

Parshat Chayei Sarah October 26, 2013/Revised for November 11, 2017 at Fabrangen West

By Bracha Laster

TWO THEMES:

1. A real estate theme: Abraham did not buy just one plot, he bought an area. He was planning ahead for the needs of himself and of his larger family, not just the immediate need of burying his wife.
2. When you have had a loss, how do you move on?

Further explanation:

1. The first theme is about **buying real estate**, specifically burial plots.
 - a. The Jewish Encyclopedia says, “Since Jewish worship does not require a special building, the purchase of a cemetery often indicates the establishment of a Jewish community. In 1656 in New Amsterdam/New York . . . in Newport, RI 1677. . . in Philadelphia 1738. . . in Charleston SC 1762.
 - b. Other congregations establish a burial site as one of their first acts. Fabrangen, though, took some wandering—40 years in fact—to get to this place. The establishment of a section in a cemetery for Fabrangen community has been a long time coming. Over the years, we made an informal arrangement with Tifereth Israel Congregation to purchase plots as needed. Several of our congregants are buried near each other in the TI section, but future purchases of plots cannot be adjacent to them; they will be in another place. So, after many discussions, we are embarking on buying a section of plots in Garden of Remembrance/Gan Zikaron Cemetery in Clarksville, Maryland. (If you want to be part of this purchase now or during the few two years, please see a member of the cemetery committee after services.)
 - c. Beyond the practical reasons, I think it is useful to consider that a visit to the cemetery is a marker for both my linking to my ancestors and to my descendants.

- d. Someday I will visit Abrova, Belarus—outside Pinsk, but I have heard that the Nazis destroyed the Jewish cemetery there as they did in many locations. This affects many descendants because it means we have no marker for our family’s place in that community from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.
 - e. Amazingly, in June 2017, I was able to visit the graves of my great-grandfather and great-grandmother which are extant in Kirchhain, Germany. The Nazis ran out of time and only destroyed part of that cemetery. Furthermore, although no Jews live there now, the town has maintained the cemetery as a memorial to the many Jews who lived there and in surrounding areas for at least 300 years. My cousins, my daughter, and I were able to say Kaddish at the graves of my great-grandparents, who died in 1916 and 1927 respectfully.
 - f. A few years ago, we had a family gathering at the cemetery in Dixon City, PA. John’s aunt and uncles, all single, needed him to order a marker for their graves. They had no community, just one willing, but somewhat estranged nephew. That gathering was a way of distant cousins coming together at that cemetery. So, descendants are affected by this piece of real estate.
2. There seems—in this parsha—to be also a second theme **of finding comfort** after a loved one’s death. What we read in the parsha is that Abraham takes action and makes three decisions:
- a. Bought the Cave of Macpeleh
 - b. Instructed Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac
 - c. Married Keturah.

Isaac moves on from mourning his mother and finds new love with Rebekah. Abraham moved on and married Keturah. How do we bind up the souls of those who are departed into the threads of life? Tzroo-ra B’tzror Ha’HaYim.

3. I suggest that, as we all know that we inevitably will die, we try to live life to the fullest—everyday, every minute. Sometimes we are sad; sometimes we must mourn. We do not forget our loved ones, but to live fully we have to move on when it is right for us to move on. As he had Eliezer swear to find Isaac a wife “back home” Abraham was looking

ahead, planning ahead about a key part of his legacy. This part of the story, I propose, is an implied living will.

As many of you know, a living will is a statement that one writes for one's descendants that expresses the key values of your life.

- If Sarah wrote a living will, what would she say? After all, this parsha is called Chayei Sarah—the life of Sarah.
- If Abraham wrote a living will, what would it say?
- What would/does your living will say?

Here is an example of a living will. This family book contains the “testament” or living will of Rabbi Dr. Saloman Carlebach, a patriarch of our family, written in the early part of the 20th century. It says:

1. All male descendants shall attend, as far as possible, daily synagogue services.
2. All married female descendants shall cover their hair—wear a sheitel—and all male descendants shall marry only women who are willing to cover their hair.
3. All male descendants, as far as possible, shall not permit one day to pass without studying Torah. It shall be our goal that each male member shall study at least one tractate of Talmud thoroughly and prepare a commentary...

(I dedicate this part of the drash to Laure Estin, the last remaining first cousin of my mother, who died recently in Paris.)

I cannot track down all of the descendants of Rabbi Dr. Saloman Carlebach, but I can report on my strand and note that what he envisioned doesn't quite fit. There were three sisters born in Hamburg, Germany, in the early part of the 20th century. The oldest, Edda, went to Mexico with her family. None of the descendants are Jewish. The youngest sister, Ilse, was able to hide out in Southern France during the Nazi occupation and later made her home in Paris. All of the French cousins—save one young man—do not identify as Jewish. None of the millennial generation in Europe identify as Jewish.

The middle sister, my grandmother, had 18 great-grandchildren, all of whom identify as Jewish in some way, half of whom have married non-Jews . . . but none of whom follow the living will vision of Rabbi Carlebach. In fact, it is sort of ironic that he could never have considered that it is a few of the **women** who study tractates of Talmud.

So, my question is how can we develop living wills that fit the future, not just the present?

Several questions for discussion:

1. How do we find comfort in mourning? Tzroo-ra B'tzror Ha'HaYim
2. If Sarah wrote a living will, what would she say? After all, this parsha is called Chayei Sarah—the life of Sarah.
3. If Abraham wrote a living will, what would it say?
4. What is one item that you would/will put in your living will?
5. How can we develop living wills that fit the future, not just the present?