

The Matriarch is Dead. Long Live the Matriarch! (Chaye Sara)

I could well imagine that I might have lived in former centuries and there encountered questions I was not yet able to answer; that I had been born again because I had not fulfilled the task given to me. -Carl Jung

Tibetan Buddhists have the interesting tradition of searching for their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, only after the previous one has died. They believe that the spirit of their leader is reincarnated in a child born after the leader's death. This passing of the leadership torch amongst the Tibetans has been occurring since the 1400s, which is not so long ago by Jewish standards.

Approximately 4,000 years ago, the Torah notes with some detail (Genesis 23:1), our Matriarch Sarah passing away. Her son, Isaac, was the one in whom God chose to continue the complete Abrahamic tradition in worship of God, and transmitting His message via his future progeny. With Sarah's mission accomplished, it was now time for the next generation to take center stage.

Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1475-1549) is intrigued by the adjacent juxtaposition of the birth of Rebecca (Genesis 22:23) with the death of Sarah only two verses later. His answer is both simple and perhaps surprising. The death of Sarah and the birth of Rebecca are intertwined. He claims that when Sarah died, Rebecca was born. There needed to be Matriarchal continuity to the embryonic Jewish nation. This happened thanks to Rebecca's timely birth, subsequent marriage to Isaac, her own delivery of Jacob and Esau, and then her pivotal role in the blessings they would receive.

Sforno states that Rebecca is the continuation of Sarah. While he doesn't talk about reincarnation per se, there is certainly an element of it in this case. In the Dalai Lama theology, reincarnation may be central, but for us it's just old news.

May we always enjoy and appreciate our part in the Eternal People and get to see our efforts of continuity bear fruit.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the birth of our grandson, Dvir Razel, to our children Orelle and Akiva Spitz. Mazal Tov! And for prayers for the full and speedy recovery of Noam Taragin, Noam Avraham ben Atara Shlomit, who was seriously injured in combat, together with all of our wounded.