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### USING TIME TO THE FULL

**A** BRAHAM IS FAMOUS AS THE ANCESTOR OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE and as a unique individual who realised that G-d is One, despite living in a world full of idolatry and cruelty. The Sages also describe him as someone who knew how to utilise his time to the full...

The Sedra<sup>1</sup> tells us that “Abraham was old, coming in days” (Gen.24:1). At first sight this is a rather puzzling statement. The Hebrew words might be translated “advanced in days”, but this seems like a needless repetition: surely if you are old you are “advanced in days”? The Rabbis explain that there is another way to understand these words. The Torah is telling us that not only was Abraham old, but also that he had “come into”, entered and truly experienced each of his days. He had filled his life, every day of his existence, with content, activity, and meaning. Every moment of every day had been utilised for good. Each day was something tangible, real, whole and complete. This meant that the weeks and the months had been similarly full, and of course the years. No time had been lost<sup>2</sup>.

One might feel that it is, unfortunately, quite possible to live through a day, a month, a year, or even several years - without discovering anything new, without developing, changing or reaching any level of fulfilment.

The example of Abraham is that we have to “enter” every single day of our lives. The Sages tell us that every day the world is recreated

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afresh. A new day dawns: it is a new world, with new opportunities. The challenge for us is to focus on it properly, to be aware of its immense potential, as an artist is aware of the potential of a fresh canvas.

The goal of Torah teaching is to help us live in this way. The Mitzvot develop the potential hidden in each moment. They reveal the infinite dimension which is the inner reality of our lives. Then, like Abraham, we too really live.

### **THE AFTERNOON PRAYER**

The Sages tell us that each of the three daily prayer services was instituted by one of the Patriarchs. Abraham instituted the Morning Prayer, Isaac the Afternoon Prayer, and Jacob the Evening Prayer<sup>3</sup>.

In our Sedra we see Isaac praying the Afternoon Prayer. It says “And Isaac went out to meditate in the field towards evening” (Gen. 24:63). This is the true nature of prayer. A deep communication, joining one's soul with G-d.

This is potentially so whenever a person prays. On Shabbat, or on a weekday morning, afternoon or evening. Yet there is an added special quality in the case of the Afternoon Prayer, especially in these Winter months.

This is because the Afternoon Prayer comes in the midst of our busy workaday activities. The fact that, for a few minutes, we leave these concerns behind and pray, is very precious<sup>4</sup>.

It means that beyond the excitement, rush and sometimes panic of work, there is something higher: a few moments of closeness with G-d. Then we return to our business and professional affairs, with renewed strength...

1. Genesis 23:1-25:18. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.3, p.772 ff. 3. Talmud Berachot 26b. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.5 p.401.

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*SEDRA CHAYEI SARAH*

**LIVING LEGACY**

"You know," said Leah thoughtfully, as she and her friend Shira walked into the classroom, "I really want to do something in honour of my great grandmother. Today's exactly one year since she passed away. The problem is, I can't think what I should do."

"Hmmm," Shira nodded. She knew how her friend felt but she didn't know how she could help.

Leah was about to say something more, when in walked Mrs Greenberg. "Talk to you after class," she whispered to Shira, and the two girls headed to their seats.

"So," began Mrs Greenberg, "Who knows what the name of this week's Sedra – Chayei Sarah - actually means?" She always went straight into the lesson, without any introduction. She could sometimes tell good jokes, but usually later on in the lesson.

Mrs Greenberg was greeted by blank stares, and Leah shifted nervously in her seat. She honestly couldn't be bothered sitting through the Sedra class.

"Well", said Mrs Greenberg, "'Chayei Sarah' means 'the life of Sarah' which is rather ironic since the Sedra begins with Sarah passing away."

Suddenly, Leah began listening, this just might be able to help her with her problem.

“So, you want to know why this week’s Sedra is called ‘The Life of Sarah’ even though she passes away right at the beginning?” asked Mrs Greenberg. Most girls took absolutely no notice, but Leah nodded enthusiastically, ready to hear the answer to this question, which seemed to relate to her and her great-grandmother.

“Well, although the Sedra begins with Sarah’s passing, it also speaks about the life of Sarah’s son - Isaac. He was, in a sense, the living legacy of Sarah. This is one of the reasons why the Sedra is called ‘The life of Sarah’, because through her son Isaac, her life was being continued.”

Leah’s hand shot up. “So does that mean we’re all somehow the living legacy of Sarah now? And also maybe of our own grandparents’?”

“Quick thinking Leah. We all have the power to continue the great things that our ancestors have achieved. And since we have them backing us up, we can, in a way, reach even further than they did.”

“Cool. So what’s one thing we can continue from Sarah, in practical terms?” asked Shira, thinking of her friend Leah’s problem.

“Well there are many things, but one thing quite relevant is lighting a Shabbat candle every Friday before sundown. The Sages tell us that every week, there was a miracle that Sarah’s candles burnt from one Shabbat to the next. So I think lighting a Shabbat candle, making a blessing like your mother, is something practical each of you girls can continue from Sarah. By the way, you should light your single candle before your mother lights her two candles.”

After the lesson, walking out of class, Leah turned to Shira. “That’s just what I am going to do in honour of my great-grandmother. I’m going to start lighting a Shabbat candle every week.” Leah smiled. She felt that she was going to be a living legacy, for all the generations.

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