

The *Parasha*, which begins with the death of our matriarch Sarah, ironically bears the name *Chaye Sarah*, the Life of Sarah, inviting us to consider, as we read of her death, the remarkable life she led. Personally, I read *Chaye Sarah* each year with mixed emotions, as it always coincides with the Hebrew calendar date of the 21<sup>st</sup> of *Cheshvan*, the anniversary of the tragic and sudden death of my younger brother Eliezer z"l. This Friday, November 10th, year marks Elie's 14<sup>th</sup> *yahrtzeit* and also falls out during the week in which we observe Kristalnacht and Veterans Day.

After the death of Sarah, the biblical text records in Genesis 24:1 that "Abraham was old, advanced in years [and], God has blessed Abraham *bakol*, in all things." What an odd juxtaposition in the final phrase of the verse. One might expect to read that Abraham was filled with grief at the loss of his life partner Sarah. Perhaps, in keeping with more traditional biblical language, the text could have used language that appears later in the *Tanakh*: "the Lord has given and the Lord has taken." (Job 1:21) Why note at this moment that Abraham was blessed *bakol*, in all things?

At a time of loss, we are focused on what we are missing, so it goes without saying that one might certainly not feel as though we have everything. Yet, the Torah is signaling to us here that even in loss, there is much to feel grateful for. We can find blessing. This message has sustained our people in a global way in times of national tragedy and loss, but it is just as important and equally meaningful as a personal message.

It is true that today, more than ever. I remain deeply saddened by the loss of my brother. I find myself constantly thinking of all the things Elie has missed over the past 13 years, and that I have missed sharing with him; special moments, life milestones, and family *smachot*. I miss that our son Elie, now 11 and our girls, will never know their uncle, that they will never have cousins from that line of the Schwartz *mishpacha*. I miss that my brother was an early innovator on the web, designing a successful website and also making good money for a college student by selling clothing on Ebay. If only he knew about social media and the power of the web today. Where would Elie have ended up? How much would he have achieved? I miss his humor, practical jokes and the fact that he did some of the best impressions not just of cultural and political figures, but also of family—nobody was spared, myself included.

Yet, when I think about how Elie would want me to live my life, the message of the Torah portion is especially powerful. Called not *mitat Sarah*, the death of Sarah, but rather *Chayei Sarah*, the life of Sarah, the Torah reminds us to take this "Abraham approach." We can find inspiration and meaning after sadness by following the model of our patriarch, looking beyond the pain and loss in our lives and focusing on the blessings.

This message resonates with me as I look back on my trip to Odessa (Ukraine) last week along with 5 area educators. This trip was led by the Center for Jewish Education with generous funding from The Associated. My initial reactions was that the people there still lived in the past --everyone talked about the Shoah, the War, Ghettos, Babi Yar and the devastation that took place in the late 30's and 40's. We saw a museum dedicated to the stories of Odessa's Jewish community and visited the former homes of Shalom Aleichem, Zeev Jabotinsky and H.N. Bialik. Yet, as I reflect on the trip, I realize now more than ever that this community doesn't just look at the sadness of its past, but truly has vision for the future. This is very much in the tradition of our ancestor Abraham who purchases the cave of machpelah and ensures Sarah a proper burial. He then directs his servant Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac, and he himself remarries.

In Odessa, the community has rebuilt and we were privileged to visit two spectacular JCC's whose programs and content provide a living testament to the continuation of the traditions of our people, of Abraham and Sarah.

I feel blessed, *bakol* in so many ways; my loving wife Aviva, three wonderful children, my two living sisters (both doctors), a large and ever-growing extended family, and a vibrant community here in Baltimore and specifically at Krieger Schechter Day School. I am particularly grateful for my colleagues (Brad, Neil Rachel, Rhoda, and our mission leader Amalia). I learned from each of them so much during our brief overseas trip and I am certain to use these new relationships to strengthen our community here in Baltimore and to partner with those in Odessa.

So too, with my brother, Elie, I try to dwell not on the fact that his time on this earth was far too short, but rather on the gratitude I feel to have had him in my life for 21 years. While the pain doesn't subside, the "Abraham approach" refocuses me to remember his humor, his love, his teachings and his unwavering support and to try to convey that to my children so that his loving qualities will reverberate in the next generation. It is clear that many in Odessa take the same approach. May we reach beyond the sadness and pain in our lives to recognize and appreciate that each of us has been blessed *bakol*, in so many ways. And may we all find ways to share the wonderful qualities of our departed loved ones with the next generation. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to visit Odessa and the impact the trip made on my leadership. Shabbat Shalom.