



“Sarah died in Kiryas Arba”

Zohar Chadash: Sarah Died Uttering the Four Words “ה' אלקינו ה' אחד”

This week’s parsha, Chayei Sarah, begins with the passing of Sarah Imeinu. According to Rashi, her death was related to Akeidas Yitzchak. Here is the pertinent text (Bereishis 23, 1):

”ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים שני חיי שרה,
ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע היא חברון בארץ כנען ויבוא אברהם לספוד
לשרה ולבכותה”

—Sarah’s lifetime spanned one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years; these were the years of Sarah’s life. Sarah died in Kiryas Arba which is Chevron, in the Land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her. Rashi comments: Sarah’s death is juxtaposed to Akeidas Yitzchak, because on account of the news of the Akeidah, that her son was prepared for slaughter and was nearly slaughtered, her soul left her, and she died. The source for Rashi’s comment is the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeira 23):

While all this was transpiring, Satan visited Sarah in the guise of Yitzchak. When she saw him, she asked him: “My son, what did your father do to you?” He answered her: “My father led me over mountains and through valleys until we finally reached the top of a certain mountain. There he erected a mizbeiach, arranged the firewood, bound me atop the mizbeiach, and took the knife to slaughter me. Had HKB”H not called out to him, ‘Do not extend your hand to the

lad,’ I would have been slaughtered.” He had barely finished reporting the incident when her neshamah departed, as it is written: “And Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her.” From where did he come? From Har HaMoriah.

The commentaries are perplexed by this account of events. After all, Sarah Imeinu was pure and free of sin. As Rashi comments on the opening passuk of the parsha: **When she was one hundred years old, she was like twenty years old with regards to sin; just like someone twenty years old is considered to be without sin, since she is not liable to punishment; so, too, (Sarah, when she was) one hundred years old was without sin.** Furthermore, we learn from Rashi’s comment on the passuk (ibid. 21, 12) that HKB”H instructed Avraham to heed whatever Sarah told him, because her level of nevuah was superior to his. Seen in this light, it seems implausible that her neshamah would have suddenly left her due to her distress upon being informed of the Akeidah. She must have surely perceived via her “ruach hakodesh” that Avraham was merely complying with the instructions of HKB”H to bind Yitzchak.

It also behooves us to note a tremendous chiddush regarding the death of Sarah Imeinu in the commentary of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh. He remarks on the superfluous language of the passuk. It begins by stating that “Sarah’s lifetime was,” and concludes with the

phrase **“the years of Sarah’s life.”** He explains in his own inimitable way that the conclusion of the passuk comes to teach us **that she completed the years of her life that had been allotted to her; this, however, was what caused her to die.** Clearly, this deserves clarification. If she lived out the full number of years that had been allotted to her from above, why did HKB”H orchestrate for her neshamah to leave her specifically in conjunction with the news of Akeidas Yitzchak?

Her Death in Kiryas Arba Alludes to Krias Shema

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by presenting a fascinating interpretation from the Zohar Chadash (Tikunim 119) of the words: **“Sarah died in Kiryas Arba.”** Her passing away was not on account of sin, carried out by the Malach Hamaves; on the contrary, her neshamah left her as she uttered the **four** words **ה' אלקינו ה' אחד**. This is alluded to by the name **Kiryas Arba**, which literally means the City of **Four**. He writes that she was a consummate tzadeket and did not die by means of the nachash. Rather, her spirit left her with the utterance of Krias Shema, which represents the four letters of the Tetragrammaton. That is the meaning of **“she died in Kiryas Arba.”** The **“yud”** is associated with the word **ה'**; the **“hei”** is associated with the word **אלקינו**; the **“vav”** is associated with the second **ה'**; the second **“hei”** is associated with the word **אחד**.

