

The story of Abraham begins in Parshat Lech Lcha when Abraham was 75 years old. The narrative of his life and accomplishments spans three Parshiot and covers 62 years, till the death of Sarah at the start of Parshat Chayei Sarah when he was 137 years old. Rambam says during this period he developed an entire ideology that he transmitted to the thousands he brought to believe in the One Gd. After Sarah's death, Abraham buried Sarah, found a wife for Isaac, married Ketura, had more children and passed away at the age of 175. While Abraham lived another 38 years after Sarah passed away, his role as the main character in the Torah's narrative essentially ended with Sarah's death and burial. Often the degree of importance attached to something by an individual is proportional to the struggle required to attain it. Though Abraham struggled for many years to have a child with Sarah, he apparently did not struggle to have children with Ketura. It was the struggle to have Isaac that showed how important he was. The lack of struggle on Abraham's part to father the children mentioned at the end of the Parsha indicates that Abraham felt they were insignificant compared to Isaac.

After the death of Sarah, Abraham realized it was now time for him to depart the stage and hand over the main role in the unfolding drama of Jewish destiny to Isaac. Isaac had to take over Abraham's role as the main character at this point. Abraham recognized the responsibility Isaac was about to assume. He took it upon himself to ensure that Isaac had everything he needed to succeed in that mission. First and foremost he needed a wife to be his partner in his mission. Abraham sent Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac and he brought Rebekah back. Upon entering Sarah's tent, she immediately took over Sarah's role. All the special signs that marked Sarah's home that disappeared when she passed, returned with the arrival of Rebekah. With her arrival, Isaac became Abraham and Rebekah became Sarah.

Abraham's life was connected to Sarah's. Abraham could not have accomplished his mission in life without Sarah. Sarah recognized that Ishmael was a negative influence on Isaac. She was the one who realized Ishmael must be sent away for Isaac's and Abraham's sake, or else his entire mission would fail. Abraham was content to let Ishmael assume the role to carry on his mission. Gd points out to Abraham that Sarah's input was important, for without her his mission will not succeed. Gd informed

Abraham that even though Ishmael will have many children and become a great nation, the covenant will not be passed to him; only to Isaac. Both Abraham and Sarah were necessary to bring Isaac into the world in order for Isaac to reach his potential. Gd appeared to Isaac and blesses him after Abraham died to reinforce this idea.

Tanach is replete with stories of a strong woman at the side of various men. Adam had Eve, Abraham had Sarah, Isaac had Rebekah. Without Rebekah interceding, Isaac would have given Esau the ברכת אברהם with the entire Mesorah. If not for Miriam, Moses would have died due to Pharaoh's decree to murder all Jewish male children or through assimilation into the house of Egyptian leadership. It is not a stretch to say without Jewish women the community could not survive.

Every scientific discipline has a theoretical and practical aspect. While someone can propose a theory, it often takes another with implementation skills to bring it to fruition. The United States genius lies in its engineering skills while European nations were noted for their theoretical and abstract genius. The same often applies in the world of Torah and Halakha. Often one finds a Torah scholar who is very capable in explaining and clarifying difficult problems in various Torah areas, what we would refer to as Lomdut. He can see and explain clearly the differences between various cases. However he stumbles when it comes to render a decision regarding basic Halakhic problems, Psak Halakha. Others were strong in Psak Halakha but were less able to clearly explain and resolve contradictions in the Talmud. Rabbi Akiva Eiger was an example of the former. He was expert and clear in the theoretical thought processes. It was almost impossible to catch him in error regarding a Talmud passage. While he did author responsae, he was not as expressive in them as he was with his novella on Shas. Often his responsae were more Lomdut than Psak.

While it was and is customary to study the works of Rabbi Akiva Eiger on Shas in Yeshivot, the same was not the case regarding the novella of the Chatam Sofer. Yet when it came to Psak Halakha, the responsae of the Chatam Sofer were indispensable. Where Rabbi Akiva Eiger excelled in original thought and explanation, Lomdut, Chatam Sofer excelled in Psak

Halakha. The Rav compared his grandfathers, Reb Chaim Brisker and Reb Elya Pruzhaner (Feinstein). The former was among the most creative Talmudic minds of the last several centuries but at times found Psak Halakha challenging and would refer such cases to others, including the latter, who were stronger in the area of Psak Halakha.

