

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS:	<i>Torah Chayei Sarah:</i>	Genesis 25:1-18
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	I Kings 1-28-31
	<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	I Corinthians 15:54-57

*Avraham gave up the spirit,
and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people.*
[Genesis 25:7]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 116:15-19;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #2, *T'shuvah* [the Prayer of Return]

Deep within the recesses of the cave at Machpelah abide the bodily remains of Sarah. Our beloved matriarch is gone – but she is not forgotten. ***Chayei Sarah*** – Sarah's life – lives on through her progeny.

Yitzchak, Sarah's only natural child, is a child no more. He has reached 40 years of age. Since transcending the great Moriyah challenge he has prospered greatly. He has taken a woman of virtue as a wife. They are now in the process of establishing their own household.

But what is to become of Avraham, the Wandering Aramean?

We have experienced a changing of the guard in relation to our matriarchs. Are we due for one in relation to our patriarchs as well?

What lies ahead for our beloved 'friend of God? Will he just go quietly into that good night that eventually seems to claim us all? Or does he perhaps have yet one more '***Lech Lecha!***' surprise in him? We will see, Beloved.

The first man to cut covenant with the Creator of the Universe since the days of the Flood is now nearly *140 years old*. He still has flocks and herds, servants, silver and gold. But alas, he has not heard the Beautiful Voice of the Creator since the dramatic events of Moriyah. And alas, on this side of the afterlife he will never once hear that Voice again. But do not pity Avraham. He is a transcender, an overcomer, and a lover of God. And so, bereaved or not, aging or not, he plows right ahead with life, still marvelously and supernaturally empowered by the

¹ All rights with respect to this publication are reserved to the author, William G. Bullock, Sr., also known as '***the Rabbi's son***'. Reproduction of material from any *Rabbi's son* lesson without written permission from the author is prohibited. Copyright © 2005 – 2014.

Breath of the Almighty's prior Visitations. The power to complete a Divine mission, you see, is found not only in the Holy One's Presence, but in His Breath and in His Words.

Today we will find that Avraham will live well over 30 years after Sarah's death – a whopping *175 years* in all. But alas all we know about Avraham's last 30 years is found in today's concluding aliyah of Parsha *Chayei Sarah*.

Welcome to the narrative of Avraham's *next 30 years*.²

Avraham's 'Next 30 Years' - Being Blessed In His Going Out as He Has Been Blessed in His Coming In

The first thing we learn about the three decades Avraham lived after losing Sarah is that he did not spend any significant time alone. Torah tells us that after Sarah died *Avraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah*³. **Genesis 25:1.**

Suddenly finding himself supernaturally empowered to sire children, Avraham will beget a whopping six sons through this late-life marriage. Here is how Torah records *toldot Avraham v'Keturah* [the generations of Avraham and Keturah]:

*She bore him:
Zimran,
Yokshan,
Medan,
Midyan,
Yishbak, and
Shuach.*
[Genesis 25:2]

Of the 6 sons Keturah bore only Midyan will figure prominently in the further narrative of Torah. His progeny will form the nation of the same name - a group of nomads who will figure significantly in both the maturation of Moshe [Moses] after he is forced to leave Egypt and in the seduction of the sons of Israel at Ba'al-Peor on the plains of Moav.

Notably it was Midyan's descendants who actually effectuated the sale of Yosef

² The phrase is taken from a Phil Vassar song about moving on to another stage of life. The song is entitled '*My Next Thirty Years*', and was made popular c. 2000 CE by country music artist Tim McGraw.

³ **Keturah** = *Qaturah, kuf, tet, vav, resh, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #6989, pronounced *ket-oo-raw'*. According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the word means 'incense'. The verb root is Strong's #6999, *qatar*, which means to *be fragrant*, or *give off a pleasant scent*. Hebrew tradition says that Keturah was a name subsequently given to Hagar, mother of Yish'mael. Torah, however, does not state this to be the case.

