

Dear Chavraya,

As pearls on a string, the days of our lives are added one to another until the strand is complete. Some strands are longer, with more pearls upon the string, while others are shorter and of fewer pearls. The beauty of each pearl is no less for the number of others that come before and after it until the circle is complete, made whole by a simple clasp that joins its ends as one. So the circle of life, each day's deeds ready to be the simple clasp when the last pearl is placed in time unknown, beginning and end joined as one, a circle of days made whole.

And what if a single pearl is missing, a gap in the strand, a day in the life? We cannot know the length that our own strand shall be, the thread itself not of our making, unwinding from the spool, but the care with which each day is strung is in our hands and hearts to choose.

That our days each have significance in the gathering of all of our days, often so hard to see in the moment, is taught in regard to both Abraham and Sarah in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Chayei Sarah*. The name of the portion is itself instructive. Though it begins with Sarah's death, *Chayei Sarah* means "the life of Sarah." A universal reality, death is not the measure of a life. Measure and meaning are found in the way that life was lived. Of Sarah we are told, "The life of Sarah was a hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years / *me'ah shannah v'esrim shannah v'sheva shannim*: years of the life of Sarah." Each part of her life was distinct, days not blurring into days, years into years. At the end of the portion, Abraham also dies. His years too are delineated in giving his age, "one hundred years and seventy years and five years." Additionally we are told, *v'eleh y'mei sh'nei chayei Avraham* / *and these are the days of the years of the life of Abraham*. The years of our lives are the culmination of our days.

That aging is a life-long process whose meaning is renewed each day is taught in regard to Abraham while he is still alive, *v'Avraham zaken ba bayamim* / *Abraham had become old; he had come through the days*. The obvious question is why the two phrases? If he was old, of course he had come through the days, and in coming through the days then naturally he had become old. It is a principle in interpreting Torah that nothing is redundant, the two phrases, therefore, coming to each teach us something different. In becoming old, Abraham had come through all the days of his life, giving meaning to each, none of them missing.

That it not remain abstract, the Slonimer Rebbe offers guidance toward giving meaning to each day. That Abraham had become old and had come through the days points to the attribute most associated with Abraham, the attribute of *chesed* / *kindness*. The Slonimer then offers bold and profound teaching, so simple and so complex: *A day in which a Jew does not do an act of kindness is not considered as a day in her or his life. . . , every day one needs to do an act of kindness / she'b'chol yom tzarich la'asot ma'aseh chesed*. Speaking to his own Chassidim, he goes on to say that even if one fills the entire day with Torah and mitzvot but has not done an act of kindness, that day is not considered as a day.

I thought of these teachings in a personal way this week, of kindness as the key to giving meaning to each day. My brother Ted, who is a host on Channel 5's

"Chronicle," received a letter from a viewer who had had our mom as a teacher at Cardinal Cushing High School in South Boston, a Catholic girl's school. In a beautiful letter, she wrote of the influence mom had in her life, of how she was touched in small day to day ways by mom's kindness: "Her smile and laugh brightened my day and I enjoyed seeing her every day. When she could she would stop by the gym and watch some of the volleyball and basketball games and cheer us on like we were her own children. She always had something nice to say and could make me smile on a really bad day. I just wanted to let you know that your mom made a difference in many young women's lives and what a WONDERFUL person she was."

My mother had a strand of pearls that fit close around her neck that were given to Tzvia for her Bas Mitzvah. A short strand and so simple, as was mom's life, there is barely a space between each pearl. As it was for my mother in coming through her days, so too may each of our days count through simple acts of kindness that brighten the days of others.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor