

# **A SON'S MEANINGFUL TRIBUTE**

**Parshas Chayei Sarah**

**By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach**

Sarah's death occupies a major portion of the Sedrah. The Torah elaborates upon Abraham's involvement: the bewailing, the eulogy, the task of finding a suitable place for burial. No less than twelve times is Abraham's name mentioned in this connection (Braishis ch23). What about Yitzchok? Not once is his name mentioned. Yitzchok was already an accomplished person, with the experience of an Akaidah. Surely did he have much to say, to express his emotions at the tragic death of his mother, who prepared him to become one of the three sainted ancestors. Why the complete omission of any role for Yitzchok?

One wishes to suggest that this is intentional. There is a paramount teaching conveyed in the omission of Yitzchok's name in the eulogies and the burial procedures. The eulogies, the words of praise, the assessment of the great loss, all this well befits the husband of the deceased. All that is left for the widower in the aftermath of the demise of his beloved wife is to bask in the glory that has been, in the harmoniousness and happiness of the past, in the righteousness of the personality that has been torn away. Not so a son. For the son the expression of praise and of the magnitude of his loss are insignificant compared with awesome task at hand which first then begins to unfold.

A son can bring merit to a parent (Sanhedrin 104a). While the deeds of a child reflect upon the parent in his lifetime, it is more consequential to the parent after death, when the parent can no more

perform deeds of his own. The fulfillment of the divine promise of a future sainted people was now thrust upon him in its full cogency. "Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall call him Yitzchok, and I will fulfill my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him."

The Midrash states that for the three years following Sarah's death, Yitzchok spent at the Bais Medrash of Shem studying Torah. This is indicated at the end of the AKAIDAH in the passage "And Abraham returned to his young men" (ibid, 22:19). And where was Yitzchok? He was sent to Shem to study Torah, and remained there for three years (Rabba 56:11, Targum Jonathan 22:19 and see R. Bachava). This was Yitzchok's way of paying tribute to his mother.

The entire chapter AISHES CHAYIL, woman of valor (Mishlai 31), is a reference to Sarah, according to the Midrash Tanchuma (Braishis 24:1). Among the felicitous praises of this woman of valor, one passage refers to her disappearance from this earth: "Strength and majesty are her clothing, and she laughed on her last day" (31:25). Rashi explains the use of the phrase "she laughed", VaTISCHAK, that it expresses a certain assuredness and fearlessness. Sarah had no reason to fear death, for she prepared well for it during her life on this earth. One ventures to add that the word VaTISCHAK herein is chosen to indicate the paramount factor in the confidence, i.e. the righteousness of her son whose name, Yitzchok, also means "laugheth", and who is also called YIS-CHAK (Tehillim 105:9), even more reminiscent of TIS-CHAK. It is comprehensible to exit from this world with a smile when it is with the equanimity of leaving behind a son, a Tzadik, like Yitzchok, who not only has already reached a high level of

sanctity, but would continue after her demise to bring bliss and blessing to her departed soul.

The bestowal of praise on the last day has a place, but that is not the role of the son. The chapter AISHES CHAYIL continues: "Her children rise up and strengthen her, her husband, also and he praises her" (31:38). Note the distinction in the roles. The husband praises her, but the children strengthen her.

Yitzchok's appearance at his mother's funeral was perhaps unnoticed. But his years of faithfulness to the "everlasting covenant", bequeathing it to the children after him, gave her strength.

And here the Sedrah relates the mission of Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchok. Interestingly, the chapter dealing with this mission occupies sixty seven sentences, the longest chapter in Braishis. It is also the second longest chapter in the whole Torah (Parshas Noso contains the largest number of sentences). Every detail is mentioned, especially Eliezer's heartrending prayer to succeed in his mission. When Yitzchok brings Rivka into Sarah's tent, he notices that her actions closely resemble that of Sarah. He was then "consoled after his mother" (24:67).

While Yitzchok's name is conspicuously omitted at the eulogies for his mother, his response is the kind which befits a son. Spending several years absorbing saintliness in the Beth Midrash of Shem, he is now ready to continue his parents' legacy, to build Kneses Yisroel.

