

A Brief Note on Closure

Parsha Chaye Sarah opens with the death of Sarah at the age of one-hundred and twenty-seven. She had died in *Kiryat Arba* (Hebron), apart from Abraham and Isaac, who had journeyed together to *Beersheba*. While the cause of her death isn't reported, it can be inferred that her demise was related to Abraham's intention to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham decided after the incident of the *Akedah* to take Isaac and make the longer trek to *Beersheba* and not back to Sarah, suggesting that Abraham's resolve to obey God and kill Sarah's only child, had led to their estrangement. Nevertheless, when Abraham heard of her death he immediately journeyed to Hebron and arranged for an appropriate burial. The text also suggests that Isaac, though in his late thirties, suffered from the loss of his mother.

Sarah's death reminded Abraham that it was time for Isaac to marry and raise his own family. However, an appropriate wife would not be found amongst the Canaanites. Abraham took a precautionary step by having his major-domo swear an oath that to prevent Isaac from marrying a Canaanite woman. Then, Abraham ordered this unnamed servant, assumed to be Eliezer, to travel to his ancestral lands in *Aram Neharayim*, the lands that lie between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers. There, from amongst Abraham's kin, he was instructed to choose a wife for Isaac.

Eliezer departed from Abraham's camp with ten camels and a bounty, meant to impress potential in-laws. Isaac remained at home. When Eliezer arrived at his destination, he immediately took up a position at the local well – the best vantage point from which to observe the inhabitants of an area, and as Jacob and Moses discovered, an excellent place to meet a potential mate.

Eliezer then devised a plan of his own to identify the right woman. The Torah describes how Eliezer spoke towards God, as if swearing an oath, and declared that his choice would be the first woman that offered to provide water to both him and his camel. And sure enough, Rebecca, of Abraham's kin, appeared and offered water to Eliezer, for him and his beasts.

Eliezer then sat down with Rebecca's father Bethuel and her brother Laban, to secure their agreement to the marriage. He regaled them with a description of Abraham's great wealth and related the story of the miraculous birth of Isaac, who would inherit this wealth. He then told them of the oath he had taken, to find Isaac a wife from amongst Abraham's kin, and how Rebecca had been chosen, as if by the hand of God. Such an introduction left Laban and his father virtually speechless: "*then Laban and Bethuel answered and said: 'The thing proceeds from God; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good'.*" The next morning Rebecca's mother tried to delay her departure. Rebecca was given the choice to stay with her kin for another year or go immediately to Isaac, her betrothed. Her answer: "*I will go*".

Isaac seems to have been immediately smitten by Rebecca, "*and she became his wife; and he loved her*". Equally important, Rebecca filled a void in Isaac's life; "*Isaac was comforted for his mother*". The saga could now continue.

Parsha Chaye Sarah, Shabbath November 26, 2005