Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Chayei Sara
November 15, 2025 *** 24 Cheshvan, 5786

Chayei Sara in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3174/jewish/Chayei-Sarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Chayei Sarah," means "The life of Sarah" and it is found in Genesis 23:1.

Sarah dies at age 127 and is buried in the Machpelah Cave 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 at age 175 and is buried beside Sarah by his two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: I Kings 1:1-31

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/585783/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftorah describes an aging King David, echoing this week's Torah reading, which mentions that "Abraham was was old, advanced in days."

King David was aging, and he was perpetually cold. A young maiden, Abishag of Shunam, was recruited to serve and provide warmth for the elderly monarch.

Seeing his father advancing in age, Adoniahu, one of King David's sons, seized the opportunity to prepare the ground for his ascension to his father's throne upon the latter's passing — despite King David's express wishes that his son Solomon succeed him. Adoniahu recruited two influential individuals — the High Priest and the commander of David's armies — both of whom had fallen out of David's good graces, to champion his cause. He arranged to be transported in a chariot with fifty people running before him, and invited a number of his sympathizers to a festive party where he publicized his royal ambitions.

The prophet Nathan encouraged Bat Sheva, mother of Solomon, to approach King David and plead with him to reaffirm his choice of Solomon as his successor. This she did, mentioning Adoniahu's recent actions of which the king had been unaware. Nathan later joined Bat Sheva and the king to express support for Bat Sheva's request. King David acceded to their request: "Indeed," he told Bat Sheva, "as I swore to you by the Lord God of Israel saying, 'Surely Solomon, your son, shall reign after me and he shall sit on my throne in my stead,' surely, so will I swear this day."

Food For Thought

Hope and Fears by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l 5767
https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/chayei-sarah/hopes-and-fears/

The sedra of Chayei Sarah focuses on two episodes, both narrated at length and in intricate detail. Abraham buys a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and he instructs his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Why these two events? The simple answer is because they happened. That, however, cannot be all. We misunderstand Torah if we think of it as a book that tells us what happened. That is a necessary but not sufficient explanation of biblical narrative. The Torah, by identifying itself as Torah, defines its own genre. It is not a history book. It is Torah, meaning "teaching." It tells us what happened only when events that occurred then have a bearing on what we need to know now. What is the "teaching" in these two episodes? It is an unexpected one.

Abraham, the first bearer of the covenant, receives two promises – both stated five times. The first is of a land. Time and again he is told, by God, that the land to which he has travelled – Canaan – will one day be his:

> (1) Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." There he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. Gen. 12:7
>
> (2) After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Avram, "Raise your eyes and look around from where you are to the north, south, east, and west. All the land you see I will give to you and your descendants

forever. . . Get up and walk through the length and breadth of the land, for to you shall I give it." Gen. 13:14-17

(3) And He told him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur Kasdim to give you this land to possess it." Gen. 15:7

(4) On that day the Lord made a covenant with Avram: "To your descendants I will give this land, from the River of Egypt to the great river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Refaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." Gen. 15:18-21

(5) "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout the generations: an eternal covenant. I will be God to you and your descendants after you, and I will give you and your descendants after you the land where you now live as strangers, the whole land of Canaan, an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." Gen. 17:7-8

The second was the promise of children, also stated five times:

(1) "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great. You will become a blessing." Gen. 12:2

(2) "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth: if anyone could count the dust of the earth, only then could your offspring could be counted." Gen. 13:16

(3) He took him outside and said, “Look at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.” He said to him, “that is how your descendants will be.” Gen. 15:5

(4) “And God said to him, “As for Me – this is My covenant with you: you shall be father to a multitude of nations. No longer shall you be called Avram. Your name will be Avraham, for I have made you father to a multitude of nations. Gen. 17:4-5

(5) “I will bless you greatly and make your descendants as many as the stars of the heavens, as the sand on the seashore.” Gen. 22:17

These are remarkable promises. The land in its length and breadth will be Abraham’s and his children’s as “an everlasting possession.” Abraham will have as many children as the dust of the earth, the stars of the sky, and the sand on the seashore. He will be the father, not of one nation, but of many. What, though, is the reality by the time Sarah dies? Abraham owns no land and has only one son (he had another, Ishmael, but was told that he would not be the bearer of the covenant).

The significance of the two episodes is now clear. First, Abraham undergoes a lengthy bargaining process with the Hittites to buy a field with a cave in which to bury Sarah. It is a tense, even humiliating, encounter. The Hittites say one thing and mean another. As a group they say, “Sir, listen to us. You are a prince of God in our midst. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs.” Ephron, the owner of the field Abraham wishes to buy, says: “Listen to me, I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.”

As the narrative makes clear, this elaborate generosity is a façade for some extremely hard bargaining. Abraham knows he is “an alien and a stranger among you,” meaning, among other things, that he has no right to own land. That is the force of their reply which, stripped of its overlay of courtesy, means: “Use one of our burial sites. You may not acquire your own.” Abraham is not deterred. He insists that he wants to buy his own. Ephron’s reply – “It is yours. I give it to you” – is in fact the prelude to a demand for an inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. At last, however, Abraham owns the land. The final transfer of ownership is recorded in precise legal prose (Gen. 23:17-20) to signal that, at last, Abraham owns part of the land. It is a small part: one field and a cave. A burial place, bought at great expense. That is the entirety of the Divine promise of the land that Abraham will see in his lifetime.

The next chapter, one of the longest in the Mosaic books, tells of Abraham’s concern that Isaac should have a wife. He is – we must assume – at least 37 years old (his age at Sarah’s death) and still unmarried. Abraham has a child but no grandchild —no posterity. As with the purchase of the cave, so here: acquiring a daughter-in-law will take much money and hard negotiation. The servant, on arriving in the vicinity of Abraham’s family, immediately finds the girl, Rebecca, before he has even finished praying for God’s help to find her. Securing her release from her family is another matter. He brings out gold, silver, and clothing for the girl. He gives her brother and mother costly gifts. The family have a celebratory meal. But when the servant wants to leave, brother and mother say, “Let the girl stay with us for another year or ten [months].” Laban, Rebecca’s brother, plays a role not unlike that of Ephron: the show of generosity conceals a tough, even exploitative, determination to make a profitable deal.

Eventually patience pays off. Rebecca leaves. Isaac marries her. The covenant will continue.

These are, then, no minor episodes. They tell a difficult story. Yes, Abraham will have a land. He will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, or suddenly, or easily. Nor will they occur without human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower will bring them about. The Divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that God will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation, from God to Abraham and his children that they should act. God will help them. The outcome will be what God said it would. But not without total commitment from Abraham's family against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable obstacles.

A land: Israel. And children: Jewish continuity. The astonishing fact is that today, four thousand years later, they remain the dominant concerns of Jews throughout the world – the safety and security of Israel as the Jewish home, and the future of the Jewish people. Abraham's hopes and fears are ours. (Is there any other people, I wonder, whose concerns today are what they were four millennia ago? The identity through time is awe-inspiring.)

Now as then, the Divine promise does not mean that we can leave the future to God. That idea has no place in the imaginative world of the first book of the Torah. To the contrary: the covenant is God's challenge to us, not ours to God. The meaning of the events of Chayei Sarah is that Abraham realised that God was depending on him. Faith does not mean passivity. It means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we – inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise - who must bring it

about.

Death and Dignity: Chayyei Sarah by Gordon Tucker
https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/death-and-dignity/

Parashat Hayyei Sarah begins with the death of the matriarch Sarah. Interestingly, it is the first time that a death enters into the Torah's narrative. In all of the genealogies from Adam and Eve through the lives of Abraham and Sarah, deaths were matter-of-factly recorded with the simple word וימת. And of course, there was the global death and destruction during the Flood. But the death of Sarah is the first one that generates a story, and a template, as it were, for how to deal with death—burial, eulogizing, mourning, and the subsequent continuation of life.

For many of us, this moment in the Torah feels deeply human. Abraham's acts of mourning and burial show that grief, ritual, and dignity are intertwined from the very beginning of our tradition. The Torah does not simply record that Sarah died; it teaches us how to honor a life and how to move forward with compassion.

Because of this, the eighth-century C.E. halakhic compendium known as the She'iltot of Rav Ahai Gaon chose this parashah as the occasion for an exposition on the laws and practices of aveilut, mourning. The She'iltot is one of the earliest of the medieval halakhic works, dated to the eighth century; it is organized according to the Torah's parashiyot, in a style that poses a question (hence the name) and explores talmudic and other material in order to formulate instruction on practice. It was a way for everyday Jews to see how the Torah's stories could translate into lived, ethical action. Studying the She'iltot is an excellent way, week in and week out, to be

instructed in and reminded of the central values underlying Jewish law.

