

The Torah informs us of the death of Sarah and notes that she lived 127 years. Chazal comment that the word שנה, years, was included with each power of 10 (100 years, 20 years, 7 years) to inform us that even at the age of 127, Sarah retained the beauty and childlike innocence found in younger people. Indeed, Sarah was Abraham's full partner in his life's work to convince the people of his time to abandon idolatry and bring them a belief of the One, True Gd. From her earliest youth she dedicated herself to this lifelong mission.

The Torah inform us towards the end of the Parsha of the passing of Abraham at the age of 175. Again the Torah adds the word שנה to each of the powers of 10 associated with his age (100 years, 70 years, and 5 years). Rashi notes the use of the word שנה by Abraham is similar to its use by Sarah, that Abraham was pure of sin as a young child. The Torah describes his death as ויגוע וימת. As the Gemara teaches אין גויעה נאמר אלא אצל צדיקים, the extra term connoting death is only associated with the passing of a righteous person.

At the end of the Parsha, the Torah records the passing of Ishmael at the age of 136. Again, the Torah associates the word שנה with each part of the number. Indeed, the Torah applies the double form of passing, ויגוע וימת, to Ishmael, similar to Abraham. This would seem out of place, as we know that for most of his life, Ishmael was a bandit and vandal who according to the Torah possessed a negative character to the degree that Sarah told Abraham to cast him out lest his abhorrent behavior corrupt their son Isaac. Indeed, Gd agrees with Sarah and tells Abraham to heed Sarah and cast him out as Isaac will be the one who bears him descendants who will be included in the Covenant Gd established with Abraham, not Ishmael. Clearly we cannot apply the same Midrashic statement that ascribes goodness and righteousness to all his years based on the repeated use of the word שנה.

Chazal derive from the verse and Abraham's children buried their father, Isaac followed by Ishmael, that Ishmael repented later in life. Ishmael realized that Isaac was the true successor to Abraham and his covenant with Gd to inherit the land. Chazal teach us that repentance has the power to erase previous sins, even under certain conditions to convert misdeeds to merits. With all the baggage he accumulated he could not erase the impression he created during all those years

when he developed a reputation as a bandit and murderer. Hence while the word שונה is repeated, we cannot apply the same exegesis to it and credit Ishmael with a completely righteous life.

The Torah appears to emphasize this point and contrast Abraham's life with Ishmael's. When noting the passing of Abraham, the Torah adds several words that were not added to the announcement of Ishmael's death: אשר חי, the years that he lived. Abraham's entire life was consumed with the pursuit of a relationship and covenant with Gd. There was a life and vitality associated with that quest that identified him uniquely. Ishmael did not possess such a spirit of life. The Torah contrasts them by the subsequent verses appearing after informing us of their deaths. The Torah tells us that even though Abraham had other sons from Hagar and Keturah (according to Chazal they are one and the same), yet even though Abraham loved them all and gave them presents before he passed away, Isaac was the one he loved most and was the divinely designated heir to his legacy. As the Torah tells us, ויתן אברהם את כל אשר לו ליצחק, Abraham gave everything he had, the legacy of the Covenant with Gd, to his son Isaac. The other children are referred to as the children of his concubines, בני הפלגשים, as opposed Isaac who is referred to as his son, בנו יצחק.

Chazal teach us that one who leaves behind a righteous son is considered to still be alive. In other words, he lives on through his son who emulates his ways. Abraham, who left behind a son like Isaac who followed his path was considered alive. The Torah explicitly states that Isaac was Abraham's son who carried on his legacy, to the exclusion of the others who did not carry on Abraham's legacy and were not included in the covenant with Gd. Hence the phrase אשר חי is appropriate for Abraham, who lived a covenantal life and left behind a child who perpetuated it.

Ishmael, on the other hand, repented later in life. We should not minimize the difficulty inherent in repentance, especially later in life when one has to break the mold of sin he created for himself in his youth and middle age. Yet we can give Ishmael credit only for himself. He had no impact, השפעה, on his offspring. The Torah notes that twelve tribes descended from him, however none were worthy of Abraham's legacy. Despite growing up in the house of Abraham and imbibing

some of Abraham's teachings, outlook and perspective on life, he failed to convey any of it to his children. As a result, the exegesis applied to Abraham does not apply to Ishmael. In the final analysis, where none of his children followed in even his more limited religious footsteps, he failed, על פני כל אחיו נפל. He had limited success in life and none in death.

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