




Chayei Sarah
Genesis 23:1-25:18
Ceaser



Chayei Sarah Genesis 23:1-25:18 Overview

- Sarah dies at age 127 and is buried in the Machpeilah Cave in Hebron, which Abraham purchases from Ephron the Hittite for 400 shekels of silver.
- Abraham's servant, Eliezer, is sent laden with gifts to Charan to find a wife for Isaac. At the village well, Eliezer asks G-d for a sign: when the maidens come to the well, he will ask for some water to drink; the woman who will offer to give his camels to drink as well, shall be the one destined for his master's son.
- Rebecca, the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel, appears at the well and passes the "test". Eliezer is invited to their home, where he repeats the story of the day's events. Rebecca returns with Eliezer to the land of Canaan, where they encounter Isaac praying in the field. Isaac marries Rebecca, loves her, and is comforted over the loss of his mother.
- Abraham takes a new wife, Keturah (Hagar) and fathers six additional sons, but Isaac is designated as his only heir. Abraham dies at age 175 and is buried beside Sarah by his two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

Chayei Sarah

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The Torah section entitled Chayei Sarah ("The Life of Sarah") deals entirely with events that occurred after Sarah's death. The first verse of the Parshah tallies the lifespan of the first of the Four Matriarchs of Israel: And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, twenty years and seven years; these were the years of Sarah's life.

The second verse reports:

Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

Presenting himself as "a stranger and a resident amongst you," Abraham approaches the people of Het with the request to purchase a plot of land for Sarah's burial. Abraham is particularly interested in the Machpeilah Cave ("the double cave" or "the cave of the couples") and the surrounding field--a property belonging to Ephron the son of Chefer.

Ephron declares that he is prepared to give the cave and field to Abraham free of charge, but also lets fall that he values the property at 400 silver shekels. So,

Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Het, four hundred shekels of silver in negotiable currency...

Then Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpeilah before Mamre, that is Hebron in the Land of Canaan.

Thus "the Machpeilah Field with the cave in it" in the heart of Hebron became the first Jewishly-owned plot of land in the Holy Land.

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And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, twenty years and seven years (23:1)

At the age of twenty she was like age seven in beauty, and at the age of one hundred she was like age twenty in piety. [Another version: at one hundred she was like twenty in beauty, and at twenty she was like seven in piety.]

(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

Why does the Torah split up the tally of her years into three parts ("one hundred years," "twenty years" and "seven years")? To tell us that every day of her life was the equivalent of them all. At the age of one hundred years she was like age twenty in strength, and at age twenty she was like age seven in modesty and purity; at age seven she was like age twenty in intelligence, and at age twenty she was like age one hundred in righteousness.

(Midrash HaGadol)

And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah (23:2)

Where did he come from? He came from Mount Moriah, Sarah having died of grief over the Binding of Isaac.

(Midrash Rabbah)

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I am a stranger and a resident amongst you (23:4)

The Jew is a "resident" in the world, for the Torah instructs him not to escape the physical reality but to inhabit it and elevate it. Virtually all the mitzvot (divine commandments) of the Torah are physical actions involving physical objects, in keeping with the Jew's mission to make a "dwelling for G-d in the material realm" by sanctifying the everyday materials of everyday life.

At the same time, the Jew feels himself a "stranger" in the material world. His true home is a higher, loftier place, the world of spirit, the world of holiness and G-dliness from which his soul has been exiled and to which it yearns to return. Indeed, it is only because the Jew feels himself a stranger in the world that he can avoid being wholly consumed and overwhelmed by it, and maintain the spiritual vision and integrity required to elevate it and sanctify it as an abode for the divine presence.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

The story is told of the visitor who, stopping by the home of the great Chassidic master Rabbi DovBer of Mezheritch, was outraged by the poverty he encountered there. Rabbi DovBer's home was bare of all furnishing, save for an assortment of rough wooden planks and blocks that served as benches for his students during the day and as beds for his family at night. "How can you live like this?" demanded the visitor. "I myself am far from wealthy, but at least in my home you will find, thank G-d, the basic necessities: some chairs, a table, beds..."

"Indeed?" said Rabbi DovBer. "But I don't see any of your furnishings. How do you manage without them?"

"What do you mean? Do you think that I schlep all my possessions along with me wherever I go? When I travel, I make do with what's available. But at home--a person's home is a different matter altogether!"

