

## Shabbat Shalom With a Side of Torah – Khayae Sarah

How does one get to be 37 years-old, and still not be able to fend for himself? According to tradition, the story we read every Rosh Hashanah (and last week in the normal reading cycle) - the Binding of Isaac, happens when Isaac is 37. One line of commentary offers this thought, because in this week's Torah portion Sarah (Isaac's mother) dies at the age of 127. The argument is that she heard what Abraham had tried to do to her son and died. Since she had Isaac at 90, this would make Isaac 37. The implications of this line of thought are devastating. It means that Isaac, without questioning anything, went on a journey with his father, never saying even "See you later" to his mother, and then let a man of 137 tie him up, put him on an altar and put a knife to his throat. There is no sign of struggle and no sign of question; Isaac just goes along. The Rabbis – in midrash – create conversation between the two. Some go so far as to say that Isaac knew what was going to happen and willingly made himself the "perfect sacrifice. Yes, there is no textual link between the threat to Isaac and Sarah's death. It could have happened years before, but it is odd that our tradition almost defaults to the notion that this commentary is as if part of the scripture; taking an adult man, and then making as if a child in his behavior. The actual text will make the same statement with Jacob and Esau. They are forty at the time they vie for Isaac's blessing. Esau is entitled to it, but Rebekah dresses her 40 year-old son Jacob in Esau's clothing and some animal skins to trick her blind husband. So, Abraham first leaves home at 60. Isaac blindly follows his father to the edge of a knife at his throat in his mid-30's. Jacob still has mom dressing him in costume to cheat his father at 40. If I were a cynical man, I would argue that the author of Torah was a woman who understood the truth – that while women grow up, men just grow older.

I do think it sends a slightly different message, one that we often are not willing to hear. We sit in front of the television every so many years to watch the Olympics and other international competitions in skating, skiing, gymnastics, etc. We marvel at the youth standing on the medal platforms. Children barely age of Bar/Bat mitzvah and Confirmation are setting world records in events, garnering a museum collection of medals, and earning huge dollars in endorsements, while we – two, three, and four times their ages struggle to get out of bed each day to face the obligations that we often feel overwhelm us. We immediately default to the realization of middle age – being past our prime – over the hill – with one foot heading to the netherworld. We then look at a Dara Torres earning medals at 41, Nolan Ryan throwing a "no-hitter at 44, George Blanda still scoring points in the NFL at 48, Martina Navratilova winning a mixed doubles championship at 49, Gordie Howe playing professional Hockey at 52, Israeli Haile Satayin running the marathon in the Beijing Olympics, or Carl Pace who won an 800 meter sprint at the age of 89. There was also Ted Radcliffe, one of the greatest stars of the Old Negro Baseball leagues who, at the age of 96, pitched to one batter in a minor league professional game to be the oldest person to ever play baseball professionally. These are people no different than we are, except that they chose to persevere when too many of us give up. Ok, it can be argued that they also started being great young, but my heroes are people like Mike Flynt who (though I think is a bit crazy) tried out for and made the Sul Ross State Lobos football team at the age of 60, and all those who launch a new life in any profession or endeavor long after most of us have stopped looking for a future filled with any hopes other than maintaining as much of what we have intact.

The paradigms of our Biblical patriarchs remind us that no path is set in stone, until we set it. Whatever we choose to do is ours to decide. I was going to college to be a dentist, ended up a lawyer, and am now a Rabbi (I'll figure out what I really want to be when I grow up). Seriously, though, too many people feel stuck in the current situations, jobs, relationships, etc, and feel powerless to change their paradigms to make more sense out of living. We look to our patriarchs as great people, all of whom switched gears (or matured) midlife, figuring out, along the way, what values to hold dear, and what issues to let go of. As Yogi Berra put it, "It's not over – 'til it's over." And, for so many, "it" really does not even begin until they intentionally change the paradigm of life chosen for them by their parents or immediate society to launch the one they choose for themselves. I can tell you this much, I enjoyed my studies in Rabbinical School a lot more than I did in law school or college – it was a journey that I chose – one that has really brought only blessings. Take time this Shabbat. Take a look at the places where you feel stuck, commitment to intentional movement. Take a look at the places where you soar, and commitment to their celebration. Shabbat Shalom.