following link, or online at TorahMax.com under: “Sefer Bereishis”, “Parshas Mikeitz”, “[Being Fruitful During Famine](#)”- R. Moshe Heigh.

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