



Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

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Today's Torah

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Shabbat Parashat Hayyei Sarah
November 3, 2018 - 25 Heshvan 5779



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Love Brings Comfort

Torah Reading: [Genesis 23:1 – 25:18](#)

Haftarah Reading: [1 Kings 1:1 - 31](#)

After the binding of Isaac, and throughout the events surrounding the death and burial of Sarah, his mother, Isaac disappears from the narrative. It is not clear if he came home with Abraham, and he is nowhere to be found in Abraham's process of mourning and burying Sarah. Though we see Abraham sending his servant, Eliezer, back to Haran to find Isaac a wife from his own kin, we do not see any direct action from Isaac himself; Isaac seems to be absent, or at least silent.

Eliezer embarks on his journey alone, prays to God for a woman that will go above and beyond to care for a stranger, almost as though he knows what Isaac needs in a mate without speaking to him, and finds Rebecca. By the time Eliezer returns with Rebecca, it seems that three years have passed. (Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born, making him 37 when she died. Based on Genesis 25:20 at the start of next week's portion, he is 40 when he marries Rebecca).

Finally, two chapters after we last saw him, we meet Isaac again. He is out in the field, seemingly

alone. Rebecca sees him, and upon learning who he is, veils herself. Eliezer tells Isaac all about the events of meeting Rebecca, her caring for him and his camels, his meeting with her family, and her willingness to join him to meet and marry Isaac. Immediately after hearing Eliezer's story, Isaac marries Rebecca: "Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebecca as his wife. Isaac loved her, and found comfort after his mother's death" (Genesis 24:67).

In Breishit Rabbah, there is a Midrash about this tent, which may give a clue to how Isaac agrees to this arrangement so quickly:

"All of the days that Sarah was living, there was a cloud [of God's presence] attached to the entrance of her tent. When she died, the cloud was no more. When Rebecca came, the cloud returned.

All the of the days that Sarah was living, the doors were open wide. When she died, they were no longer wide. When Rebecca came, the wideness returned.

All the days of that Sarah was living, there was a blessing in her dough. When she died, the blessing went away. When Rebecca came, the blessing returned.

All the days that Sarah was living, a light burned from one Shabbat evening to the next. When Sarah died, the light was extinguished. When Rebecca came, the light returned.

As soon as [Isaac] saw [Rebecca], that she did the deeds of his mother, he brought her into the tent."

Up to this verse, we had no real indication of how much Isaac was still hurting from his mother's death. For three years, he has not found comfort, has been alone, and has not been able to take down her tent. For three years, he has longed for the cloud that showed love and happiness and God's presence, for the open doors, for the welcome smell of constantly baking bread, for the bright light, ever-present light. For three years, he has been dwelling in his past, trapped in his grief, missing from his own story.

Note that these miraculous occurrences surrounding Sarah's tent don't seem to reappear just because Rebecca lives—they reappear when Rebecca comes to the tent—which happens when Isaac sees her, hears of her generosity and openness, brings her in, and begins to see the possibility of a future again. He heard about her generosity, her willingness to come and be a part of a people who always keeps its doors open to the stranger. He sees the values he cherished in his mother still alive in another person, still existing in God's world.

We learn much about mourning from this week's portion. From Abraham, we learn to offer eulogies to honor our loved ones. At the end of the Parasha, when Abraham dies, we learn from Isaac and Ishmael to set aside any differences while we honor the person we have lost. In that same moment, we learn from God to be present with a mourner when they bury their dead.

From Rebecca, we learn how to help them once Shiva has ended, once it is time to reengage with our lives. For many of us, the hardest part of grief is finding a way back into our lives, to find a way to not disappear into our grief. Grief and depression can feel like we have stopped living our stories, as we are so consumed by what is missing that we cannot see what is. However, when Rebecca

arrived, Isaac remembered what it was to see generosity in the world. He sees the possibility of a future, and returns to his narrative. Through engaging with her, he remembers how to love. In remembering how to love, he is comforted.

This past week, we were all Isaac. We came to worship God, and we were hurt in the process. We faced loss and grief. Eleven lives were lost in an act of terrorism against our community. We have spent this week reeling, mourning both them and our own sense of security. However, we cannot disappear from our own story; we now need to be Rebecca for one another. We need to be the person who will jump to serve the person in front of us, and to care for the others around them. We need to be willing to comfort one another, to keep the lights and values those we have lost alive, to share our love and hold their miracles.

Because love will get us moving on from pain.

Love will bring us healing.

Love will bring us comfort.

Love will help us slowly to restart our lives.

Jenni Greenspan grew up in the San Fernando Valley, and spent summers at Camp Ramah in California (where she first met her husband). As a teen, she was active in Far West USY and attended Los Angeles Hebrew High School, and always found home in Jewish spaces. After high school, she earned her Bachelors of Arts with a double major in Psychology and Feminist Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She began her studies at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in 2014 to explore a passion for Judaism and Jewish Life. Since beginning her studies at Ziegler, she has grown as a service leader, taught children in multiple communities in Los Angeles, and she kept Camp Ramah close to her heart as Rosh Yahadut during the summer and Coordinator for the Ruach Nashim Women's Spirit Retreat with Rabbi Shawn Fields-Meyer. She currently interns at Adat Ari El in North Hollywood and at Congregation Beth Am in San Diego.



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