

Torah Table Talk

Abraham and the Blessings of Old Age

Parshat Hayyei Sara
Genesis, Chapters 23:1- 25:18



The deaths of Sarah and Abraham mark the transition from the first to the second generation of Israelite history. Abraham is devastated by the loss of his beloved wife and partner but life goes on. He remains an active and vibrant individual, participating in all aspects of life. Parshat Hayyei Sarah describes the last years of Abraham's life, as he turns his attention to the future. He not only arranges for the burial of his wife but Abraham also takes on the job of arranging a proper marriage for his son Isaac. In the end we are told Ishmael and Isaac are reunited at their father's graveside, suggesting that Abraham experienced some type of reconciliation in his family close to his death.

Genesis 24:1

Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things (*Bakol*).

1. The Torah associates growing old with a blessing here. What would you describe as a blessed old age? What material, social, and spiritual blessings would you like to have as you grow old?
2. Compare this statement about Abraham and the stories which follow in the Torah with today's Haftorah from the book of Kings in which we find an old and decrepit King David who has lost control of his own monarchy. What images of old age do these two chapters offer, and which one is closer to reality?

Babylonian Talmud Baba Batra 16b

There is a difference among the Tana'im: It is written: "The Lord had blessed Abraham, *Bakol*, in all things." What is meant by "*Bakol*, in all things?" 1. **Rabbi Meir said:** "In the fact that he had no daughter." 2. **Rabbi Judah said,** "In the fact that he had a daughter." 3. **Others said** that Abraham had a daughter and her name was "*Bakol*." **Rabbi Eliezer the Modiite** said that Abraham possessed a power of reading the stars for which he was much sought after by the potentates of the East and West. 5. **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said:** "Abraham had a precious stone hung around his neck which brought immediate healing to any sick person who looked on it and when Abraham our father departed this world the Holy One suspended it from the orb of the sun." 6. **Another explanation:** Esau did not rebel so long as Abraham was alive. 7. **Another explanation:** is that Ishmael repented while Abraham was still alive.

1. Why do you think the sages singled out these things as a sign that Abraham was blessed with "all things?"
2. Look at the controversy between Rabbis Meir and Judah. Why would Rabbi Meir make such a comment? Consider some of the responsibilities that went along with having a daughter in ancient times (even in the time of Reb Tevye of Fiddler on the roof.) What do you think Rabbi Judah would have said to his colleague?
3. Esau was Abraham's grandson. Based on the chronology of the Bible, Abraham would probably have lived long enough to see his grandsons approach adulthood. How do grandparents play an influence in the lives of their grandchildren? Why is Abraham's repentance a sign of Abraham's blessing?
4. Which of these explanations do you like? Why?

Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 82a

Rabbi Nahorai said; I abandon every trade in the world and teach my son only Torah, for a man enjoys the reward thereof in this world while the principle remains for him in the world to come. But all other professions are not so. When a man comes to sickness or to old age or to suffering and cannot engage in his craft, he must die of starvation. Whereas the Torah is not so, for it guards him from all evil in his youth and gives him a future and hope in his old age....Thus scripture says of Abraham our forefather: "Abraham grew old...and the Lord blessed him with all things." We find that Abraham observed the whole Torah before it was given, for it says in scripture. "Because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws." (Genesis 26:5)

1. How is this explanation of "With all things" different from the others above? Consider the role that Abraham plays in bringing about this blessing.
2. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What blessings do the study of Torah and the practice of Judaism bring to a persons life?

How to use Torah Table Talk

1. *Read the sheet out loud to one another. Discuss what it has to say.*
2. *Focus on the text in the box. It is taken from Biblical, post-biblical and modern Jewish sources. What does it mean? How does it make you feel?*
3. *Try to answer the questions following the text.*
4. *This is not a test and there are many correct answers and interpretations to each question. Share your ideas with one another. Be open and honest in sharing your ideas.*

***"All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul."***

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