The sweet aroma of freshly-baked challah is no longer in the air...
The candles which once illuminated ever so brightly have been extinguished...
And the Heavenly cloud, which provided shelter and protection, has disappeared.
Sarah’s soul has been recalled to heaven.

As the Midrash relates, it was at this time that Avraham praised Sarah with the beautiful words of Eishet Chayil, recognizing her dedication as a woman of valor to G-d and her family.

However, it seems odd. Why would Avraham only now extol Sarah’s unique qualities? Why only after she passed away did he take special note of the blessings in her dough, candles and clouds?

A person can only appreciate the full scope of his wife’s or mother’s deeds after her lifetime. Her true greatness can be seen from the legacy she leaves behind.

Sarah never completely left her tent. After her passing, when Yitzchak brought his new wife, Rivka, into Sarah’s tent, the illuminating candles, fresh challah and Divine cloud returned. While Rivka would now step into the role of the primary Matriarch of Klal Yisrael, the life and lessons Sarah left behind would forever continue to inspire and warm the hearts of her beloved children.

Even amidst the darkness, Sarah saw light. Even when life was painful and troublesome, she saw G-d’s salvation. And it is that unique perspective in life she has bequeathed to us all. We all possess the inner conviction to recognize the good and see that G-d is carrying us along. For Sarah herself, she was barren for 90 years, abducted by Pharaoh and Avimelech, and died at the shock of hearing about the near-death experience of her son, Yitzchak. Yet what does the Torah tell us?

“And the years of Sarah were 100 years, 20 years and seven years, the years of Sarah’s life” (Bereishit 23:1). Rashi explains that the redundancy of the word “years” after each period of life teaches that these years shared similar qualities. When Sarah was 100 years old, she was as sinless as she was at age 20, comparable to an individual under 20 years of age who is not subject to Heavenly retribution. And when she was 20, she was as charming and beautiful as a seven-year-old.

We find a further comparison between the numbers 100 and 20, adding further meaning and dimension to the balance of Sarah’s life. The 100th perek of Tehillim describes the joy one is to experience when serving G-d. “Serve G-d with gladness, come before Him with joyous song…” The 20th perek depicts the opposite set of circumstances, a life of challenge and difficulty: “May G-d answer you on the day of distress… may He send help and support you…”

As Chazal state, the final repetitive phrase of the verse – “the years of Sarah’s life” – teaches that all the days of Sarah’s life were equally good in her eyes. For Sarah, both the joyful and sad experiences were embraced and understood to be coming from G-d. Whatever she was going through, she maintained the same positive and optimistic outlook. Because she knew all along that G-d was supporting her and serving as her source of comfort and strength.

After I sadly lost my own child a”h, I was reminded it was appropriate to recite the verse, “G-d has given and G-d has taken away; may the name of G-d be blessed” (Iyov 1:21). The Ben Ish Chai explains that we often only understand how much G-d gives us after G-d takes it away. It is then we value what precious gift we had and how much we ought to have appreciated it.

And so I named my next son Natan, meaning “give.” I learned to understand that everything we have in life is a beautiful gift from G-d. Whether times are good or challenging, G-d is there to lend us support.

That is the eternal lesson Sarah has left us. Appreciate every year of life and every step along the way. And when we do so, we will surely be following in the ways of our dear mother, for whom every day and every moment of life was full of G-d’s goodness.

Our Beloved Mother