When it comes to the laws of Sabbath, you cannot put your finger on the Jewish Sabbath just by looking at the שולחן ערוך. The Sabbath is not just the collection of prohibitions, מצוות לא תעשה. It also includes the positive aspects, in the form of קיום ועשה as to how to celebrate the day. To properly appreciate the Sabbath, a Jew had to understand what the day before Sabbath meant, how previous generations hurried to prepare for Sabbath during the days that preceded it. Someone who is inspired by something or someone, waits impatiently for their arrival and prior to the arrival is in a state of flux, hurrying here and there. שמור את יום השבת does not mean to heed but rather to watch or wait for the Sabbath. Slowly, after nearly six days of the mundane week, the Jew removes his weekday clothes, בגדי חול, including his dirty spiritual garments, and dons his holy external and internal Sabbath clothing, בגדי שבת. On this day, he studies Torah, sings זמרות and teaches his children the significance of the day.

One cannot appreciate Rosh Hashana by simply studying the laws relating to the appropriate length of the Shofar blasts of תר"ת, תשר"ת, תש"ת. The Jew must live through and experience the month of Ellul, and the associated sanctity and trepidation, in order to prepare for and appreciate Rosh Hashana. Whoever has not experienced a Jewish home preparing for Passover has no idea as to the meaning of the holiday. When Rabbi Yehoshua Diskin saw the great care and effort his wife exerted to prepare for Passover, he remarked the שולחן ערוך does not require so much effort, that she need not work so hard. His wife responded that if we relied on you (men) to prepare for Passover we would have surely eaten Chametz on Passover. No effort was too much or too great when it came to preparing for the Sabbath or the Festivals. These experiences speak to the genius of the Jewish engineers, Jewish women, who put the theory into practice and developed the Sabbath and the festivals, not those who laid down the dry laws.

The hands-on approach is what is important. Parents would bring their children to Cheder and introduce them to Torah study. Young children, students, used to experience Abraham's trials and tribulations. They were part of the story. Whether it was Joseph, David or Rabbi Akiva, Jews did not simply study history, they lived it. They cried when Abraham bound Isaac, when Joseph was thrown into the pit and when the brothers were finally reunited. Who were the teachers for these children? It was not the scholars who affected this. It was the Jewish Public, the **עם הָמוֹן**, the simple teachers who inspired these feelings for Judaism. They did not require a choir or a cantor or all sorts of innovations to inspire them. They subconsciously built a living personality with love and unbounded dedication and imbued warmth and empathy into everything they taught.

Judaism is not just the **שולחן ערוך**. There are areas that the Jewish community was more restrictive than the Halakha, for example all the restrictions we have adopted for Passover. Every Jewish custom, **מנהג**, has a source, **מקור**, and often was established through blood and tears. It is frightening to hear people who neither studied or participated in the Jewish experience scorning our time honored customs and traditions, **מנהגי'ם**. These people have no right to change anything.

The High Priest wore eight special garments when performing the Temple service while the rest of the Priests wore four. The **אבנט**, belt, contained Shaatnez, a combination of linen and wool prohibited by the Torah generally, was worn by both the High Priest as well as the other Priests. The Torah and Chazal teach us important lessons about Jews as individuals and collectively. People like the High Priest or the Vilna Gaon dedicated and sanctified their lives and minds to Kedusha and Torah study. On the other hand, the wagon driver's mind was filled with simple thoughts.

The Vilna Gaon carried the weight and concerns of all of Israel on his shoulders. He understood the **נגלה** as well as **נסתר**, those subjects and concerns that were open and obvious to all, as well as those that were hidden, known only to a select few. Externally, the Vilna Gaon's appearance was

different than the simple people around him. His prayer, daily routine and his clothing all appeared different. However, both the Gaon and the simple Jew wore the same אבנט, When it came to the belt that represents אמונה, deep faith and loyalty, there was no difference between the Vilna Gaon and a simple Jew. Both were dedicated to it. There was a vast difference between the High Priest and a regular Priest. Yet both wore the same אבנט, they demonstrated the same faith and dedication. It was not only the scholars who surrendered their lives to sanctify the name of Gd, קדוש השם, during the pogroms and the Holocaust. During the Khmelnytsky Pogroms, many Jews could have saved themselves by simply acknowledging Christianity. Yet the simple, less learned Jew, demonstrated the same dedication when it came to קדוש השם as the great scholars. When it comes to matters of אמונה, the faith that inspires one to observe יהרג ועל יעבור is encoded in the DNA of all Jews. Even if the Jew could not pray, he felt the Sabbath and had the same emotional bond to it as the scholar. In many cases, their emotional commitment exceeded the knowledge of the scholars. Without these feelings, Judaism could not have survived. It is this appreciation of commitment that escapes the reform and conservative clergy.