What Rav Ahai had to say on the subject of death and mourning gave rise, as the Talmud itself typically did, to many dicta that, while seemingly tangential, continued an underlying theme. In this case, the She'iltot presented a list of historical enactments (based on texts in the talmudic tractates of Mo'ed Katan, Ketubot, and Sanhedrin) that were all united by a concern for human dignity.

Rav Ahai begins with an enactment attributed to Rabban Gamliel, who saw that the elaborate conventions attending burial were so burdensome that poor families would abandon their dead to the mercies of the community because they could not afford those expectations. Even today, the cost of funerals and mourning rituals can create anxiety for families already struggling with loss. The rabbis, sensitive to the emotional and economic weight of grief, sought to make dignity—not display—the defining feature of Jewish mourning.Therefore, Rabban Gamliel, hoping to set an example, gave instructions to his own family that at his death, he was to be buried in plain linen shrouds. This very democratic leveling of the socioeconomic strata is the source of this Jewish practice still in use to this day.

From there, Rav Ahai cites several other enactments that were made "for the honor and dignity of the poor," to prevent unnecessary embarrassment to those of meager means. Expectations for gifts of food that would be brought to a house in mourning were lowered, so as not to embarrass those who had little to bring. When the wealthy were themselves in mourning, they were told to pour the customary wine for the comforters to drink with the mourners into the simplest and

cheapest possible vessels. All so that when the poor were in mourning, they would not be humiliated by their necessary use of inexpensive cups.

And perhaps most poignant of all is the following: The faces of the wealthy dead used to be visible whereas the faces of the poor—who often died of malnutrition—were covered up so as not to reveal the discoloration that starvation brought on. The Sages eliminated this disparity by ruling that all of the deceased should be covered by a simple shroud, so as not to impinge on the honor and dignity of the poor.

These enactments remind us that human dignity (kevod haberiyot) is not an abstract ideal; it is preserved in the smallest gestures of equality and empathy. To ensure that every person, regardless of means, could be buried and mourned with honor was itself a radical moral act. In a world often stratified by wealth and status, Jewish law made compassion the great equalizer.

Rav Ahai compiled this Talmudic material as part of the exposition of mourning practices occasioned by the Torah's first story of burial and mourning. But more than that, it was an opportunity for him to instruct future generations in the importance of kevod haberiyot, human dignity. In his teaching, we see a theology rooted not only in reverence for God but in reverence for each other—a belief that our treatment of the vulnerable defines the moral strength of a community.

In our own moment, when economic and social inequality continues to shape so many aspects of life and death, this ancient sensitivity feels remarkably modern. The rabbinic insistence on dignity for all reminds us that compassion and justice must begin with the most intimate human experiences —loss, care, and mourning.

The rabbinic call to uphold human dignity across every difference remains as urgent now as it was in Rav Ahai's time. *JTS's upcoming convening on this very theme invites us to bring these teachings into conversation with our contemporary struggles for equity and compassion.* *(Gordon Tucker is Vice Chancellor for Religious Life and Engagement, and Assistant Professor of Jewish Philosophy at JTS)*

Chayei Sara: Raise Your Voice for Justice: Chayei Sara
by Rabbi Shifra Tobacman
https://truah.org/resources/shifrah-tobacman-chayei-sara-moraltorah_2025_/

"Abraham rose from mourning his wife (Sarah). He spoke to the Hittites saying, 'I am a foreigner living among you. Sell me a gravesite among you that I may bury my dead.'" (Genesis 23:3-4)

At least 20 people have died while in ICE custody this year. Media and immigration advocates have reported overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and issues with food. But whatever the official cause of these deaths might be, the circumstances are clear: hateful, cruel, illegal, and immoral actions of ICE, its agents, and the Trump administration, paired with the lethal history of racism and xenophobia deeply baked into U.S. history and culture.

Each of the 20 people who have died this year had loved ones, a history, a lineage. The bereaved may have traditional rituals and customs for honoring their loved ones who have died and may have been unable to attend to these because they are undocumented and can't claim their loved ones' remains without risking additional harm to themselves or their

families, or because the remains were not made available.

