



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

JUST A MINUTE, SARA

Sara, what right did you have to die just when you were becoming interesting?

You figure in a sheaf of Biblical stories, but hardly ever do we come to grips with you as an individual.

You are Avraham's wife, Pharaoh's romantic interest, Yitzchak's mother, Hagar's rival... but it's all about you in relationships with others, not you in your own right.

Were you really beautiful, in appearance, in character? Were you really pious and God-fearing, thinking of God, meditating on eternity? Were you really clever, a good organiser, an efficient homemaker?

Did the Midrash get it right when it said your tent had a light burning from one Erev Shabbat to the next, that you were not only hospitable but brought the women under the wings of the Divine Presence, that you wanted Yitzchak to study in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever?

Did Avraham value your wisdom and hearken to your voice? Did you willingly allow Yitzchak to go with his father, even if he never came back?

Did your tears flow in private, so that neither your husband or son would realise how torn apart you were?

When you died, was it old age or the shock of events? When Avraham came to mourn for you and weep, was he weeping for himself, now alone and bereft, or for you, such a woman of worth whose going made the world poorer?

Sara, don't leave yet before we have worked out your preciousness and personality!

Finally They're Friends

You would never think that Yishmael and Yitzchak would end up as friends.

After so many decades of rivalry, tension and animosity, you would expect that they would not only go their separate ways but leave each other's lives for good - actually, not for good but for better, since they could not share the same corner of the world in peace and understanding.

Then came the death of their father Avraham, and "Yitzchak and Yishmael buried him" (B'reishit 25:9).

I have to inject a personal note at this point. Many years in the rabbinate brought me face to face with human situations which sometimes solved themselves but not always.

I learned a great deal about counselling and conciliation but couldn't always restore unity between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters.

When a parent dies I wanted to weep extra tears for the children who could not bring themselves to attend the funeral together - or if they did, they sat in the car on the way to the cemetery bickering and berating each other, even already squabbling over the deceased's will.

I dreamt of Yitzchak and Yishmael being reunited but I could not always bring it about.

The two brothers must each have made a really special effort to face each one another.

Maybe they had both forgotten what the original quarrel was all about. Even if they hadn't, they found the courage to rise above it and share the moment of mourning. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH