

CHAYEI SARAH (GENESIS 23:1-25-18)

Never Alone

2016 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

I lost my mother this year.

Time goes on, and the pain subsides somewhat, but it never goes away. Next week I will complete the 11 months of saying Kaddish. But some days it feels like it happened yesterday.

It's different than the last time. I was 5 years old when my father passed away. I don't have a lot of memories of my father. I imagine I probably cried -- if I understood it -- but I really don't remember much.

This was different. Mom was always there. She was there at the happy times. She was there at the sad times. (When my family's rabbi passed away last week, my first instinct was to pick up the phone and call Mom.)

But Mom is gone. And now I'm an orphan. Now I'm alone.

There is a wonderful Mitzva called "*Nichum Aveilim* -- Consoling the Mourners," but that's not really an accurate name. Friends come to visit the mourner who is sitting Shiva. But most of us lack the ability to truly comfort someone who is dealing with a profound loss. It is only G-d who truly has the ability to comfort a mourner. The rest of us just offer our feelings of solidarity and pray to G-d to do the rest.

At the end of the visit, they bless the mourner: "May G-d comfort you all among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

Sometimes, a human being succeeds in offering words of consolation. Our Sages tell us that when the Temple was destroyed, Rabbi Akiva found the words to comfort his colleagues. They responded to him, "*Neechamtanu* -- You have consoled us, Akiva, you have consoled us."

While I was sitting Shiva, many friends and relatives came to offer condolences and blessings. One fellow shared with me an explanation of the Alshich on this week's Torah Portion.

Isaac lost both of his parents in this week's Portion. First Sarah died. Thirty-eight years later, Abraham died.

G-d paid a Shiva call.

And it was after the death of Abraham, that G-d blessed his son Isaac. (Genesis, 25:11)

What was the nature of the blessing? And why does the Torah need to tell us that Isaac was Abraham's son? Isn't that obvious?

Rashi tells us that the blessing that G-d gave him was the consolation of mourners.

My friend told me that the Alshich explains that G-d only gave this blessing to Issac when Abraham died. When Sarah died, it wasn't necessary. When Isaac lost his mother, he still had his father Abramam to teach him, to guide him, and to strengthen him.

But now Abraham was gone. Isaac was truly bereft and alone in the world.

Therefore , G-d blessed Issac HIS son. No, not Abraham's son; we already know that he was Abraham's son. G-d was blessing His son -- G-d's son -- Isaac. G-d was telling Issac that he was NOT alone and bereft. G-d was telling Isaac that he has a Father in Heaven who loves him and watches over him.

G-d was telling Isaac that in reality, there is no such thing as an orphan.

I looked at my friend who shared this beautiful thought with me while I was sitting Shiva.

"*Neechamtani*," I said. "You have consoled me. You have consoled me."

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz