

Parshas Chayei Sarah - Rabbi M Taubman (reprint)

כ"ב חשוון תשע"ה - 14th November 2014 - שבת פ' חיי שרה

This week we read in Chayei Sarah: "And the life of Sarah was one hundred and twenty seven years [23:1]." The Sidra begins with Sarah's death and Avrohom's subsequent acquisition of Ma'aras Hamachpelah (The doubled cave) for her burial.

Afterwards, the Torah tells of Avrohom sending his servant, to find a fitting wife for his son, Yitzchok. Avrohom wanted to ensure an appropriate partner with whom Yitzchok could continue the world-shaping path that he had begun. He therefore had his servant swear not to take a Canaanite girl as a wife for Yitzchok. "Rather, to my land and birthplace you shall go. [24:4]"

Placed between these two episodes is the following passuk: "And Avrohom was old, 'Zokain ba ba'yamim' – old coming with days, and Hashem had blessed Avrohom with 'kol' –everything. [24:1]"

The Ramban explains that this passuk supplies the reason why Avrohom felt compelled to have the servant swear. He saw himself advancing in years and he was concerned that he might leave this world before the servant would return. He therefore had the servant swear in order to 'lock in' his choice of Yitzchok's future wife's nationality. However, this term of 'ba ba'yamim', meaning, having come or advanced in days seems repetitive. The passuk had already said that Avrohom was old. Isn't every old person 'ba ba'yamim'? Furthermore, we only find this expression by Avrohom. What is the meaning and significance of this term as it relates specifically to Avrohom?

We know that the attribute which Avrohom exemplified and perfected was that of chessed - acts of kindness. The Shnei Luchos HaBris writes that a Jew must perform at least one act of chessed each day in order for it to be considered a "day". Without at least one act of chessed, it is as if that day didn't exist.

With that, the Nesivos Sholom explains, our question: Avrohom was specifically termed 'ba ba'yamim', advanced in days. With his incredible devotion to chessed, he had of course performed at least one act of Chessed every day and had, as it were, made those ordinary days into real "days". He had every single day standing proudly behind him as he approached his old age. He literally came with his days. Not a single one was absent.

However, we still need to explain why only chessed, as opposed to any other commandment, is the deciding factor if a day is to be considered truly existing or not. The Nesivos Sholom explains that it was Hashem's chessed which brought Him to create the world. Hashem needed nothing but wanted to share His goodness with others. Furthermore, the world, having been created 'yesh ma'ayin' - something from nothing - is in the constant, perilous state of being unable to continue to exist on its own. It is only through a constant re-creation, every single second of time, through which Hashem's chessed enables this world to continue to exist.

Dovid HaMelech refers to Hashem as our shadow [T'hilim 121:5]. The Baal Shem Tov explains that a person's actions can be established by watching how his shadow moves. So too, Hashem's actions towards us mirror our own actions. When we treat each other with chessed, Hashem in turn, showers chessed down upon us. Since the entire world is based on chessed and only continues to exist through Hashem's constant chessed, we can only 'earn' our day if our actions of chessed prompt and stimulate Hashem to give us of his chessed. If we do our part, we have earned that day. It exists and is worthwhile as something that we had a hand in creating. In the absence of any chessed-provoking action on our part, the day was a 'free-bee' and a gift in which we played no part. It would not be something that we could consider to be ours and would therefore, not stand behind us as we reach our old age.

Avrohom was 'ba ba'yamim'. He had earned every one of his days. As a result of that, as the passuk continues, "Hashem had blessed Avrohom with 'kol' - everything."

Everything that Hashem blessed Avrohom with came as a result of Hashem mirroring Avrohom's actions.