

Shabbat Chayei Sarah ShaLom



Abraham and Sarah by Marc Chagall

by Phyllis Chesler

Although Sarah now disappears from the story, the parsha is titled The Life of Sarah, which indicates that she is meant to live in our hearts forever, and does, through the lives of her descendants.

Avraham did not know she was beautiful—until he found her beauty and sexuality useful to him—in order to save his own life—and this happened twice. However, here, for the first time, we learn that Avraham truly loved her, came to Chevron

to both eulogize and weep for her. The phrase, “mayal pnai mayto”/v’ekbarah mayti meelphanav/l’ekbor et mayti meelphani” is repeated at least three times. Avraham is asking to bury his dead “which is in his presence,” unbearably, in his face, so to speak. (23:3); (23:4); (23:8). When Ya’akov’s beloved Rahel dies, all we are told is that he set up a matzeva on her grave (35:20) and continued on his way. However, my dear teacher, Rabbi Michael Shmidman, referred to Rahel’s dying as having “met alai,” died all over Ya’akov, her death continued to grieve him forever. I do not remember what the source for this might be.

As usual, there is so much going on here, and so many questions. Avraham’s decision to send his servant, Eliezer, to find a wife for Yitzhak from the very land or birthplace (or near it) that God told him to leave. Avraham was born in Ur Casdim. Rivka lives in Aram-Naharayim but she is the granddaughter of Avraham’s brother Nahor; she is a close genetic relative. Still, Rivka has been raised by idol worshippers—and yet, she is filled with generosity and grace; is given agency, asked to decide whether she will go and marry a man she’s never met; blessed by her brother and mother. The presumably evil Laban, her brother, and her presumably disenfranchised mother, have blessing powers.

What conclusions, if any, can we draw?

Shabbat Shalom!