According to this passage in the Zohar Chadash, Sarah Imeinu intentionally passed away with the utterance of Krias Shema. This seems to conflict with Rashi’s comment based on the Midrash that her neshamah left her suddenly, unintentionally, when she was informed that her son was being prepared for slaughter. Furthermore, according to the Midrash Tanchuma, it was the Satan disguised as Yitzchak who caused her neshamah to leave her. If that was the case, then the nachash, the embodiment of the Satan, did cause her death.

The Akeidah Tested Avraham’s Attribute of Chesed More So than Yitzchak’s Attribute of Din

I would like to reconcile the assertion of the Midrash with the assertion of the Zohar Chadash. Let us refer to an illuminating insight regarding the Akeidah found in the Zohar hakadosh (Vayeira 119b). The Torah prefaces the passage of the Akeidah by informing us that G-d tested Avraham (ibid. 22, 1): **וַיִּהְיֶה אַחֵר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹקִים נִסָּה אֶת אַבְרָהָם**. Wasn’t the Akeidah also an ordeal and test for Yitzchak? After all, he was thirty-seven years old at the time and could have refused to comply. Yet, he agreed to comply willingly—to be offered as a sacrifice.

To paraphrase the Zohar’s explanation, prior to the Akeidah, Avraham lacked any component of **“din.”** Without it, he was incomplete. Hence, G-d tested Avraham by requesting that he perform this act of **“din.”** Thus, he achieved his tikun and completion. We can elaborate on this explanation by introducing the explanation of the Alshich hakadosh as to why the ordeal of the Akeidah was a test primarily for Avraham Avinu rather than for Yitzchak Avinu.

To paraphrase, he explains the inherent differences in the midos of Avraham and Yitzchak. Since Yitzchak was the paradigm of **“din,”** he staunchly upheld the word of Hashem. In contrast, Avraham was the paradigm of **“chesed.”** In keeping with his midah, he disputed Hashem’s decision to destroy Sedom and even attempted to find merit in the perverted inhabitants of Sedom. As such, Yitzchak did not even hesitate to be offered up on the mizbeiach, since, in keeping with his midah, he was committed to fulfilling the word of the Almighty at any cost.

Thus, to test Avraham, HKB”H instructed him to perform an act of **“din”**—to take a knife and sacrifice his precious son. This was a test, since it required him to act contrary to his midah and natural inclination. Note that the passuk employs the term **“Elokim”**—the name associated with the midah of Yitzchak. Avraham was being asked to do something that conflicted with and opposed his midah;

this did not test Yitzchak at all; his midah dictated that he uphold the word of Hashem at all costs.

Clearly, the explanation of the Alshich hakadosh is based on the teaching of the Zohar above. The Zohar stated that prior to the Akeidah, Avraham Avinu performed exclusively acts of “chesed.” At the Akeidah, however, he was instructed to perform an act of “din.” In fact, the Zohar hakadosh asserts that the purpose of the Akeidah was to incorporate the midah of “din”—which is analogous to fire—into Avraham’s midah of “chesed”—which is analogous to water. Thus, the Akeidah (Binding) bound the midos of Avraham and Yitzchak together—water and fire.

This concurs magnificently with the teachings of our illustrious teacher, the Arizal, in Likutei Torah (Vayeira). In keeping with the insight of the Zohar hakadosh, he interprets the deeper significance of the narrative of the Akeidah (ibid. 7): **”וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֲבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר: ”הִנְנִי בְנִי”****—then Yitzchak spoke to Avraham his father and said, “Father.” And he said, “Here I am, my son.”** Yitzchak, whose midah was “din,” was telling his father Avraham that he wished to connect with his midah of “chesed.” This is conveyed by the words **”וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי”**. Avraham, on the other hand, wished to connect with his son’s midah of “din.” Hence, he replied **”הִנְנִי בְנִי”**. Therefore, the following passuk concludes with the words (ibid. 8): **”וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּיו”****—the two of them went together—**teaching us that Avraham and Yitzchak continued on their journey united as one; both now contained the midah of “chesed” and the midah of “din.” However, Avraham remained primarily “chesed” tempered by “din”; while Yitzchak remained primarily “din” tempered by “chesed.”

