

“Life” is Not What it Seems

PARSHA INSIGHTS - CHAYAI SARA (5760)

WHAT A TITLE FOR A PARSHA!

We know that today’s *parsha* [Torah portion] records the passing of Sara *Imainu* [Sarah our foremother]. If so, why is the name of the Torah portion “*Chayai Sara*?” These words mean “the life of Sara”. It is deceiving! One would be led to think that the verses contained herein would describe the events of her LIFE. Instead, the Torah immediately tells of her demise, Avraham’s eulogy and mourning, and then her burial. Are these the appropriate subjects for a *parsha* entitled “The Life of Sara?”

Here is another, similar question. Please look ahead to the last *parsha* of *Sefer Beraishis* [the Book of Genesis], known as “*Vayechi*”. It begins by relating that Yaacov *Avinu* [Jacob our forefather] lived in Egypt for the last seventeen years of his life. This was after he was reunited with his beloved son, Yosef. Recall that Yosef had been separated from him for twenty two years, from the time he was sold to *Mitzraim* [Egypt] to the moment father and son embraced once again (see *Rashi Vayaishev* 37:34). This final *parsha* of the *sefer* [book] tells of Yaacov’s passing. In fact, right after the introductory *pasuk*, which states that he lived in Egypt for the last years of his existence in this world, the Torah begins to describe his demise. It is fine to tell us that he resided in Egypt for the end of his life, but why should the *parsha* be entitled “*Vayechi*?” This means “he lived”, yet the subject matter of the *parsha* is mainly about his death!

How do we explain the titles of these two *parshiyos* [Torah portions]? To restate it, ask someone: In which *parsha* does Sara die? “*Chayai Sara*” - “the life of Sara”. In which *parsha* did Yaacov pass on? “*Vayechi*” - “and Yaacov lived”. What is the profound meaning?

Surely, many explanations exist. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin will assist us today. It is possible that these names teach us that true life is the eternal existence in *Olam Habo* [the World to Come]. This only occurs after the soul separates from the body and enters the Heavenly realm.

We are reminded over and over again by our sages that life in this world is merely a preparation for *Olam Habo*. IT IS NOT THE FINAL DESTINATION. True, we yearn to live on and on in *Olam Hazeih* [this world] to serve Hashem and show our love for Him through *mitzvah* [commandment] observance. Every moment in this world is precious beyond description. However, *Olam Hazeih* is just a stopping point for *Olam Habo*. Consequently, genuine “life” exists only in the next world. (Please realize, though, that a *tzadik* [righteous person] can transform his *Olam Hazeih* into an *Olam Habo* type of existence with his *kedusha* [sanctity]. This is a separate discussion.)

For this reason, the DEPARTURE from *Olam Hazeih* is called “life” for *tzadikim* [righteous people]. They are headed for eternal bliss, to bask in the light of the *Shechina* [Divine Presence]. May our lot be like theirs.

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