This is painful to me. I love Jewish traditions for death and mourning, and I'm equally committed to every person being able to grieve according to their own beliefs and customs. I didn't learn much about Jewish mourning rituals growing up, but the wisdom they provide is now an essential element of my spiritual life. Some of our core rituals involve a visit to a burial site. On the rare occasions that I go to my hometown, I've been moved to tears visiting the graves of my mother, father, grandparents, and aunts, most of whom died many years ago. These rituals matter. But they aren't always possible, and when they aren't, sometimes what's required is the simple calling forth of sacred memory.

Right now, some of the losses I want to call forth are the two ICE detainees who have died in my state this year, Ismael Ayala-Uribe and Huabing Xie. I didn't know them and I don't know their loved ones, but I want to honor their memories by naming them. I want to be sure that in the maelstrom of traumatic loss occurring at the hands of ICE, I don't become numb to those enduring these horrible experiences. I start by learning two names. It doesn't feel like enough.

Recently, I was co-organizer and emcee for "Walking Our Faith: A Vigil of Prayer and Caring for Immigrants," which was held outside of two buildings from which ICE has been operating in downtown San Francisco. (KQED) Approximately 250 faith leaders from diverse traditions gathered, walked, sang, and prayed for justice and compassion. We listened attentively to the beat of a drum, connecting us to those who have been disappeared from that place, and to their loved ones. We stood grounded in sacred observance. It was there that I learned that 20 people have died this year in ICE

custody.

As I reflect on our powerful act of solidarity with the people who are detained, I think, too, of those 20 who have lost their lives. Though I won't be visiting a gravesite in their memory, the solidarity from that day downtown matters. I was surprised to see that passersby were visibly moved. A news story quoted a woman who had travelled from out of state to be with her friend and was anxiously awaiting his return from an immigration appointment. Our presence comforted her, she said. Her friend came out a while later, and they hugged in joyful relief. (KQED) And I, in turn, was comforted to see their joyful reunion. We're connected to each other in surprising ways, even during this time of disruption and loss.

The violent and destructive times in which we find ourselves right now require us to develop a level of courage, resilience, and compassion that can feel overwhelming. We build our capacity by doing it together, raising our voices for justice, attending to the grief when we can, and expanding our connections, one heartbeat at a time, one heart to another.

(Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman is a spiritual leader, teacher, interfaith chaplain, and poet. Rabbi Shifrah was ordained by Aleph Alliance for Jewish Renewal in 2015.)

Hayyei Sarah – 5786 by Rabbi Dorit Edut
https://ajr.edu/parashat-hayyei-sarah-5786/

For the last two years our Jewish people have been in a state of trauma and mourning – yes, I would say it is PTSD on a national scale. We've been worried constantly about what was happening in Israel, especially with the hostages, and worried about our physical safety and emotional security in the

Diaspora. Now with the return of the living Israeli hostages from Gaza, and some of the bodies of the murdered hostages, we are able to have a modicum of relief, a chance to begin mourning rituals, and a 'moment to breathe again', as Rabbi Donniel Hartman and Yossi Klein Ha-Levi said in their recent "For Heaven's Sake" podcast. As regards those of us in the Diaspora, there is a momentary lull, though we still live with much anxiety and keep both eyes and ears open for any potential attacks.

Perhaps the Biblical character that most resembles a person with PTSD is Isaac. After all, his half-brother abused him as a kid, his mother dies without any disease or forewarning, and his own father tried to ritually slaughter him as we read on Rosh HaShanah (Gen. 22:10) and in last week's portion Vayeira. However, we hear nothing from him until the very end of this week's portion (Gen. 24:62-67). We learn that he has been in mourning after the death of his mother, approximately for three years which, according to our Jewish tradition, is considered an excessive amount of time and points to an unusual mental health state.

What helps Isaac recover from this condition or at least be able to resume living with others in a more vibrant way? The answer the Torah gives is Rebecca, the kinswoman bride whom his father and servant Eliezer have found from their family in Aram-naharaim. Their meeting is a climactic moment in the narrative. It is not only a case of love at first sight (the first time "love" is mentioned between a man and woman in the Tanakh), but also of "comfort" or "consoling", as the Hebrew verse indicates. Rebecca, taken into Sarah's tent by Isaac, restores the "light" therein, according to Midrash Aggadah 24, by kindling the Shabbat candles, separating the dough of the challah, and practicing the laws of niddah, family

purity. Perhaps, suggests the 12th century commentator Radak, Isaac recognizes in Rebecca the same personal characteristics his mother had and this in itself consoles him. But it is certainly through the compassionate and patient care of Rebecca that Isaac recovers and is soon able to start a family with her.

