

Sarah died in Kiryas Arba, which is Chevron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her. Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead... “Grant me an estate for a burial site with you, that I may bury my dead from before me.” (23:2-4)

These *pesukim* seem to tell a simple story: Sarah *Imeinu* had died. Avraham *Avinu* mourned her passing and sought a burial place, which was the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*.

It seems straightforward. When one peruses the commentators who focus on the esoteric interpretation of the events, however, the story comes alive. Indeed, it is anything but simple. In his inimitable manner, *Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita*, takes us on a journey, viewing the course of events through the lens of *Kabbalah*. He cites *Horav Yehonasan*

Eybeshutz, zl, in his *Tiferes Yehonasan*, who posits that the *Meoras HaMachpeilah* was the resting place for those *tzaddikim*, righteous people, whose deaths were induced by a kiss from Hashem, *meesas neshikah*, as opposed to being struck by the *Malach Ha'Mavess*, Angel of Death. The fact that Avraham sought to bury Sarah in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah* is an indication that he was well aware that Sarah had died a *meesas neshikah*. How did he know this?

Rav Yehonasan quotes the *Talmud* in *Avodah Zarah* 20b where it states, “They said, regarding the Angel of Death, that he is ‘full of eyes.’ At the moment of the death of a person who is ill, the Angel of Death stands in the air, above his head, and his sword is unsheathed in his hand, with a drop of poison suspended from its tip. As soon as the person notices the Angel of Death, he shudders and opens his mouth. The Angel of Death throws the drop of poison into his mouth. From this drop the person dies; his body rots; his face turns sallow.” (Although this passage of *Talmud* clearly must be explained, this is not place to do so.) The *Yaaros Devash* explains the concept of “full of eyes” as follows: When a person sins, he creates a prosecuting angel who observed his act of indiscretion. When a person is at the threshold of death, these angels – the “eyes” who observed his transgressions – exact retribution from him. Thus, the Angel of Death is “full of eyes.”

Based on this *Chazal*, *Rav Yehonasan* suggests that Avraham took one look at Sarah's countenance in death and observed that her face had not turned sallow. She was the picture of health; her face was illuminated as usual. Immediately, he understood that Sarah's death had been unique. It was *meesas neshikah*. This is what is meant by the *pasuk*, “And Avraham rose up from the presence (literally, face) of his dead.” He gazed at her face and knew that the *Malach Ha'Mavess* had had no power over her. She had merited to die *meesas neshikah*, through “a kiss from Hashem.” Thereupon, he went to *Bnei Cheis* and sought to have Sarah buried in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. She was worthy of entering into this holy place.

Rav Friedman quotes the *Zohar HaChadash* which interprets the *pasuk*, *Va'tamas Sarah b'Kiryas Arba*, "And Sarah died in *Kiryas Arba*," to mean that Sarah did not die as a result of the [sin catalyzed by the primordial] serpent (which is the cause of death), but rather, her *neshamah* left her as she uttered four words (*Kiryas/krias – Arba*). This refers to the four seminal words of *Krias Shema – Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad* – "Hashem (is) our G-d, Hashem (is) One." This part of *pasuk 2* concludes, *hee Chevron b'erezt Canaan*, "it is Chevron in the land of Canaan." The word Chevron may be derived from the word *chibur*, to connect. As a result of these four words, Sarah "connected" with Hashem as her soul left her, and became one with the Almighty.

This, explains Rav Friedman, helps us understand the manner in which Avraham grieved for Sarah. The *Baal HaTurim* expounds on the diminutive *chof* in *v'livkosa*, "and to bewail her." He explains that Avraham held back on mourning Sarah's passing because, after all, she had achieved remarkable longevity. Furthermore, Avraham did not bewail Sarah excessively, because it was not appropriate. *Chazal* teach that one of the primary reasons for weeping is **for** the deceased, who had been unable to complete his mission in life. Sarah *Imeinu*, however, who died as a result of *neshikah*, surely completed her mission, her lifelong series of service to Hashem. Thus, Avraham "eulogized her" (*lispod l'Sarah*), reflecting on the irreparable loss to the generation of an individual of her saintly caliber. In contrast, the personal grief, the idea that Sarah had died before her mission had been accomplished, Avraham held back. Concerning Sarah he could say, "mission accomplished."

The sequence of *pesukim*, which was our original question, is hereby elucidated. Sarah *Imeinu* died in *Kiryas Arba*, which means that the Matriarch eluded the serpent's hold on humankind. She left this world with *mesiras nefesh*, sacrificing her life for Hashem, with the four words – *Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad*. As a result, when Avraham came to eulogize and bewail Sarah, he did not weep excessively, realizing that Sarah had not succumbed to the primordial serpent, the usual catalyst for humanity's death sentence. This was supported by Sarah's countenance in death, which Avraham noted was unlike that of any other human being. Her visage had not turned sallow – she had died through Hashem's kiss. With this knowledge in hand, Avraham turned to *Bnei Cheis* to have Sarah buried in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*.

In an addendum to the above, the *Panim Yafos* explains that the poison which is at the tip of the Angel of Death's sword is actually comprised of three drops. *Chazal* allude to this when they detail the three consequences of this poison: the individual dies; the body rots; the face turns sallow. These three drops of poison are generated by the person himself through his pursuit of the three *middos ra'os*, negative character traits, which, *Chazal* say, *motziin ha'adam min ha'olam*, "take a person out of the world" as noted in the *Mishnah (Pirkei Avos 5:28)*: We are exhorted to distance ourselves from the deleterious effects of *kinaah*, envy; *taavah*, desire/lust; and *kavod*, honor. The word *motziin*, however, seems to imply that it is specifically these three traits that actually take the person out of the world. How?

Now that we consider the composite of the three drops of poison that take a person's life, we

understand how these negative character traits actually catalyze a person's death. **They** are the poison. *Rav* Friedman adds that the effect of each individual poison coincides with its source. *Kinaah*, envy – an individual in a group often becomes envious of the others, their successes, achievements, their fame and glory. The poison resulting from envy is what kills the person, severing his relationship with others. *Taavah*, desire – for food and drink, the temporal things in life that soon rot is ameliorated when the poison created by this *taavah* causes his body to rot. *Kavod*, honor, is something which one pursues, so that others will look to him with reverence. Thus, the poison generated by one's pursuit of honor causes his face to turn sallow. No one will be interested in looking at him now. Sarah *Imeinu* did not fall victim to these three negative character traits, and consequently did not suffer from their harmful effects.