It was the Jewish woman in particular who played an important role in the survival of the Jewish tradition and people. Our Rabbis tell us that Jewish women have great merit as they bring their children to school to study and enable their husbands to study Torah. In this regard, the Jewish woman gets more reward. In his eulogy for his wife, the Vilna Gaon paid tribute to her role and sacrifice that allowed him to become the Vilna Gaon. He said that while he experienced hunger pangs, he never felt cold as he studied in a heated Synagogue and was always kept warm by his Torah study. His wife deserved the greater reward because she stayed home so he could study. She felt both hunger and cold and did not have the Shah and Taz to warm her, as he did.

Abraham was called Prince of Gd, נשיא אלקים. Abraham saw and interacted with angels. Gd appeared to him many times and he even asked Gd to wait for him while he attends guests! And Gd complied! Gd told Abraham that He intends to destroy Sodom and the surrounding cities. These interactions were

a form of reward for Abraham, as the Torah says **המכסה אני מאברהם אשר אני עושה**.

On the other hand, Sarah was never referred to as a princess. Sarah was not explicitly rewarded. Like Sarah, it was the unsung Jewish mothers and simple Jews through our history who dedicated their lives to enable their children and husbands to study. They were the engineers. While the men were the theoreticians who developed the mathematical formulae to build bridges and ladders to reach heaven, **סולם מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה**, they needed the engineers to reach their goal.

Abraham needed Sarah. When Sarah died Abraham realized that alone, without his engineer at his side, he could no longer succeed. He came to eulogize and cry for Sarah, **לספד לשרה ולבכותה**. Why does he eulogize her before he cried? We cry when we experience a sharp and strong physical pain. We also cry when we experience emotional pain. Eulogy, **הספד**, is not the first reaction to loss. Eulogy requires the intellect, to think through what we lost and how we will continue after the loss. Our first reflex reaction is to cry from the initial sharp pain. Ultimately, with the growing realization of the magnitude of the loss, the eulogy aspect overtakes the depth and extent of the initial pain. After the Shiva period, when the loss truly sets in, one begins to appreciate the fullness of loss. That is the time of **הספד**.

Abraham had two reactions when he discovered he lost his beloved Sarah. The first was to cry in pain, **בכי**. After all he lost his wife of many years, the one person who stood with him through so many life experiences, times of suffering and times of joy. Now, after the **עקדה**, when he could have truly enjoyed their son Isaac with her, he loses Sarah. This was Abraham's final test. How would he react? Abraham cried.

However, Abraham realized that not only did he lose his **נעורים**, his life partner. With Sarah's death his mission came to an end. Without Sarah there is no Abraham. At this point the **השראת השכינה**, the special connection between Abraham and Gd, was to be transferred to Isaac. He had to surrender all he fought for. Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to

acknowledge that the theoretician could not continue without the engineer. It was not just Sarah's passing he had to come to grips with, but his own imminent demise. Even though Abraham lived another 38 years after Sarah's passing, his mission was over. His eulogy was not just for Sarah, it was for him as well. The Torah tells us that the field became **לְאִבְרָהָם לְאֶחָזָת קֶבֶר**, a burial plot for Abraham. Why not say that it was a burial plot for Sarah? Because he realized that his mission in the Mesorah had concluded together with Sarah's death. It was now time for Isaac to take over. At the start of Parshat Toldot, Isaac and Rebekah pray in opposite corners of the room, they act like Abraham and Sarah. They are a team. However, after the death of Rebekah, the Torah no longer mentions Isaac, except to record his passing. Once the engineer, Rebekah, is gone the theoretician, Isaac, dies as well.

It is incumbent upon us to build Yeshivot for our children. Everyone is impressed when a great scholar hails from a particular school. However, the need for schools is not only for the High Priest or the Vilna Gaon. It is for all who will wear the **אַבְנֵט**. Schools are needed to inculcate basic faith in Jewish children, to imbue them with the love of Judaism. Our children must appreciate the Sabbath, festivals, the laws of family purity and prayer. We need Yeshivot and teachers to unite our Jewish children of today with previous generations. It is not the **what** that is important but rather the **how**. The Jewish home, kitchen, Sabbath and festivals were laboratories of Jewish life. Jewish education was never confined to the four walls of a school room. It embraces the educational experience both in and out of school, provided by teacher, father and mother.

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