Let us remember that Rebecca, like Abraham, has given up her birth family, her birthplace, and her country to come to a land and culture she did not know – but with the hope that Isaac will be a great husband and she will become a part of his family in Canaan. She was not told that she would be the one to lift him up out of his depressed state, yet she manages to do so through love and kindness and no known complaints.

How can we understand this Biblical example in terms of modern psychology and how can it be applied to an entire nation, both those living in Israel and those in the Diaspora? First let it be explained that, like the process of mourning in Judaism, there are several stages that one goes through in recovering from PTSD. According to Dr. Trish Kahawita, in an article entitled “A Guide to The Stages of Complex PTSD Recovery” (Sept. 20, 2022, Health-Match) there are four stages to this process: 1) self-acknowledgement of symptoms, 2) re-establishing a sense of safety, 3) remembering and grieving, and 4) reincorporating yourself into everyday life. Of course, therapists, family and community are involved at various stages. The third and fourth stages sound much like what happens when in Jewish practice we mourn the loss of a loved one – going from the seven days of shiva, to the first month or shloshim, to the setting up a gravestone and ending the year with the anniversary or yahrzeit observance. Gradually we come to adapt ourselves to this new reality of our lives and to being able to both remember and move

forward.

I often think of my parents who were Holocaust survivors and only found each other after the war. Their PTSD manifested itself over several years as I grew up. At first, we lived quite separate from others outside of our immediate family who lived in New York, Israel and Luxembourg, and we spoke European languages at home, plus kept up many of the customs and cuisine of their birthplaces. Gradually, especially as my sister and I brought in more American ways, my parents joined a synagogue and we became part of a larger community here in Detroit. When my sister and I were pre-teens, my parents started to tell us of their wartime experiences and also established a group of friends whom they called “fellow refugees.” Later, other friends and neighbors became part of their circle and they joined PTA, Hadassah, and various camera clubs. I can’t say that my parents were ever totally without anxiety – and my father even temporarily developed a severe case of asthma from stressors at his workplace when he was passed over for a promotion just because he was the only Jew in his engineering department though he had much more education and experience. This must have been a flashback for him to his German experience after the Nuremburg Laws were enforced. But over the next 30 years my parents felt more secure and enjoyed traveling and living in this country.

When it comes to a whole community or nation experiencing PTSD, there is also a slow but gradual process of going forward with our lives while not totally forgetting that pain or sadness we have experienced. Perhaps this is already happening in Israel today, and we in the American Jewish community can be the supportive ones, as Rebecca was to Isaac. As regards our own stressful situation, the answer

seems to be standing together with Jews here and all over the world, including Israel, and figuratively giving a hand to each other, helping each other to rise as at the end of our shiva period. Na'ama Levitz Applbaum in an article entitled "An Invitation to Rise From Our Communal Mourning" (in the journal Sources, Summer 2025) writes that "Both must begin with honest conversations in our own communities and with one another about what it means to be in relationship with Israel while mourning all human loss… cultivating a language that holds grief, loyalty, and hope together – one that reflects one of our core values, the belief that every human being is created be tzelem Elohim, in the image of God. We must invest in education, community building, and meaningful dialogue… imagining what a renewed Jewish future looks like in Israel and around the world."

Let us do this also with genuine love, compassion, and understanding that will help us renew our familial connections and guarantee a strong future for the coming Jewish generations. Am Yisrael Hai! *(Rabbi Dorit Edut was ordained in 2006 after completing her studies at the Academy for Jewish Religion, a pluralistic Jewish seminary, in Riverdale, NY. She served as student rabbi during her years of study at the Kane St. Synagogue (Conservative) in Brooklyn, NY, the Progressive Congregation (Reform) of Boro Park,NY, and Temple Benjamin (Reform) of Mt.Pleasant, MI. She is currently the President at the Detroit Interfaith Outreach Network in Detroit MI)*