[Joseph] into slavery in Potifar's house. **Genesis 37:36**.

Moreover in the time of the Judges it will be the progeny of Midyan who will oppress Israel up to the time of Gideon.

It has been conjectured, but of course cannot be proven, that the fourth son of Avraham by Keturah, the one named **Medan**, is the person for whom the city of Medina, Saudi Arabia [one of the 3 holy cities of Islam] was named. This city on the western edge of the central Arabian plateau was the first city in which Mohammed was embraced as a prophet. It was this city that served as the base from which Mohammed conquered Arabia and forcibly converted its native peoples to Islam.

The last son born to Avraham, *Shuach*, may have been related to the friend of *Iyov* [Job] known as Bildad *from Shuach*. See *Iyov* [Job 2:11].

Living to See His Children's Children

Not specifically mentioned in Torah but easily calculated from available data⁴ is the fact that Avraham lived to see the first 15 years of the lives of his twin grandsons Ya'akov and Esav. It is a blessing of the Holy One for someone to live to see and to have an impact upon the lives of his 'children's children'.

There is, regrettably, no specific reference in Torah to any interaction between Avraham and these two young men. Hebrew legend, however, suggests that it was while Ya'akov and Esav were grieving their grandfather Avraham's death that Ya'akov purchased Esav's birthright for a bowl of stew.

Dividing the Inheritance

Though Avraham had other children after Yitzchak he remained faithful to both the Holy One's declaration to him that "**... from Yitzchak will your seed be called.**" [Genesis 21:13 (a)] and to Sarah's instruction that "**... the son of this handmaid will not be heir with my son, even with Yitzchak.**" **Genesis 21:10(b)**.

Vayiten Avraham et-kol-asher-lo l'Yitzchak

Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzchak,

V'liv'nei ha-pilagshim asher l'Avraham

but to the sons of the concubines who Avraham had,

⁴ Avraham was 100 when Yitzchak was born. **Genesis 21:5**. Yitzchak was 60 (meaning Avraham was 160) when Ya'akov and Esav were born. **Genesis 25:26**. Avraham lived to 175, which would mean that Ya'akov and Esav were 15, Yitzchak was 75, and Yishmael was 88, when Avraham died.

natan Avraham matanot
Avraham gave gifts.

V'yeshalechem me'al Yitzchak beno b'odenu chai
and while he yet lived, he sent them away from Yitzchak his son,

kedmah el-eretz Kedem
eastward, to the land of Kedem.
[Genesis 25:5-6]

It is an act of patriarchal love to make arrangements *while yet living*, as did Avraham, for the division of one's estate. Indeed to leave this matter unattended is not only unwise but unBiblical.

Avraham did not leave open for question to whom his inheritance would go. He did not just let the survivors 'fight it out'; nor did he leave it up to any legal authority to distribute his wealth. He gave lifetime gifts to Yishmael and the sons of Keturah, but he sent them away, and gave all the rest, residue, and remainder of his estate, and his spiritual heritage, to Yitzchak.

The Passing of Avraham From this Earth

In the midst of a God-encounter long ago the Holy One made this promise to Avraham:

V'atah tavo el-avotecha b'shalom
You will join your fathers in peace,

tikaver b'seyvah tovah
and you will be buried at a good old age.
[Genesis 15:15]

The Holy One will be faithful to fulfill this promise. At the age of 175 years⁵:

V'yigva v'yamot Avraham
Avraham gave up the spirit⁶,

b'seyvah tovah zaken v'savea
and died in a good old age, an old man, and a satisfied one

v'ye'asef el-amav
and he was gathered to his people.
[Genesis 25:8]

⁵ The years of Avraham's life are also, like the years of Sarah's life, set forth by Torah in stages. Torah tells us he lived *100 years*, and *70 years*, and *5 years*.

⁶ Gave up the spirit, or gave up the ghost = ***gava***, *gimel*, *vav*, *ayin*, Strong's Hebrew word #1478, ***gav-vah'***. It means to breathe out with a deep breath. Figuratively, it refers to the separation of a man's soul from his body.

As stated in the introductory shiur to parsha Chayei Sarah – the parsha of the changing of the guard - the euphemistic phrase *v'ye'asef el-amav* "and he was gathered to his people" alludes to nothing less than the immortality of the human soul. Let me explain why.

Please note that in Scripture the statement that a deceased person is 'gathered to his people' always occurs *before* any reference to that person's burial. The sequence is *breathing the last* [physical death], followed by being gathered to one's people [the departure of the soul for a realm in the spirit], then followed further by burial of the physical remains – which by then constitute nothing more than an empty shell.

In Hebraic thought therefore the words "gathered to his people" are considered a reference to the departed soul being *ingathered among the souls of those who have already left this physical world*.

In other words Scripture pictures burial as always something that always happens after the deceased has been 'gathered to his people'. The implication is that the person himself [or herself] has already departed *long before* and been gathered to his or her people by the time his or her body is lowered into the grave (or otherwise interred).

Nevertheless, something must be done with the physical remains. They should not be left to biodegrade like the spent shell of a locust, or the shed skin of a snake.

Avraham's Burial

Though Avraham had taken a second wife he was buried alongside Sarah, the beloved wife of his youth, in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron. His burial was the first – and only thing – Yishmael and Yitzchak did together.

To his credit Yishmael put aside his resentment toward Sarah [at whose word he and his mother had been banished] and his animosity toward Yitzchak [who had replaced him as Avraham's favorite son] and actually worked with Yitzchak to escort their mutual dead to and settle his remains in the earthly resting place from which he would await the resurrection. As Torah puts it:

*Yitzchak and Yishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah,
in the field of `Efron, the son of Tzochar the Hittite, which is before Mamre,
the field which Avraham purchased of the children of Het.
There was Avraham buried, with Sarah his wife.*

[Genesis 25:9-10]

A Look Back at the Life of Avraham Avinu

Three weeks ago when we began the study of the life of Avraham [his name was then ‘Avram’] we said:

“How this ordinary man encountered the Most High God, was over many years humbled and transformed by Him, to the extent that he became not only the “*exalted father*” [in Hebrew, Avram] of the Hebrew peoples, but the “*Father of Many Nations*” [in Hebrew, Avraham] is one of the most critical theological lessons anyone seeking to truly know the Holy One must understand.”⁷

A little later we added:

“According to the sages of Israel . . . Avraham . . . was tested by the Holy One ten (10) times. Each test was an *ox-goad*, making Avram move, grow, get closer to the Divine Plan and to his Divine Destiny. Through Avram’s tremendous series of ever deepening encounters with the God of the Universe, in the midst of trials and tribulations, we learn not only *who he was*, but *Who God is*. Moreover, if we will hear, Beloved, I believe we will learn a lot about *who we were created to be*.⁸”

Let’s look back at what we’ve learned as we’ve walked with Avraham through the last 100 years of his life. We have walked with him through 8 full-blown God-encounters, namely:

1. The *original call*, in Charan [Genesis 12:1-3];
2. The *first ‘appearance’*, at Beit-El [Genesis 12:7];
3. The *instruction to walk the length and the breadth of the land*, at Beit-El [Genesis 13:14-17]
4. The *B’rit Ceremony, Act I* of II [Genesis 15]
5. The *B’rit Ceremony, Act II* of II [Genesis 17]
6. The *Divine Visitation at Hebron* [Genesis 18-19]
7. The *Instruction to let Sarah decide Yishma’el’s fate*, at Hebron [Genesis 21:1-13]
8. The *instruction to present Yitzchak on Mount Moriyah* [Genesis 22:1-2].

We have eavesdropped on *multiple conversations* Avraham has had with angels.

We have seen the Holy One *cut covenant with Avraham*.

⁷ See the Rabbi’s son’s Introductory Shiur to Parsha *Lech Lecha*.

