

Chayei Sarah, Genesis 23:1-24:18

This Shabbat's Torah portion is called Chayei Sarah and is translated as "the life of Sarah" but it actual begins with the death of Sarah, so could more appropriately be translated as "Sarah's Lifetime." This opening statement teaches us that death is a part of life. Our legacy in life is far more than an accumulation of the facts of our lives, but is rather about what we do in this life.

You will be hearing a wonderful Devar Torah from Noah tomorrow, so I'll keep my Devar a little shorter tonight, to save the best for tomorrow!

While thinking about this portion, I thought about what Rabbi Pearce asked once: "What is it that most people want to become but nobody wants to be? His answer? Well, we all want to reach old age, but no one wants to be old! Think of all the products and programs out there that help us find a fountain of youth! We try to eat healthy, take our vitamins, exercise, take all sorts of classes, use beauty products, and everything else you can think of to help us stay younger and more active. I, myself, try very hard to stay fit and healthy, but when I look in the mirror, expecting to see that pretty 26 year old, I am surprised to see the lines on my face!

But actually, it seems to have have worked! Statistics tell us that the number of 65-74 year olds are approximately 8 times larger than it was in 1900; the number of 75-84 year olds is 17 times larger; and the 85 and up population is

nearly 40 times larger. They project that by the year 2030, there will be more than 70 million people over the age of 65!

Just think about Holocaust survivor, Yisrael Kristal, who died at his home in Haifa on August 11, 2017, just five weeks before his 114th birthday. During the Holocaust, Kristal lost his wife and 2 children, but after he survived the concentration camps, he restarted his life, remarried and had 2 children. He made Aliyah to Israel with his family and became a gourmet candy maker. Kristal wasn't able to have his Bar Mitzvah at age 13 because of WW1, so he celebrated his Bar Mitzvah a century later, in 2016 at the age of 113! His son and daughter blessed him with 9 grandchildren! On March 11, 2016, Kristal was officially recognized as the world's oldest man by *Guinness World Records*.

I can't tell you how many Jewish adults, both women and men, over the age of 13 and well into their 60's, 70's and 80's that I have helped to become B'nai Mitzvah. Things are certainly different from when our grandparents & great grandparents lived.

In this portion, Sarah dies at age 127 and Abraham lived to be 175 years of age. And they accomplished many amazing things later in their life. Remember that Sarah was 90 and Abraham 100 when Isaac was born!

Living to a ripe old age doesn't mean you stop being productive or you are useless! We can often accomplish much in our later years. I did not become a Cantor until I

was in my 40's. Ruth Bader Ginsberg served as Supreme court Justice until the day she died at age 87!

Our attitude is an important factor in aging well. As an older woman once said: "I tried being old a couple of years ago and I hated it, so I am never going to do that again," or when I told a woman celebrating her 99th birthday that I hoped to come back next year for her 100th birthday, she answered: "Why shouldn't you? You look perfectly healthy to me!" With an attitude such as that, we can all try to reach old age with a positive look on life, still using our intellects and spirit to accomplish goals and enjoy life.

The book of proverbs, 16:31, teaches us that "The gray hair is a crown of glory", even if you color it, like I do!

Pirkei Avot, 5:21 teaches us that "at forty, one is fit for discernment; at fifty, for counsel, at eighty, for strength."

And psalm 90:12 says "Teach us to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart." Rashi notes that Sarah's 127 years were written this way to indicate that she had different times and qualities in her life: innocent as a 7 year old, with the strength and idealism of a 20 year old and always possessing the wisdom of an 100 year old.

Many of my congregants and my friends, like myself, are in the "senior" category, and they are still leading very fulfilling and active lives, some still work, even if it is part time, and some are pursuing new and interesting adventures and hobbies. Many of these wonderful congregants are amazing volunteers who help us at the Temple by being on our Board, or committees, or just

helping around the Temple with projects that need to be done. We are so grateful for everyone who helps us maintain this congregation and keep our Temple going.

It is important to stay young in your mind and do everything you can to stay healthy and happy.

This Torah portion is truly about life transitions, filled with great emotion. Life and death, grief and mourning, love and marriage, faith and healing. It teaches us that life has its calms and its storms; each segment has its time and place, and will come and go. English author, Samuel Johnson, wrote: "It matters not how a person dies, but how they live. The act of dying is not of importance, for it lasts so short a time." Live each stage to your greatest potential; keep the valuable qualities of each stage to bring with you and to serve you in your next stage.

I wish you all a very long and healthy life, and a life well lived. Kein yehi Ratzon, "May this be God's will".