

**Hadassah – Byte-Size**  
**Special Mother’s Day Edition**  
**May 2017**

**From Your Writer/Editor – Sharon Hox**

This coming Sunday is Mother’s Day, and as I ponder the meaning of “mother” I was drawn to look up the relationship between Mother and Matriarch. According to Merriam-Webster: matriarch is a woman who rules or dominates a family, group, or state; *specifically*: a mother who is head and ruler of her family and descendants. Mother is defined as a female parent OR a woman in authority; *specifically*: the superior of a religious community of women. [We’ll let this last thought go in the interest of keeping your interest...but it does raise a good discussion vs a vs matriarch.]

Naturally, our Jewish heads think of the four matriarchs when we hear that word, starting, of course, with Sarah. So – on the occasion of Mother’s Day, would you have considered the touchingly intimate, often something sentimental, messages to a “mom” appropriate for Sarah?

I think not, at least in my case. When I think of my Mom (OBM) I know there’s a heaven, because that’s where she must be, smiling down at me when I am happy; laughing frequently because that was her nature; and kvelling when I truly make a difference for my family, friends, community, and in the pursuit of my personal Judaism. When I think of Sarah, the Matriarch, who spoke directly to God; who gave “orders” to Abraham; who through God’s intervention became a mother at the ripe old age of 90.....I am intimidated and while I would not deny her a role as a maternal figure, I would not be comfortable even intellectually cozying up to her as I would to my mom.

Whatever your thoughts, and whether you play the many roles of daughter, granddaughter, mother, grandmother, etc. I hope you enjoy refreshing your knowledge of our first matriarch in the story below.

**HAPPY MOTHER’S DAY FROM HADASSAH**



The Matriarch Sarah is the only woman for whom a sidra, the weekly torah reading, is named. The first wife of Abraham, the mother of Isaac, she is the also the first of the four biblical matriarchs. What do we know about her? No genealogy is given for her when we first meet her as the wife of Avram living in Ur of the Chaldees, although Avram does at a later point say she is his half-sister. (Gen 20:12). Her name when we first meet her is “Sarai” which may be a name derived from the goddess Ishtar who was also called “Sarrat”, and although scholars also suggest it may be a name meaning priestess of that pagan cult, we tend to assume her name comes from the Hebrew for prince or leader – S.R.R. making Sarah a princess of our people.

The first thing we know about Sarah is that she is unable to conceive a child, and so when she does so at the age of 90, her husband being one hundred years of age, this is clearly because of divine intervention and both parents laugh in disbelief when God tells them. Abraham asks God to give Ishmael the role of heir (Gen 17:17-19) but God is very clear – the covenant with Abraham will be passed down through a son he shall have with Sarah. She is an important and necessary figure in the divine covenant and as proof of this her name is to be changed along with Avram’s and she too is blessed in similar language to the blessing given to Abraham.

The change of names must catch our attention. When Abraham’s name is changed it is to clearly alter his destiny. God tells him “your name will no longer be called Avram (exalted father) but your name shall be Avraham because I have given to you the fatherhood of a multitude of nations”. The letter ‘hei’ has been added to Avram’s name – and this letter, with the numeric value of 5 which is the magical number for protection, is also a letter which symbolically denotes the name of God.

Sarah’s name change is rather different. God speaks not to her but to Abraham, saying “You shall not call her name Sarai, because her name is Sarah. And I will bless her and also give you a son with her. And I will bless her....”

Sarah is already her name – there is no change except that now Abraham will call her by her name. There is no added letter to her name – instead one could argue that part of her name has been taken away, the yod (numerical value ten, symbolically used for the name of God) has transmuted into the letter hei. It has been halved, and one half given to Avram in order to fit him for the role he is to take on. You could say that Sarah is diminished in order to enrich her husband. Some of her divine spark is taken in order to build him up. She is the woman whose descendants will gain the eternal covenant. She has a special relationship with God – the only woman in torah to whom God talks directly – it is through the merit of Sarah that Abraham is able to achieve his destiny.

Sarah’s relationship with God is defined by the phrase we use in liturgy – “*pokeid Sarah*”. The verb p.k.d has a number of meanings: to attend to, to visit, to muster, to remember, to account, to command. God remembers Sarah’s desire for a child, God visits Sarah to announce that she will have a child, God appoints Sarah to be the matriarch of peoples, God pays attention to her and tells Abraham to do the same.

Abraham and Sarah were said to have been noticeably hospitable, open and inclusive. Sarah's tent was said to be open on all sides to welcome desert travellers needing a warm welcome. The midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 60:16) tells us also that as long as she lived the Shechinah hovered over her tent, her challah dough was blessed and her Sabbath lights lasted the entire week until the next Shabbat.

She was also a notable prophet – the Talmud (Yerushalmi Sotah 7:1) tells us that her prophecy was greater than that of Abraham, and that God was referring to her prophetic power when telling Abraham “whatever she tells you, do as she says” (BT Sanhedrin). It also lists her among the seven women prophets (BT Megillah 14a)

Sarah lived to the age of 127, and the way the bible describes this implies she lived a number of different lives in these years. She was a woman of great complexity, a woman of great strength who was destined to become the progenitor and matriarch of many peoples. It took time for this to be revealed – she is a woman both hidden in the tent and open to the world; a wife who travelled with her husband wherever he went at some real inconvenience to herself and a wife who was living in a different city from him when she died. Her relationship with Isaac was a strong bond – she ensured his protection when she saw that Ishmael was assuming a position of power that might damage him, and he was comforted for her death by the love of his wife Rebecca, a touching phrase which tells us a great deal about the bond between them.

Sarah's relationship with Isaac is at the core of the text. The covenant of blessing is destined to be given to the child of both Abraham and Sarah, but Abraham is clearly fond of both boys, even suggesting to God that rather than have another child, Ishmael could take the role. So it is Sarah who must protect Isaac, who must shape and form him ready to take on his destiny. It is Sarah who engineers the removal of Ishmael from the scene, and who having protected her son from a potential rival retires from the fray.

But her protective action did not end the danger. God appears to ask Abraham to offer up Isaac on a specific mountain and Abraham does not argue but takes the boy on the journey, prepares him for his fate and is ready to slice the knife into him as a bound offering to God, only stopped by the urgent cry of an angel of God at the very last moment.

Because of the story of the death of Sarah being reported in bible immediately after this terrible text of the binding of Isaac, the midrash links the two, saying that Satan tricked Sarah into believing that Abraham had indeed killed their only son, and the soul of Sarah flew out of her body in her deep distress as she wished to live no longer. Another somewhat less believable version is that she died of happiness when she realised that she had been tricked and her son was still alive. (Pirkei d'R. Eliezer 32/ Ginzburg Legends of the Jews)

Either way, her life ends much sooner than that of Abraham who goes on to marry Keturah and have more sons, but who has become irrelevant to the purpose of the biblical narrative after that moment on Mount Moriah – except to buy the land in Hebron for her final resting place, the Cave of Machpela which will become the family mausoleum to this day.

The text moves on to focus on Isaac, son of Sarah and Abraham. Isaac will marry Rebecca and he will love her till his death. The love of his mother has made him who he is, a strong but

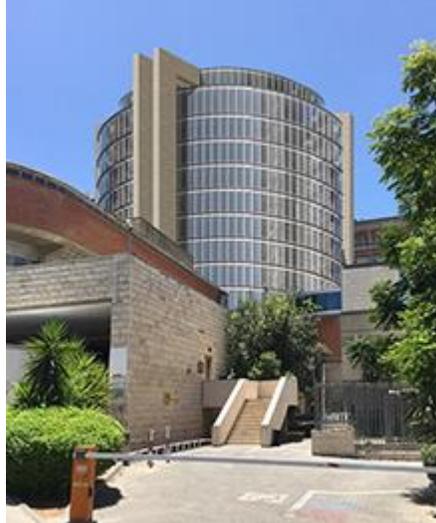
unobtrusive figure perfectly placed between his famous father and his famous son, providing stability and warmth and entrenching the place of the covenant of blessing into the family firmly and steadfastly. The legacy of Sarah provided many things in rabbinic tradition – land properly bought within Israel, many converts to the one God, hospitality, steadfastness, divine merit, but for me her best legacy is Isaac. Often misunderstood and seen as less important than his colourful father and sons, he is a man who has shown himself to be so well loved that he can overcome the trauma of near filicide to build a relationship of love and trust with wife and sons, and to put down roots and live alongside the other tribes. That, I am sure, is the inheritance he got from Sarah. That, and the covenant of blessing which is usually – wrongly – ascribed to Abraham alone. but which was given to him only because of the merit of Sarah. I used to have a fridge magnet that said “behind every successful man is an exhausted woman” – certainly the aphorism that most fits our first and most wondrous matriarch.

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***From Prof. Zeev Rotstein, Director General, Hadassah Medical Organization***

*The notes below are taken from an email sent earlier this month. Many of you may not have received it – but the messages are an important reminder of the wonderful work our funds support in Israel... and will make you proud of your contribution to these achievements. The text is written in the first person, from Prof. Rotstein....*

- Over the fifteen months, we have experienced steady levels of occupancy often exceeding 100 percent We carefully studied every parameter, and found new ways to make the hospital even more efficient for an overcapacity patient-load. For example, we decided to move neurology, neurosurgery, and cardiothoracic surgery to Level 12 of our Sarah Wetsman Davidson Hospital Tower, with a combined Intensive Care Unit on the same floor.
- Because of the need for more beds for babies and children in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, we have moved PICU from its former home on the seventh floor of the Charlotte R. Bloomberg Mother and Child Center to expanded facilities on the second level of the SWD Hospital tower, across the bridge from Mother and Child.



- Because of the growing population and a greater need for adult hospitalization facilities, the Internal Medicine Departments were shifted from their crowded location in the Round Building to the well-appointed Tower. This allowed us to serve more patients than before and to make them more comfortable.
- Hadassah's leadership in neurology was also strengthened by the opening of our Stroke Unit, headed by Professor Ronen Leker. Hadassah's life-saving ability to quickly ameliorate the impact of strokes has brought hundreds of additional patients to the hospital.
- Next to move out of the Round Building will be cardiology, taking up facilities in the Tower's Heart Center on Level 3. All of these are marks of success and herald a period of expansion and growth that reflects not only a growing population but also renewed energy at Hadassah. You've made this possible. All recognitions will, of course, move along with the life-saving facilities you have gifted us with.



- I hope that you saw the latest news about the breakthrough technology you've made possible in the Sarah Wetsman Davidson Hospital Tower. Many of you who visited remember the hybrid operating room — the huge one with the pink flowers on the walls. There you were told about a new robot, called Zeego. In April, the Zeego and the sister robot Renaissance were both put into use at the same time to save the back of a steel worker who was pinned to the floor by a steel wall that crushed him. A 42-year old dad, he was sure his life was over. But Prof. Iri Liebergall, Dr. Amal Khoury and Dr. Josh Schroeder and the two computers — which communicated with each other — made it possible to fix his crushed leg and broken back (six vertebrae) with exactly placed screws, something that would have been impossible without the facilities you provided. It was a world first.
- We need to move forward. Having committed ourselves to the Recovery Plan, we need to further expand our activity. Our new success has brought upon a huge demand for Hadassah services in Jerusalem. The hospitals are full with patient occupancy of up to 110%. The next step in my vision is to restructure the Round Building, opened in 1962, to update and expand the historical building. The physical structure needs to be strengthened, and rooms that were planned for six patients with one bathroom need to be brought up to 21st century standards. Fortunately, the building was designed with balconies and a large space like a donut hole in the middle, both of which can be renovated to provide needed space. We don't have to start from scratch. My vision is that we will add floors so that we will have two state-of-the art modern, fully-equipped towers on the Ein Kerem campus.

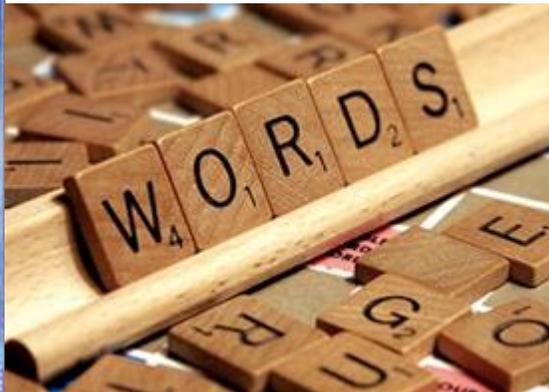
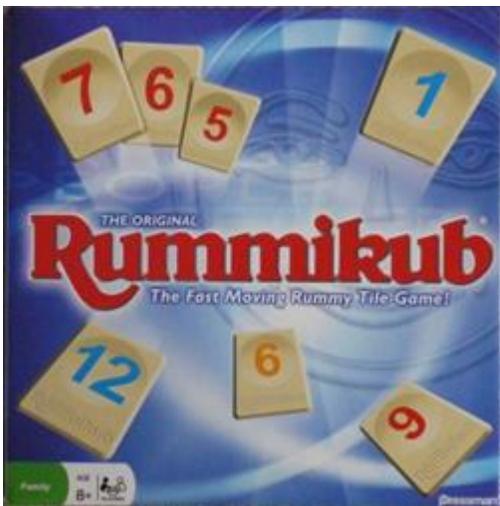
- Across town at Mount Scopus, we've opened a new radiology center with its own MRI, and the expansion of the new delivery department and larger pediatric emergency room, as well as the new rehabilitation center, are now underway.
- Today's New Hadassah is fully equipped with cutting-edge technology and offers the highest quality of medical treatment and a high level of service to the people of Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the State of Israel.
- How appropriate that all this is happening as we celebrate the return of the keys to Mount Scopus 50 years ago. We are thrilled to mark the reunification of Jerusalem as well as the reunification of the Hadassah Medical Organization.
- Lighting one of the 12 torches at Mount Herzl marking the beginning of Independence Day celebrations will be our own Professor Ahmed Eid, a transplant surgery pioneer and head of the Mount Scopus Department of General Surgery. Professor Eid has saved so many lives, including victims of terror. He also stands proudly for Hadassah's ethic that healing goes beyond all borders.
- Together with your ongoing support, Hadassah will continue our mission of healing all the people of our beloved Jerusalem and the entire State of Israel.

***Keep the miracles coming***

***Donate to [www.Hadassah.org](http://www.Hadassah.org) or send a tax-deductible contribution to Bonnie Weinberg at 1511 Waterstone Lane, Charleston SC 29414. You can designate your gift for Tower, or HMO, or Youth Aliyah***

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**GAME DAY IS BACK – Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 11:30-3pm at Synagogue Emanu-El**



As promised, our popular “beat the heat” summer game day is on the calendar for August 13<sup>th</sup>.

Please join Hadassah and the Sisterhood of Synagogue Emanu-El for a chance to play your favorite games and win door prizes. The day, with lunch and one door prize ticket, is yours for \$25. (Additional door prize tickets can be purchased on site.)

Favorite games in the past have included Mah Jong, Canasta, Scrabble, and Rumikub. Bring your own game set (and if you have a playing table, please bring that as well. We have loads of chairs). Help us plan lunch by sending your RSVP and check for \$25 payable to Hadassah

to Sandi Archambault at 4004 Alpheretta Court, Charleston SC 29414. You can pay at the door (cash or check only) but let us get a good headcount.

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***Important Contact Details – Hadassah Charleston Web Page:***

We have a web page on Hadassah Southeastern Region's site. Go to <http://hadassah.org/southeastern> and click "chapters" to find Charleston. There are also links to other Hadassah news and information, opportunities for giving, and more! Check it out.

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