PARASHA OF THE WEEK / 05

Chayei Sara חיי שרה

There is still time to begin

7 November 2026 · 27 Cheshvan 5787 · Genesis 23:1-25:18

After Sarah's death, Abraham still has decisions to make: where to bury her, how to care for Isaac's future, how to live the days that remain. The Torah calls him "advanced in days." Reading those words with the Zohar, we can ask: what can we bring into the day we have?

THE STORY OF THE PARSHA

Sarah dies in Hebron at 127. Abraham mourns and weeps for her, then seeks a burial place. In a public negotiation with Ephron, he insists on paying for the field and Cave of Machpelah. He weighs out four hundred shekels of silver and buries Sarah there. The promise of a land takes a concrete form in this first burial holding. [2, ch. 23]

Abraham sends his senior servant to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac, insisting that Isaac remain in Canaan. The servant travels with ten camels to the city of Nahor. At the well he prays for a woman who will offer him water and also water his camels. Rebecca arrives and does exactly that. She is the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew. The servant thanks God; her brother Laban brings him into the family home. Before eating, he tells them his mission and recounts the meeting at the well. [2, ch. 24]

The family agrees to the marriage, but the next morning Rebecca's brother and mother ask for a delay. Asked whether she will go with the servant, Rebecca says that she will. She leaves with her nurse and attendants. Isaac sees the caravan as he is out in the field toward evening; Rebecca sees him and covers herself with her veil. Isaac brings her into Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He finds comfort after his mother's death. [2, 24:50-67]

Abraham marries Keturah and has six more sons. He gives his estate to Isaac, gives gifts to the sons of his concubines and sends them eastward. He dies at 175; Isaac and Ishmael bury him beside Sarah in Machpelah. God blesses Isaac. The portion ends with Ishmael's twelve sons, chieftains of their tribes, his death at 137 and the region settled by his descendants. [2, 25:1-18]

A THOUGHT TO CARRY THROUGH SHABBAT

The days we bring with us

At the start of chapter 24, Abraham is described as old, *ba bayamim*, usually translated "advanced in days." We already knew that he was old: the Torah said so before Isaac was born. Why tell us again, here, as he begins arranging his son's future? What might it mean to come into our days, rather than simply have them pass? [2, Genesis 18:11; 24:1]

The setting gives the question weight. Sarah has died. Abraham weeps before he rises to negotiate for her burial. The next chapter opens toward a marriage. The Torah makes room for sorrow and for the practical responsibilities that remain. We are not told that Abraham has stopped missing Sarah. We see him continue to care for the living.

A Kabbalistic way to read time

The Zohar explains that Abraham drew closer to God through his deeds, day after day, from one spiritual level to another. It calls the days he enters "supernal days": days understood on a higher, spiritual plane. His passage through time becomes a journey of nearness to God. The years contain the relationship he has cultivated within them. [3, paragraphs 118-120]

This gives us a simple way into a deep teaching. A day can become a place where we answer God through something we do: a prayer said attentively, a promise kept, an honest decision when dishonesty would be easier. These are our everyday applications. Their significance lies in the relationship they express, even when nobody else notices them.

Letting a day reach us

A Chabad teaching based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe draws out both directions of this encounter: Abraham's experiences change him, and he gives his days spiritual content. He continues to be affected by life even in old age. [7]

Rabbi Warren Goldstein, in his published Chayei Sarah lecture transcript, describes a person coming into each stage of life with the wisdom gathered in earlier stages. Different ages bring different opportunities. A life can keep growing as its circumstances change. [5]

Our task, then, may change too. One period allows long study; another asks for patience with a child or care for a parent. We can ask what faithfulness looks like in the day actually before us. The answer need not resemble what we could do ten years ago, or what someone else can do today.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY THROUGH SHABBAT

The door that stays open

There is a surprising turn in the Zohar's discussion. After describing Abraham's gradual ascent, it praises the person who returns to God: in a day, an hour, even a moment, that person can come extraordinarily close. The same passage that honors a lifetime of devotion also opens a door for someone beginning again. [3, paragraph 121]

A return can begin today

The Hebrew word is *teshuvah*, return. Rambam teaches that teshuvah brings a person near to the Divine Presence, changing distance into closeness. This is a hopeful claim about the possibility of change. It asks us to leave the wrong behind and turn toward God with honesty and resolve. Where we have harmed another person, Rambam also requires repair and seeking forgiveness. [4, 2:2, 2:9; 7:6]

We may wish we had prayed more, listened better or chosen differently. Regret can show us what needs changing without deciding the worth of every day ahead. The Zohar takes a sincere beginning seriously. A neglected prayer can be resumed; an apology can open a difficult conversation; a habit can change direction.

A full day can include rest

Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, drawing on Rabbi Mordechai Rubenstein in his published Chayei Sarah teaching, includes Sarah's sleep within the goodness of her life: rest prepared her to do good when awake. His reading gives spiritual meaning to rest. [6]

A meaningful day need not be crowded. Sleep, recovery and accepting care can belong within a life turned toward God. Illness or grief may limit what we can manage. Our application is to choose an act suited to our strength and allow the rest we need.

Light carried into the week

Rashi's midrashic reading of Rebecca entering Sarah's tent recalls three returning blessings: a lamp lasting between Shabbat eves, blessing in the dough and a cloud over the tent. His commentary adds this spiritual picture to the verse's account of marriage and comfort. [8]

The lamp offers our table an image for the week. Something received on Shabbat can shape an ordinary Tuesday: attention in prayer, a gentler answer, time for what matters. Abraham's years cannot be ours, and Rebecca's beginning is her own. We too have a day in which to respond. There is still time to begin.

Around the table

Abraham comes into his days carrying a lifetime of experience. What has a difficult or unexpected season taught you that now helps you live differently? Share only what feels comfortable; a quiet example can open a thoughtful conversation.

The Zohar places steady devotion and a sudden return side by side. Which do you need more just now: a small practice to sustain, or permission to begin again? What would make that beginning honest and possible?

Think about the week ahead, including its work, rest and responsibilities. Where could one moment of attention change its quality? Perhaps each person can name something modest enough to do, meaningful enough to remember, and gentle enough to begin today.

SOURCES & FURTHER LEARNING

[1] The week's reading
7 Nov 2026, 27 Cheshvan, both regions. Torah: Genesis 23:1-25:18. Haftarah: I Kings 1:1-31.
Hebcal · Chayei Sara 5787

[2] Torah · Genesis 23:1-25:18
Full annual portion; focus on 23:2-3, 24:1, Rebecca's answer in 24:58 and comfort in 24:67.
Sefaria · Genesis 23-25

[3] Zohar · I 129a-b
Chayei Sara 16:118-121: daily ascent and the nearness of a person returning. Aramaic and translation consulted.
Sefaria · Zohar, Chayei Sara 16

[4] Rambam · Hilchot Teshuvah
7:6: return and closeness. Also 2:2 on changing course, and 2:9 on repairing harm to others. Hebrew consulted.
Sefaria · Hilchot Teshuvah

[5] Rabbi Warren Goldstein · 24 Nov 2016
Strive for greatness. Published edited audio transcript; the passage on gathering wisdom through life's stages.
Chief Rabbi SA · Edited transcript

[6] Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis · 18 Nov 2022
How can anyone have two lives on earth? Published teaching text, Israel National News; the passage on rest.
Rabbi Mirvis · Published teaching

[7] Chabad · Entering Into the Days
The Chassidic Dimension, based on the Rebbe's teachings: being changed by days and giving them spiritual content.
Chabad · Entering Into the Days

[8] Rashi · Genesis 24:67:1
The returning signs of blessing in Sarah's tent, citing Bereishit Rabbah 60:16. Hebrew and translation consulted.
Sefaria · Rashi on Genesis 24:67:1

Sources checked 2 November 2026. Original Kavaná letter with brief attributed paraphrases. Published teaching and lecture texts were read; no claim of independently watching or transcribing recordings. Everyday examples and the synthesis are editorial reflection.

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