⁸ See the Rabbi’s son’s Introductory Shiur to Parsha *Lech Lecha*.

We have seen the Holy One *forgive many, many of Avraham's sins*.

We have seen the Holy One *discipline* – and then turn around and *bless* -Avraham through an amazing array of life experiences.

We have seen the Holy One *respond to Avraham's intercession*.

And we have felt Avraham's pain and shared his joy on numerous occasions and in a wide variety of circumstances.

And through it all, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see, Avraham has taught us important lessons about what it means to be *a friend of God*.

The Legacy of Avraham

What was Avraham's legacy? What about him should be alive and active in all of us?

According to the sages our dear father Avraham was challenged with *ten tests or trials* - and *because of, and on the strength of his love for the Holy One* he persevered through and overcame each one⁹. **Pirkei Avot 5:3.**

What he did – all he did – he did *for love*.

He did nothing for earthly blessings. He did nothing in hope of heavenly reward.

He did not seek either wealth or power. He was not distracted from the humble yet world-changing mission to which he had been called by fame, by fortune, by the honors he received from men, by the adoration he received from women, by the adulation he received from children, or by the pride of personal achievement.

⁹ According to the sages: “ And these are the ten trials:

1. He was thrown into the furnace, as it says, “***I am God that took you out from Ur Kasdim.***”

2. God instructed him, “***Go for yourself.***”

3 & 4. Two tests concerning Sarah [first in Egypt, then in Gerar].

5. With Hagar, as it says, “*Consort, now, with my maid-servant.*”

6. And with Yishmael, as it says, “*Drive out this slave-woman [with her son].*”

7. [Going to war] with the kings, as it says, “*He armed his his disciples.*”

8. Circumcision: in that God instructed him, “***Walk before Me and be perfect.***”

9. In the Covenant Between the Parts, when the Holy One prophesied that his descendants would be enslaved in four exiles.

10. With Yitzchak (Isaac): “***Take, please, your son, your only one.***”

All he did in life he did for the love of the Ever Watchful, Ever Faithful, Unseen Shepherd-King Who befriended him. He was in it for the love of His Creator – and absolutely nothing could seduce or pry him away from that love.

He therefore did not allow his heart to become haughty and self-righteous. He did not try to make people be what he wanted them to be or do what he wanted them to do. He just loved them with the Holy One's love. He just treated them as he would have wanted to be treated.

He avoided silly arguments with men over things like politics, philosophy, religion, property rights, what/who is good/evil, what/who is moral/immoral, what/who is true/false, what/who is fair/unfair, what/who is right/wrong, and what is proper and improper halakhah. Any questions or concerns he had about such things he addressed only to the Unseen Shepherd, in prayers of intercession.

He did not waste time assessing fault or blame for things that went wrong – he stayed focused on the mission he was assigned.

He knew he did not have to crusade for or defend the honor of either the Creator of the Universe or the Truth – because both could take care of themselves much better than he could. He knew if one's god had to be defended by a man, it was not God at all. And he came to understand that if one's perception of truth had to be either promoted or defended by a mortal, it was not Truth.

He did not preach to men about injustice and unrighteousness – he *modeled* justice and righteousness to them in real time in real ways, by walking with and following the instructions and guidance of the Holy One wherever he went.

He did not claim to be perfect – nor think himself so. He made mistakes – and then, in humility he allowed the Holy One to discipline him, to return him to the right path, and to restore both his vision and his passion.

And through it all his love – for his God, for his family, and for his fellow man - never grew cold.

This was the outworking of Avraham's *emunah*. And *this is his legacy*.

Is it Really 'Goodbye' . . . or Just 'Until we Meet Again'?

One might be tempted at this juncture to bid a sad 'goodbye' to Avraham Avinu. After all, he is dead and buried in the cave of Machpelah with Sarah. From this point in Torah our discussion will focus on Yitzchak, Ya'akov and their

descendants.

But let us not be so quick to say ‘goodbye’. Perhaps we should instead say simply ‘til we meet again.’

What am I babbling about, you ask? *I'll tell you.* There is a stunning passage in the apostolic records of Y'shua's talmidim where Y'shua is telling a parable about the realm of Eternal Life on the one hand and the realm of *she'ol*, or place of eternal death, on the other. In that passage Y'shua assigns Avraham Avinu a very prominent role in, of all things, the realm of Eternal life. Look with me for a few moments at Luke 16:19-31:

*"Now there was a certain rich man,
and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day.
A certain beggar, named Eleazar, was laid at his gate, full of sores,
and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.
Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

*It happened that the beggar died,
and that he was carried away by the angels to Avraham's bosom.
The rich man also died, and was buried.
In She'ol, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment,
and saw Avraham far off, and Eleazar at his bosom.*

*He cried and said, 'Father Avraham, have mercy on me,
and send Eleazar, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water,
and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame.'*

*But Avraham said, 'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime,
received your good things, and Eleazar, in like manner, bad things.
But now here he is comforted, and you are in anguish.
Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed,
that those who want to pass from here to you are not able,
and that none may cross over from there to us.'*

*"He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house;
for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them,
so they won't also come into this place of torment.'*

"But Avraham said to him, 'They have Moshe and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'

*"He said, 'No, father Avraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'
"He said to him, 'If they don't listen to Moshe and the prophets,
neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.'"*

That is a rather long passage to quote in a lesson like this, I know. And theologians will scoff and say that *a parable is just a parable*, and proves nothing. Most will even tell you an ‘Old Testament’ figure like Avraham simply could not

enter the Realm of Eternal Life, because he died before Y'shua died on the Roman execution stake and hence never accepted Y'shua as personal savior.

Believe what you want, of course. I however would rather rely upon even a parable from the mouth of Y'shua then on all the books all the theologians in the world could ever write.

So look for 'St. Peter' to meet you at the pearly gates if you desire. Me, I'll be looking to climb into Avraham's bosom - right next to Eleazar the beggar.

*May the God of Avraham be your God,
May the blessing of Avraham rest upon you,
May you inherit the promises, and May you carry His seed.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 116:15-19

Precious¹⁰ in the sight of the Holy One is the death of his holy ones¹¹.

*O Holy One, truly I am your servant.
I am your servant, the son of your handmaid.
You have freed me from my chains.*

*I will offer to you the sacrifice¹² of thanksgiving,
And will call on the name of the Holy One.
I will pay my vows to the Holy One,
Yes, in the presence of all his people,
In the courts of the Holy One's house,
In the midst of you, Y'rushalayim.
Praise the Holy One!*

¹⁰ **Precious** = *yakar*, yod, kuf, resh, Strong's Hebrew word #3368, pronounced *yaw-kawr'*. The verb root is *yakar*, Strong's Hebrew word #3365, which Strong's defines as "to esteem, be prized, be valuable, be precious, be costly, be appraised".

¹¹ **Holy ones** or **saints** = *Chasidin*, chet, samech, yod, dalet, yod, nun sofit, a masculine [or mixed gender] plural of chasid, *chet, samech, yod, dalet*, Strong's Hebrew word #2623, pronounced *khaw-seed'*. The verb root, of these words is, of course, *chesed*.

¹² **Sacrifice** = *zebach*, zayin, beit, chet sofit, Strong's Hebrew word #2077, pronounced *zeh'-bakh*. This word is first found in Torah in Genesis 31:54. It is from the verb root *zabach*, zayin, beit, chet sofit, Strong's Hebrew word #2076, pronounced *zaw-bakh'*. This means to put to death with a knife or sword, as an act of executing Divine judgment. The English word 'sacrifice' does not adequately [or, in today's English, at least] accurately, translate this word. We tend to consider a sacrifice as something we abstain from [such as some Christian denominations give up something for Lent]. But unless there is a sharp blade, blood, and a death, there cannot be a *zebach*.