new london synagogue



Dear Community,

This week's Torah portion is surprisingly quiet when compared with last week. No angels visit. No societies are destroyed. Nobody turns into a pillar of salt. Nobody binds a son to an altar.

But this week's Torah portion is about love.

Sarah, the mother of our people, passes away. Abraham mourns her and purchases a final resting place.

Abraham then enlists a matchmaking service (in the form of his servant) for their son, Isaac, and Rebecca is discovered through the servant's prayer and Rebecca's acts of kindness. She agrees to the match, is blessed by her family, and rides a camel across the desert.

The Torah is unusually cinematic in small details in the first moment they see one another (Gen 24:63-64): "Isaac was wandering in the field towards evening, and he raised his eyes, and behold: camels were approaching. And Rebecca raised her eyes and saw Isaac, and she fell from the camel."

(Most commentators insist that Rebecca deliberately alighted from the camel; they interpret her asking who the man in the field is and subsequently veiling herself as an act of modesty. Personally, I imagine that if Rebecca did fall by accident and cover herself in embarrassment, that probably isn't the way she told the story later either.)

Isaac brings Rebecca into Sarah's tent and marries her. "Isaac loved her," the Torah tells us (Gen 25:67), "and Isaac found comfort after his mother."

Abraham remarries late in life, and other children are mentioned and given gifts as Abraham approaches his final days. But when Abraham dies, there are two sons who are mentioned as coming together to bury him: Isaac and Ishmael, who were torn apart last week by the competition between their mothers.

It is a quiet parashah, and Isaac is a quiet character. Action tends to unfold around him or happen *to* him, in both last week's and next week's parshiyot. But Parashat Chayei-Sarah reveals something significant about Isaac and the way that he loves: we see him mourn for his beloved mother; we see how loving his partner brings him comfort; and then we see him quietly healing the rift in his family by reuniting with his brother, in order to put their father to rest.

May we all learn to heal and love alongside Isaac this week.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Natasha