

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Chayei Sarah  
November 3, 2018**

**פרשת חיי שרה  
כ"ג במרחשון תשע"ט**

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 23:1-25:18

In this *parasha*, Sarah dies. Avraham buys the burial plot of *M'arat HaMachpelah* and buries Sarah. He then sends his servant, Eliezer, to the ancestral home to find a wife for Yitzchak.

The second verse of the *parasha* tells us of Sarah's death: "וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה, בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבֶּעַ – Sarah died in Kiryat Arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan, and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her."

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (20<sup>th</sup> Century United States), known as the Rav, in his book *Out of the Whirlwind*, picks up on the reversal of the natural order of response when we lose someone close to us. Generally, first we cry, and then we eulogize. Avraham did exactly the opposite.

The Rav comes to a number of conclusions about this reversal. First, Avraham needed to acknowledge that the mother of the Jewish people had passed and recognize her publicly before attending to his own grief.

Secondly – and those who knew the Rav saw this when he lost the love of his life, the Rebbetzin Tanya – that he believed that public figures should mourn in private. In the public space, they need to remain rational and share their thoughts with those around them. When they close the door to their houses and are among their nearest and dearest, only then do they let out the "convulsive and compulsive shriek resulting from pain."

Both of these answers make sense. I would like to suggest an additional response, based on the events in Pittsburgh last Shabbat and their aftermath. We learn from Avraham how to act in response to tragedy. The emotion of crying is necessary but not sufficient. Even as we cry, we simultaneously convene memorial vigils, reach out to those affected, and raise money to support the injured and their families and to bury the dead. Just as Avraham did in his moment of horror and grief, we respond with action. Avraham eulogized, then cried, then proceeded immediately to find a suitable burial place for his beloved Sarah.

Is that not the response that we have seen from the global Jewish community over the last week? Our people have risen up in support of those affected, we have given charity, we have prayed, we have redoubled our efforts to assure that Jewish institutions across the land are safe, and we have continued to gather in public places, showing the world that no evil act will cause us to cower or retreat into hiding.

The rabbis teach us that **מעשה אבות סימן לבנים** – the deeds of our ancestors are a sign to us about how to conduct ourselves. And indeed, the actions of Jewish communities and individuals this week proudly reflect the actions of Avraham Avinu, Abraham our Ancestor.

We have acted, and we have cried, and we will continue to take action to assure the safety and security of both Jews and Americans in light of last week's incident.

Shabbat Shalom. May it truly be a Shabbat of peace for all of us.

For Discussion:

- How might you comfort someone who has lost a person close to them? What might you say to them? What might you want to avoid saying to them?
- Comforting a mourner by going to visit them – what is known as paying a shiva call – is one action we can take for the mourner. What other actions might we take to comfort a mourner?
- Do you agree with the idea that leaders should cry only in private? Why or why not?