After the Akeidah Avraham Was Notified of the Birth of Rivkah Yitzchak's Soulmate

Understood in this light, we can explain the text following the Akeidah beautifully (ibid. 20): "ויהי אחר הדברים האלה ויוגד לאברהם לאמר הנה ילדה מלכה גם היא בנים לנחור אחיך... ובתואל ילד את רבקה." And it happened, after

these events, that Avraham was told, saying: Behold, Milkah, she, too, has borne children to Nachor, your brother . . . And Betuel begot Rivkah. Rashi comments: **HKB”H informed him (Avraham) that Rivkah, his (Yitzchak’s) spouse, had been born.** Now, our sacred sefarim teach us (based on the Zohar hakadosh, Terumah 175b) that each of the three holy Avos served HKB”H with his own unique midah—Avraham with the midah of “chesed,” Yitzchak with the midah of “gevurah,” and Yaakov with the midah of “Tiferes,” which is associated with “rachamim.” “Tiferes” incorporates and merges the “chesed” of Avraham with the “gevurah” of Yitzchak but with a greater propensity for “rachamim.”

Thus, we can suggest that this is why Avraham Avinu was informed after the Akeidah of the birth of Rivkah, Yitzchak's future mate. Since the respective midos of Avraham and Yitzchak had been bound together and modified for the better—as implied by the words **וילכו** "**שניהם יחדיו**"—it was then possible for Yaakov to descend from them. For, his midah of "Tiferes" is the perfect blend of "chesed" and "din." Therefore, at that juncture, HKB"H informed Avraham of the birth of Rivkah Imeinu, who would temper the "din" of her husband Yitzchak and give birth to Yaakov Avinu.

This answers very nicely the doubts of Avraham Avinu. He wondered why he could not marry off Yitzchak prior to the Akeidah. In light of what we have learned, before Avraham and Yitzchak and their respective midos were bound together, Yitzchak was not capable of fathering Yaakov Avinu—the paradigm of “Tiferes” incorporating the midah of “chesed” and the midah of “din.”

This can be used to interpret a passuk in the passage of the Akeidah (ibid. 4): **“ביום השלישי וישא אברהם את עיניו—on the third day, Avraham raised his eyes, and he saw the place from afar.** The Zohar hakadosh (Vayeira 120a) interprets **“the third day”** as a reference to Yaakov, the third member of the Avos. Additionally, **“he saw the place from afar”** refers to **Yaakov, as it is written** (ibid. 28, 11): **“He took from the**

stones of the place." In other words, after Avraham and Yitzchak had been bound together—water and fire—they immediately perceived that Yaakov Avinu, the paradigm of "Tiferes," was destined to descend from them.

The Midah of Avraham Avinu Was “Chesed” in Contrast to the Midah of Sarah Imeinu which Was “Din”

Proceeding along this enlightening path, we will now address the mystery of Sarah Imeinu's passing. Further on in our parsha, we read that Avraham's devoted servant, Eliezer, is sent by his master to find an appropriate mate for his son, Yitzchak. To ensure the success of his mission, Eliezer determines that she must satisfy the following criteria (ibid. 24, 14): **"וְהָיָה הַנֶּעֱרָה אֲשֶׁר אוֹמֵר אֵלַיהָ, הִטִּי נָא כֶדֶךָ וְאַשְׁתָּה וְאָמַרְתָּ שֶׁתָּה וְגַם גַּמְלִיךָ אֶשְׁקָה, אוֹתָהּ הוֹכַחְתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לִיצְחָק וְכֵן יִשְׂחָק וְאָמַרְתָּ כֵּן עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם אֲדוֹנִי."** Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say, "Please tip your jug so I may drink," and who replies, "Drink, and I will even water your camels," her will You have chosen for Your servant, for Yitzchak; and May I know through her that You have done chesed with my master. Rashi comments: She is fitting for him in that she will perform acts of kindness ("chesed").

In Toras Moshe, the Chasam Sofer explains the matter based on the concept of "עֵזֶר כְּנָגְדּוֹ". For a wife to be a proper, helpful partner, her nature should oppose the nature of her husband. For instance, it is not good if they are both lenient or both spendthrifts. Therefore, since Yitzchak personified "din," it was desirable to find him a wife who excelled in acts of "chesed." Hence, this is the virtue that Eliezer sought in a wife **"for Yitzchak."**

We learn from the remarks of the Chasam Sofer that since the midah of Avraham was “chesed,” it was arranged from above for him to marry Sarah Imeinu whose midah was “din.” She was indeed his “עזר כנגדו.” This is evident from the following incident (ibid. 21, 9): **וַיִּרְא שָׂרָה אֵת בֶּן־הָגָר הַמִּצְרִיָּה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מִצְחָק**—**Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Avraham, mocking.** Rashi explains that she witnessed

him committing acts of avodah-zarah, sexual immorality, and murder. Hence: "וְתֹאמַר לְאַבְרָהָם גֵּרֶשׁ הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת בְּנָהּ,"—so, she said to Avraham, "Drive out this slave-woman and her son; for the son of this slave-woman will not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak!" She feared that Yishmael would be a bad influence on Yitzchak, so she demonstrated the full force of her "din" by banishing him from her home. Also, whereas Avraham was generous with their guests, Sarah was stingy with their guests.

In contrast, because Avraham Avinu personified “chesed,” he agonized over the decision to banish Yishmael (ibid. 11): “וירע הדבר מאד בעיני אברהם על אודות בנו” — **the matter greatly distressed Avraham regarding his son.** Ultimately, HKB”H decided the matter for them; He told Avraham in no uncertain terms (ibid. 12): “אל ירע” בעיניך על הנער ועל אמתך, כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקולה, כי — **be not distressed over the youth or over your slave-woman; whatever Sarah tells you, heed her voice.** Here Rashi teaches us that **Avraham was inferior to Sarah in matters of nevuah.** This is a fabulous example of how the concept of “אעשה לו עזר כנגדו” applied to the relationship of Avraham and Sarah.

Sarah Stayed Alive until the Akeidah to Complete the “Din” of Avraham

Now, let us introduce another important concept presented by the Chasam Sofer in Torah Moshe (Ki Savo) in relation to the passuk (Devarim 28, 11): **"והויתירך ה'—לטובה בפרי בטןך—and Hashem shall give you bountiful goodness in the fruit of your womb.** He refers to what the Rambam writes to his son in Igeres HaRambam. He explains that every Jew has an allotment of Torah and mitzvos he is supposed to complete in his lifetime. Once he has completed that allotment, he has completed his (role in) life. That, however, is only if he is alone. If he has children or others whom he helps to better themselves, there is no set allotment. This is the message of this passuk. Hashem will grant you extra life to enable you to help better your children or other dependents.

This provides us with a better understanding of Rashi's comment: **Sarah's death is juxtaposed to Akeidas Yitzchak, because on account of the news of the Akeidah, that her son was prepared for slaughter and was nearly slaughtered, her soul left her, and she died.** The news of the Akeidah informed Sarah Imeinu that Avraham Avinu, the epitome of "chesed," was also able to perform an act of "din"—namely, to slaughter his son. Since it was no longer necessary for her to modify and balance Avraham's "chesed" with her "din," she had completed her mission in Olam HaZeh and was able to depart.

Accordingly, the explanation of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh that the seemingly superfluous phrase **"שני שרה"** actually teaches us that she had completed her mission in life, does not contradict the assertion of the Midrash that her neshamah left her upon receiving the news of the Akeidah. In fact, it seems clear that HKB"H orchestrated for her soul to depart joyfully knowing that her husband, Avraham Avinu, had acquired a component of "din." Thus, he would be able to ensure that their son Yitzchak would continue to follow the path of Torah and would not adopt the ways of Yishmael. Thus, the two facts go hand in hand magnificently.

Yaakov Avinu the Paradigm of "Tiferes" Instituted Krias Shema

In this manner, we can proceed to clarify the statement in the Zohar hakadosh above that **"ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע"** means that Sarah passed away while uttering the four words **"ה' אלקינו ה' אחד"** of Krias Shema. We know that the level of nevuah of Avraham Avinu was inferior to that of Sarah Imeinu. Hence, it was specifically Sarah Imeinu, with her superior level of "ruach hakodesh," who perceived that Yaakov Avinu—whose midah was "Tiferes"—had to be born from Yitzchak Avinu.

Furthermore, Chazal teach us that before he passed away, Yaakov Avinu instituted Krias Shema. This is found

in an elucidation in the Midrash (B.R. 98, 3) of the passuk (Bereishis 49, 2): **"הקבצו ושמעו בני יעקב"**—assemble and listen, sons of Yaakov:

Based on an incident alluded to by this passuk, Yisrael were privileged to receive the mitzvah of Krias Shema. Just before Yaakov Avinu passed away, he summoned his twelve sons. He asked if any of them had a personal quarrel with HKB"H. They replied in unison, **"Hear O Yisrael, our father, just as you have no quarrel with HKB"H, neither do we; rather, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the one and only G-d!"** At that point, Yaakov Avinu also proclaimed, **"Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity."** . . . Commemorating this event, Jews proclaim, every morning and every night, **"Hear O Yisrael, our father, from the Cave of Machpeilah, that which you commanded us, we still observe: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the only One."**

We can suggest a reason why it was Yaakov Avinu who instituted Krias Shema. According to the Tikunei Zohar (Intro. 9b), the passuk of **"שמע ישראל"** proclaiming the unity of Hashem corresponds to the midah of "Tiferes"—the midah of Yaakov Avinu. Therefore, he instituted Krias Shema to extend "rachamim"—divine mercy—to Yisrael. This is the message conveyed by the passuk (Devarim 6, 4): **"שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד"**. As the Alshich hakadosh explains in parshas Vaeschanan, this proclamation expresses our strong emunah that whether HKB"H relates to us with the midah of "rachamim"—indicated by the name **Havaya**—or what appears to us as the midah of "din"—indicated by the name **Elokim**—we believe that **Hashem is One**—everything (both) is an expression of total "rachamim" emanating from the name **Havaya**.

We can now shed some light on the assertion of the Zohar Chadash: **"Sarah died in Kiryas Arba"—this is a reference to Krias Shema. For, the death of this tzadeket was not by means of the nachash (on account of sins). Rather, her spirit departed with the utterance**

of **Krias Shema, with the four letters** . . . The **four** words "ה' אלקינו ה' אחד" correspond to the **four** letters of the Tetragrammaton. This is alluded to by the name **Kiryas Arba**, which literally means the City of **Four**. Upon learning of the Akeidah—the binding of the midos of Avraham and Yitzchak, "chesed" and "din"—Sarah saw via her "ruach hakodesh" that Yitzchak Avinu's soulmate had been born. This meant that the stage was set for the birth of Yaakov Avinu, whose midah "Tiferes" is the proper balance of "chesed" and "din."

She also foresaw from above that Yaakov Avinu was destined to institute Krias Shema to draw "rachamim" to Yisrael from the midah of "Tiferes." This is the implication of the words "ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע". She passed away while uttering the four words "ה' אלקינו ה' אחד", invoking the power of the midah of "Tiferes"—the perfect blend of "rachamim" and "din"—to sweeten the force of "din," since in reality "ה' אחד"—everything is actually divine "rachamim." Upon realizing that she had successfully completed her mission in Olam HaZeh, her neshamah flew away blissfully.



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