

Chaye Sarah

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Last week's *parsha* was a laugh. This week's *parsha* is to cry for. It's never easy losing a spouse you love, especially if you had something to do with it. In Avraham's case, it was the *Akeidah* that caused Sarah's death, even though she ended up dying precisely at the moment she was meant to die from the day she was born. We *all* do.

But as the *Gemora* says, righteous people, even after they have died are considered alive (*Brochos* 18a). So the *parsha* is appropriately called "The Life of Sarah" and not "The Death of Sarah" because, though her body died, her spirit lives on and continues to do so through every Jew that descends from her.

You have to also appreciate the irony of the situation. The son that made her laugh and others with her, whose very name is a reflection of all her joy was the means to take it away from her. The potential loss of her beloved son cost Sarah her life (she died from the shock of the *Akeidah*), and denied her the chance to stand under the *chupah* of her son, or see any grandchildren from him.

But that's life, and that's laughter. Life is the ongoing daily reality that usually includes some pain or another. There is a reason why anti-depressants are so popular today, be they actual medication or just distracting forms of entertainment. It's as if something pain-causing is always lurking in the shadows waiting for the right moment of vulnerability to pounce.

Laughter is the opposite. It is not continuous and can be difficult to generate. That's why "good" comedians make so much money and are so in demand. And even if we do manage a hearty laugh from time to time, it is usually short lived. Even more ironic is how we're able to manage ongoing pain, but we could never manage continuous laughter. People have died laughing.

But that's the way it is meant to be. God made the world He did so that man could

exist and have free will. This necessitated good *and* evil, cause *and* effect, pain *and* relief. Pain is an integral part of this stage of history because it is the main way a person is pushed to make a choice in one direction or another, to reveal their moxie or spiritual weakness.

It works, as long as it does not kill *hope*. Hope is that all-important state of mind that drives us in life to accomplish meaningful things and inspires us to get out of bed each morning. If hope goes, so does a person, and few things kill hope more completely than prolonged pain.

But a funny moment? It has the power to restore hope in seconds, like rising above the clouds on a stormy day into the calm, sunny world above. You can't stay up there for very long, but having been there for even a short while can leave a long, lasting impression, sometimes even years later.

This idea however is even more powerful than most think, something we learn from the holiday of *Purim*.

On a simple level, *Purim* celebrates how history for the Jewish people went from being bleak to promising all within a short time. One moment, the Jews of Mordechai's and Esther's time were facing genocide, and the next moment they had the king's permission to fight back. Everything got turned on its head.

This is reminiscent of a story from the *Gemora*:

Rebi Yehoshua's son became weak and his soul left him. When he recovered, his father asked him, "What did you see?" He answered him, "An upside-down world! [There], whoever is esteemed here, was down, and those who are down [here] were esteemed." He told him, "My son, you saw a *clear* world!" (*Pesachim* 50a)

The upside-down world he saw was really right-side up. It just looked upside-down relative to the world he came from until his father, who already knew the difference on his level, explained it.

This is why *tzaddikim* seem to be from another planet. They basically are. They live in this world but their minds belong to the next world, a world that makes guest appearances from time to time, on *Shabbos* each week, the holidays, and especially during *Purim*. Toppling Haman in such a short time was not just a matter of good *Hashgochah Pratis*. It was the result of drawing some of the reality of the next world into this one, and righting the world.

Such victories are clearly short-lived. How many pogroms and Crusades have we suffered since then, the worst of all being the Holocaust. It's enough to dash a person's hope, which is exactly what the *Sitra Achra* needs to convince a Jew that it is

not worth remaining one.

So in life, and in history, God makes sure to give us something to laugh about every now and then just to keep hope alive, so we can continue to anticipate redemption and the arrival of *Moshiach*. He creates opportunities for us to rise above the dark clouds of Jewish history to remind us that, as bleak as Jewish life might get sometimes, it will always be worth it to hang on until the end.