

## פרשת חיי שרה

One of the more noteworthy pasukim in *Chayei Sarah* comes immediately after Sarah's burial, where the Torah records that "Avraham was now old, advanced in years, and Hashem had blessed him in everything."<sup>1</sup> While this happens to be the first mention of old age in the Torah, there is an apparent redundancy in the pasuk: what need is there for the Torah to say that Avraham was both old *and* advanced in years? Would using one of the terms not have been sufficient?

There is a fascinating answer provided by a Gemara in *Yoma*:<sup>2</sup> Avraham now spent his time as an elderly man learning in yeshiva, and this is what the pasuk meant: his being "old" meant that he was a wise Elder with prominence in Torah, while his being "advanced in years" means that he was elderly compared to his peers. In addition to being a pioneer of monotheism and having a successful career in religious outreach, Avraham had evidently been a true resident scholar of the *beis medrash*, devoting his time not only to spreading the word of Hashem, but also to delving into the depths of the *Dvar Hashem* even further.

On the last *daf* of Maseches Kiddushin,<sup>3</sup> a dialogue is held between several rebbeim over the nature of teaching one's child a professional trade, as well as which vocations are considered to be unsuitable. During this conversation, R' Nehorai makes a fierce declaration, saying, "I will set aside all the trades in the world, and teach my son only Torah, as a person partakes of its reward in this world and the principal reward remains for him in the World-to-Come, which is not true of other professions, whose rewards are only in this world. Furthermore, if a person comes to be ill, or old, or undergoes suffering, and is unable to be involved in his trade, behold, he dies in hunger. But concerning the Torah, it is not so, since one can study it under all circumstances; it can preserve him from all evil and sin in his youth while providing him with a future and hope in his old age." And what is such a source that explains this tone of optimism and assurance in old age? The very same *pasuk* of Avraham reaching old age and being blessed by Hashem, as R' Chama b. R' Chanina says, "מִימֵהֶן שֶׁל אַבֹּתֵינוּ לֹא פָרְשָׁה יְשִׁיבָה מֵהֶם" — from the days of our ancestors, yeshiva never left them, as they taught Torah to their students who came to them.

One dominant theme in mussar schmoozes is the concept of continuous growth and that a person leaving their yeshiva does not necessarily mean that their yeshiva leaves them; the culture and mindset that they have built can carry them through their lives. As Avraham Avinu and many other tremendous *tzadikim* have demonstrated, religious growth is an ongoing journey without a final destination, and there is always more room for a person to grow in their religious ambitions and cultivation of Torah. While we may eventually stop a progression of growth on a physical level, we nonetheless can always endeavor to continue advancing and flourishing in our aspiration to be better *ovdei Hashem* and *yirei shamayim*, imbuing ourselves in *Torah* and *middos* in our pursuit for greater spiritual heights.

<sup>1</sup> בראשית כד:א

<sup>2</sup> יומא כח:

<sup>3</sup> קידושין פב.