This week's Torah portion, Chayyei Sarah, opens with the death of our matriarch Sarah. It is a moment in Torah where the narrative is utterly and deeply human – it is about a family navigating the landscape of grief. Abraham mourns and eulogises Sarah before purchasing her burial site, a gesture that solidifies her legacy in the land of Israel. Later in the portion, Isaac marries Rebekah, who becomes a comfort to him after the loss of his mother.

Some commentators suggest that Sarah's death is not coincidental to the story of the binding of Isaac, *Akedat Yitzchak,* which we read last week. They argue that she may have died from heartbreak – either from the shock of what nearly happened to Isaac or from the trauma of estrangement from Abraham after such an event. This interpretation challenges us to confront the human cost of divine tests and the weight of grief.

While the Torah does not explicitly tell us how Sarah felt about the binding of Isaac, we are left to imagine her inner world. What we do know is that she loved fiercely and lived her years with purpose. The text in the first verse I read today says, *"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years – the years of Sarah's life"* (Genesis 23:1). So much repetition in the phrasing, repetition which emphasises the fullness of her life, even as it recognises its end.

This brought me to thinking about our custom of saying "May their memory be for a blessing". This is quite a profound theological statement. With this statement – wish? – we affirm that the person's presence in our lives had meaning and that their influence continues even after their death.

But how do we make someone's memory a blessing? Jewish tradition gives us some tools. We can focus on acts of kindness. When we perform acts of *chesed* – kindness – in someone's memory, we perpetuate their values. We can live their values**:** we can ask ourselves, "What would this person have wanted me to do? What would their 'best self' have directed me towards?" – and act accordingly. Or we can use their memory as a compass – recalling not only their virtues but their humanity, holding their flaws with compassion – as we may hold our own flaws with compassion – and allowing their life to guide us in our own choices.

For Sarah, her memory becomes a blessing through her impact on Abraham and Isaac. Her death spurs Abraham to establish a permanent family home in the land. Isaac's grief is comforted by the arrival of Rebekah, who steps into Sarah's legacy of nurturing the next generation.

The midrash on Sarah's death teaches us something profound about loss: grief is not linear, nor is it clean. The binding of Isaac may have been a moment of divine testing for Abraham, but it also tested the family's bonds. Even in our matriarchs and patriarchs, we see that faith and family are deeply entwined, and sometimes, faith's demands can strain the human heart. I know something of this – perhaps you do, too.

In our own lives, we too encounter losses that shake us to our core. To navigate grief is to honour what ***was*** while continuing to live fully in what ***is***. This is why Sarah's life is described in its totality, "the years of her life", as if to remind us that she was more than her death.

The tasks of mourning, the work of memory, and the work of life go on. As we reflect on Chayyei Sarah, let us take with us the practices and prayers our tradition offers. We can say "May her memory be for a blessing" – may Ben's memory be for a blessing – is to carry with us the legacy of the one we are mourning. We can wish mourners a long life, and thereby affirm the possibility of joy and resilience even in the shadow of grief. And we can challenge ourselves to live fully, as Sarah did, and thereby ensure that our own lives will leave a lasting imprint.

May we be inspired by Sarah's courage, Abraham's resilience, and Isaac's capacity to love again. And may the memories of all our loved ones be for a blessing.