"Ah, yes," said Rabbi DovBer. "At home, it is a different matter altogether..."

(Likkutei Dibburim)

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The Cave of Machpeilah (23:9)

Rav and Samuel differ as to its meaning. One says that the cave consisted of a lower and upper chamber. The other says that it had multiples of couples [interred in it]: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah.

(Talmud, Eruvin 53a)

And Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham: "The field I give to you, and the cave that is in it, I give it to you..." (23:11)

Said Rabbi Eleazar: The righteous promise little and perform much-- Abraham promised his guests "a morsel of bread" (Genesis 18:5) and then "ran to the herd and fetched a calf tender and good, and he hurried to prepare it" (ibid., v. 7).

On the other hand, the wicked promise much and do not perform even a little. Initially Ephron proclaimed, "A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you?" But in the end, "Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Hetfour hundred shekels of silver in negotiable currency."

(Talmud, Bava Metzia 87a)

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And Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver (23:16)

Said Rabbi Judan the son of Rabbi Simon: This is one of the three places regarding which the nations of the world cannot accuse Israel and say, "You have stolen them." The three places are: the Cave of Machpeilah, the site of the Holy Temple, and the tomb of Joseph at Shechem. The cave of Machpeilah, as it is written: "And Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver"; The Temple: "So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold" (I Chronicles 21:25). And Joseph's tomb: "And [Jacob] bought the parcel of land (at Shechem) for a hundred pieces of silver (Genesis 33:19).

(Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 33:19)

Four hundred shekels of silver (23:16)

As per Leviticus 27:16, a field the size of a beit-kur, which is the equivalent of 75,000 square cubits, represents a value of 50 silver shekels. Thus, the size of the field which Abraham purchased for 400 silver shekels was eight kur, or 600,000 square cubits.

A square cubit (approx. 20 inches by 20 inches) is the space occupied by a single person. This means that Abraham purchased a plot of land that provides an individual "space" for each of the 600,000 souls of Israel.

(Paaneach Raza)

Our sages tell us that the Torah contains 600,000 letters (counting the spaces between letters), for each Jew possesses something of the Torah. The same is true of the Land of Israel. Israel is the eternal inheritance of the Jewish people, equally the property of every individual Jew. And so it has been from the very first moment of Jewish ownership of the Holy Land: the first plot of land obtained by the first Jew included a share for every Jewish soul.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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Eliezer's Mission

"Abraham was old and come along in days; and G-d had blessed Abraham in all things"--so it was time to find a wife for Isaac.

Abraham summons Eliezer, "the eldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had" and says to him:

"...Swear by G-d, G-d of heaven and G-d of the earth, that you will not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife to my son Isaac..."

And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; all the goods of his master were in his hand. And he arose and went to Aram Naharayim, to the city of [Abraham's brother,] Nachor.

How to find the right woman to marry Isaac and become the second matriarch of Israel? Eliezer had a plan.

He made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at the time of evening, at the time that the women go out to draw water.

And then he prayed:

"O L-rd, the G-d of my master Abraham... Behold, I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water.

"Let it come to pass that the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Please, set down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she shall say, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also'-- she is the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac..."

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Eliezer's Mission

Things now happen swiftly:

Before he had finished speaking, Rebecca came out... with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the girl was very fair to look upon...

The servant ran to meet her, and said: "Please, let me drink a little water from your pitcher." And she said: "Drink, my lord"; and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink.

And when she had done giving him drink, she said: "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have done drinking." And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again to the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels.

Eliezer "looked at her wonderingly, but kept his peace, waiting to know whether G-d had made his journey prosperous or not" for he still had to determine if she met the criteria insisted upon by Abraham--that Isaac's wife be "from my kindred."

Still, he must have been fairly certain that she was the one, because he immediately gave her "a golden ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold," in effect betrothing her to Isaac. Only then did he ask:

"Whose daughter are you? Tell me, I pray thee: is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?"

And she said to him: "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milka, whom she bore to Nachor."

She was Abraham's brother's granddaughter! Then she answered his second question: "We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in."

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Abraham was old and come along in days (24:1)

When Abraham aged, he did not merely pass through the days of his life: he accumulated them. Each day was fully utilized, so that they were fully possessed by him.

(The Zohar)

I will make you swear by G-d, G-d of heaven and G-d of the earth (24:3)

But further on (in verse 7) he says, "G-d, the G-d of heaven, who took me from my Father's house."

This is what Abraham was saying to Eliezer: "When G-d summoned me from the house of my father, he was G-d of the heavens but not of the earth: the inhabitants of the earth did not recognize Him and His name was not referred to in the land. But now that I have made His name familiar in the mouths of His creatures, He is G-d in both heaven and earth."

(Rashi)

Before he finished speaking, behold, Rebecca came out (24:15)

Three people were answered by G-d as their words left their mouths: Eliezer, the servant of Abraham; Moses and Solomon. Eliezer, as it is written, Before he finished speaking, behold, Rebecca came out. Moses, as it is written, As he concluded saying all these things, the ground split open... Solomon, as it is written, As Solomon concluded praying, the fire descended from the heavens...

(Midrash Rabbah)

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And the man took a golden ring, a half-shekel in weight; and two bracelets of ten shekels weight of gold for her hands (24:22)

A half-shekel--to allude to the shekalim contributed by the people of Israel [for the construction of the Sanctuary in the desert], a half-shekel per head.

(Rashi)

And he gave straw and provender for the camels... And there was set food before him to eat (24:32-33)

*First he fed the animals, and afterward he was served food. For it is forbidden for a person to taste anything until he feeds his animals
(Midrash HaGadol)*

And he said: "I will not eat, until I have told my errand." And he said: "Speak" (24:33)

Said Rabbi Acha: The talk of the servants of the fathers is more desirable than the Torah scholarship of the children. For Eliezer's story, which takes up two or three pages in the Torah, is twice recounted, while many principles of Torah law are conveyed with a single word or letter.

(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

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The Family of the Bride

Rebecca runs home, and Eliezer and his ten camels follow. There he is greeted by Rebecca's brother, Laban, who provides feed for his camels and water for him and his camel-drivers to wash their feet.

And there was set food before him to eat, but he said: "I will not eat, until I have told my errand."

And he said: "Speak."

And he said: "I am Abraham's servant.

"And G-d has blessed my master greatly... He has given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses.

"And Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has."

The Torah now repeats the entire sequence of events--Abraham's instructions to Eliezer; Eliezer's arrival at the well; his prayer and the "test" he invented; Rebecca's appearance and her actions; Eliezer's gifts to her and his conversation with her--this time as told by Eliezer to Rebecca's family. Laban and Bethuel respond:

"The thing comes from G-d; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebecca is before you, take her, and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as G-d has spoken."

The next morning, however, her mother and brother (Bethuel is mysteriously absent) have some last-minute objections: there are many arrangements to be made, a trousseau to be prepared. "Let the girl stay with us a year or ten months; after that she shall go."

Eliezer, however, insists that they must set out immediately. "Hinder me not, seeing that G-d has prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master."

And they said: "We will call the girl, and inquire at her mouth." And they called Rebecca, and said to her: "Do you want to go with this man?"

And she said: "I will go."

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And Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master in her old age; and to him he has given all that he possesses (24:36)

Eliezer showed them a deed of bequest in which Abraham had given Isaac all his possessions, so that they should hurry to send their daughter.

(Rashi)

As the first Jewish marriage described by the Torah, the union of Isaac and Rebecca is the prototype of all subsequent Jewish marriages, both in the literal sense of building a home in Israel and in the broader sense of uniting the physical world with its cosmic soul, thereby fulfilling the Divine purpose in creation of making the world a dwelling place for G-d. In this endeavor is invested everything that Abraham possesses: all the resources--spiritual and material--with which the Almighty His people to the end of realizing His purpose in creation.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

I arrived today at the well (24:42)

From Hebron to Charan is a 17-day journey, and Eliezer made the trip in three hours.

(Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 16)

And her brother and mother said... (24:55)

But where was Bethuel? He wished to hinder it, and so he was smitten during the night.

(Midrash Rabbah)

We will call the girl, and inquire at her mouth (24:57)

From this we learn that a woman should not be given in marriage without her consent.

(Rashi)

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Marriage

And Rebecca and her maids arose, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man; and the servant took Rebecca and went his way.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the evening time; and he lifted up his eyes and saw, behold, camels were coming.

Rebecca lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac; and she fell from the camel.

And she said to the servant: "Who is this man who walks in the field to meet us?" And the servant said: "It is my master." And she took her veil, and covered herself...

And Isaac brought her into the tent [of] his mother Sarah. And he took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother.

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Isaac went out to meditate in the field... and behold, camels were coming (24:63)
Sometimes a person must go to his soulmate, and sometimes his soulmate comes to him. In the case of Isaac, his wife came to him, as it is written, "And he saw, and, behold, there were camels coming." Jacob, however, went to his wife as it is written, "And Jacob went out of Be'er Sheva..." (Genesis 28:10).

(Midrash HaGadol)

And Isaac brought her into the tent [of] his mother Sarah (24:67)

This verse can also be punctuated "And Isaac brought her into the tent--his mother Sarah" implying that when she came into the tent she became, in effect, his mother Sarah.

For as long as Sarah lived, a cloud (signifying the divine presence) hung over her tent; when she died, the cloud disappeared; but when Rebecca came, it returned.

As long as Sarah lived, her doors were wide open; at her death that openhandedness ceased; but when Rebecca came, it returned.

As long as Sarah lived, there was a blessing on her dough, and the lamp used to burn from the evening of the Sabbath until the evening of the following Sabbath; when she died, these ceased; but when Rebecca came, they returned.

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

And Isaac was comforted after his mother's death (24:67)

Such is the way of the world: As long as a person's mother is alive, he is attached to her; when she dies, he finds comfort in his wife.

(Rashi)

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The Other Sons of Abraham

Our Parshah has one more event to relate before concluding:

Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, and Yakshan, and Medan, and Midyan, and Yishbak, and Shuah.

The Torah, however, is quick to point out that these additional sons of Abraham were not to be included in the Abrahamic legacy:

Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from his son, while he yet lived, eastward, to the east country.

Thus the Torah concludes its account of Abraham's life:

And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: a hundred years, and seventy years, and five years. Then Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the Cave of Machpeilah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Het: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.

The Torah also informs us that Ishmael died at age 137 years, after fathering twelve sons, each of whom was the prince of a domain; the territories of these twelve clans extended "From Havilah to Shur, which is before Egypt, all the way to Assyria."

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Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah (25:1)

This is Hagar. She is called Keturah because her deeds were now as pleasing as the ketoret (the incense offered in the Holy Temple)

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the Cave of Machpeilah (25:9)

This implies that Ishmael did teshuvah (returned to a righteous life) and placed Isaac before himself.

(Rashi)

RABBI BEREL WEIN
Wein Online

The city of Chevron is very prominent in our world and in the daily news reports. The news from Chevron is not always encouraging. It is a tough place, this Chevron of ours - a tough place to live and a tough place to leave. In the Torah we read of the purchase of the Cave of Machpela by our father Avraham. This purchase was supposed to eternally establish that holy place as being the property of the people of Israel. But it hasn't worked out that way. Over the long centuries, Yishmael and his descendants and Eisav and his descendants have successfully contested Israel for these premises innumerable times. For over a millennium Jews were not allowed to enter the building, which supposedly rests on the top of that burial cave. The right of Jews to live in Chevron is and has always been contested far more bitterly than even the right of Jews to live in Jerusalem. Why? What is the secret of Chevron that makes it so dangerous and so contested a place for Jewish settlement and security?

The Talmud mentions that there are three locations in the Land of Israel, which are indisputably the legal property of the Jewish people. They are the Cave of Machpela in Chevron, the field outside Shechem/Nablus in Samaria, and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. All three locations were purchased by the leaders of Israel - Avraham, Yakov, David - for good and valuable consideration and for full, if not more than full, market value. The purchases and the details of those purchases are all recorded in the Bible. Yet, over our long history, even till this very moment, our title to all three locations is in dispute. The insight into this paradoxical situation may be that the very reason these properties are contested - because our claim to them is based on man-made law, contracts and deeds and not on Divine promise.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

All contracts, even all purchases in this world of ours, are always subject to review, revision and cancellation. Governments rise and fall, circumstances and situations change, the definition of "rights" is altered by fiat or common consent. In short, nothing ever remains the same. Nothing in the world created by man is permanent. Therefore, the general world, and certainly the Arab world, contests our claim of ownership to these parcels of land in Israel. Our deed is outdated and no longer valid, they say. We abandoned our claim long ago by not being present on those properties for long centuries. The Indian tribes in America also had signed and legal government deeds to large sections of the United States, but when the circumstances "changed," the deeds were abrogated, and the Indian tribes' claim to the land was disallowed. Claims to land are not very secure if they are based only upon legalities, purchases and contracts. The entire thrust of the book of Bereshith is that the world and its lands and properties belong not to man but to the Creator.

The claim of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is not based on contracts and deeds. Indeed, it is not based even on Balfour Declarations and United Nations resolutions. It is based upon the Godly promise to our ancestors that the Land of Israel belongs, by right of Godly fiat, to their descendants. Those Jews, who, for various personal and faith reasons, deny this Godly promise, are very hard pressed to justify the existence of the state of Israel and the Jewish claim to Jerusalem. Without this justification of belief and Jewish tradition, the claim of the nations of the world that "you are thieves" sounds plausible and correct. The faith of Israel is based upon the revelation and will of our eternal Creator. We certainly have to do our part, for God certainly helps those who help themselves. But, in the final analysis, it is obvious that we derive our rights and claims not merely from current behavior, but rather from rights based upon ancient faith and religious tenets and beliefs. As Rabbi Saadya Gaon stated: "Our nationhood is based solely on the Torah." Chevron and the Cave of Machpela prove how right he is.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

- *And these are the days of the years of the life of Avraham which he lived: One hundred years and seventy years and five years. And Avraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content and he was gathered to his people." (Breishis 22:7-8)*
- *There are descriptions given about the conclusion of Avraham's life that are not found by anyone else. Why does the verse mention "the days of the years" of his life? By Yishmael, who is immediately juxtaposed, only the years of his life are counted! Why does the verse tell us "that he lived"? What else does one do with their life? It seems rather redundant.*
- *This quote from the Zohar (Parshas Emor) might help us to focus in: "We learn that when one does a deed down below it arouses a reaction above. If a person behaves in a certain way below a commensurate force is awakened on high. Someone does a deed of kindness in this world, kindness is awakened above. It rests upon that day and crowns it for him. If a person acts mercifully below, mercy is aroused on that day and it is crowned on his account. That day then stands as a shield for him whenever it becomes necessary for him..."*

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

- *It seems from the Zohar that there's a unit of time, which is not arbitrary, it is called a "day". We are told that a given day is titled after the person whose behavior wakes up the heavenly mood of that day. Each day has a unique reason for being and different expression, as it says, "Day after day utters speech and night after night declares knowledge." (Tehillim 19)*
- *I have observed that little children live happily in twenty-four hour cycles. One day everything is good. The next, for whatever reason, it's terrible. It could be something as simple as not liking snack. After we get a little older, we tend to look back at good years and bad, be it in school or business. Later still we begin to talk about the 80's or the 90's. Decades start to take on nostalgic color and meaning. By the end, in the nursing home, there etched on the faces, a lifetime of experiences, we see distinctly drawn expressions of sweetness or bitterness. The whole life is thought of as either good or bad.*
- *As "twelve step" lingo leaks out into daily life it has become popular to talk about "one day at a time". About Avraham too it states in the verse, "And Avraham the elder came with his days...(Breishis 24:1) Each day was accounted for and filled with maximum productivity. In the army, in college and in prison people "do years". We are taught by the life of Avraham to "do days".*

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

- *It's important to know that this same Avraham spent decades of his early days and years in intensive research. He didn't have a clear path of tradition from birth. At the age of three he posited a theory about the Oneness of the The Creator. Until he had completed the paradigm of his thesis and began his career teaching he was already in his 50's.*
- *Perhaps, one could suggest that those days and years should be deducted from the totality of his productive life. That time, though, was not for naught. He had to begin his search and proceed methodically from wherever he was. Both the time in search of the greatest and clearest picture of reality and the time spent living up to what he came know are all accounted to him as "the days of the years that he lived".*
- *The contentment he achieved at the conclusion of his life was not the product of a last minute lunge for meaning. No! If life is perceived as "good" in the end, it is the cumulative result of moment by moment and daily choices over many years and changing conditions to happily confront the challenge of today.*

Final Thoughts

Ceaser

All of what we are, we see, we did and will do, is the
Work of HaShem

This we celebrate fifty-two times a Year on Shabbat.

“May it be Your Will, HaShem, that the Holy Temple be
rebuilt speedily in our days and grant us our share in
Your Torah....”

Shabbat Shalom