

While a major portion of Chayei Sarah discusses Eliezer's quest for Yitzchak's wife, Avraham's other son, Yishmael, also makes some appearances. One of these appearances is immediately following Avraham's death. The passuk tells us that both Yitzchak and Yishmael bury Avraham in Maarat Hamachpela (25:9). According to Rashi, this teaches us that Yishmael did Teshuva, he repented, and put Yitzchak in front of himself (Yitzchak is listed first in the passuk). Ramban similarly comments, quoting Breishit Rabba, that the son of the Maid (i.e. Yishmael, the son of Hagar) is giving "kavod," honor, to the son of the Woman (i.e. Yitzchak, the son of Sarah). So it is clear that Yishmael is doing something right. Burying his father was expected of him it seems, yet doing it with Yitzchak is telling of a certain transformation.

Soon after we learn of his appearance by Avraham's burial, we are told of Yishmael's descendants. This leads into Yishmael's death, as the passuk tells us: "*Vayigava vayamat vaye'asef al amav*"- "he expired and he died, and was gathered unto his people" (25:17). On the spot, Rashi looks at the word "*vayigava*," "and he expired," as redundant, and quotes the gemara in Baba Batra (16b) to explain that this word is only used in the Torah to describe tzadikim, righteous people. The Be'er BaSadeh spells out what we were all thinking: this is parallel to previously stated Rashi that said that Yishmael did teshuva.

Ramban brings the same gemara that Rashi did about Yishmael's death, but continues quoting where Rashi did not. The gemara in Baba Batra continues to ask about the veracity of the statement that the word "*vayigava*" is only written by tzadikim, because the word comes up by the generation of the flood, which was certainly not righteous. The gemara concludes that the word describes tzadikim only when it is adjacent to the words "*vaye'asef al amav*," and by Yishmael it indeed says that he was gathered

onto his nation. Ramban continues that the word “*vayigava*” really means a painless death, which only the righteous merit. Further, he concurs with the way Onkelos translated “*vayigava*,” to mean overcome with faintness. Therefore the Ramban concludes that the type of death we are talking about here is like a man who becomes weak and dies, with no pain. In the end we still conclude that Yishmael was included with tzadikim, and the question is why.

I’d like to take the question a step further. Who else receives this type of death? Only nine pessukim earlier, Avraham also dies in this manner. The passuk says: “*Vayigava vayamat Avraham b’seira tova zakain v’saveia vaye’asaf al amav*”- “Avraham expired and he died at a good old age, an old satisfied man, and he was gathered unto his nation” (25:8). So “*vayigava*” was stated also in the same passuk as “*vaye’asaf al amav*,” just like by Yishmael. The first Rashi that we mentioned by Avraham’s funeral even explains that Avraham’s death at a “good old age” is a result of Yishmael’s teshuva. Did Yishmael really deserve the same painless death as Avraham?

I think we could possibly answer our question of why Yishmael was able to merit a painless death through this Rashi that told us that Avraham died at a “good old age” because of Yishmael’s teshuva. After all, Yishmael was Avraham’s son, and Avraham loved him {we see this from the Rashi in Vayerah (22:2), when the midrash says that Hashem tells Avraham to take his loved child for the Akeidah, and Avraham says he loves both Yitzchak and Yishmael}. The fact that Yishmael did not live the lifestyle that Avraham wanted him to was difficult for Avraham. Therefore, when Yishmael did teshuva, Avraham could pass away happily. Because Yishmael played a part in the “*vayigava*,” the content and painless death of Avraham, by repenting, he merited the same death as a tzadik.

That leaves us with one final question: what was Yishmael's teshuva that was such a big step for him, that led to him easing Avraham's qualms and his own death as a tzadik? I think the answer is that Yishmael finally began to understand his role. His entire life, Yishmael he had tried to be Avraham's number one son. Yishmael wanted to get Avraham's bracha and inheritance. After all, Yishmael was born first. He felt more entitled. He was even passed over for Yitzchak to be sacrificed to Hashem. Yishmael felt neglected. So when Yishmael finally realized his mission was not to get all the things Yitzchak was getting, Avraham could be happy. Proof of Yishmael's realization: he let Yitzchak ahead of him at Avraham's funeral.

Further proof: look at the pessukim following Avraham's death and Yishmael letting Yitzchak go first at the burial. First the pessukim tell us that Hashem blessed Yitzchak. Perhaps He does this now because Yishmael realized the bracha was not for him and therefore he stopped fighting for it, and instead did teshuva. Then the pessukim list Yishmael's descendants, calling Yishmael the son that "Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Avraham." This passuk along with Ramban could even be hinting to our answer with the midrash that we cited; that the son of the Maid was giving honor to the son of the Woman, that Yishmael realized he might have been the son of Avraham, but he was also just the son of Hagar, not Sarah, but Sarah's maid. Ramban could be getting his explanation on the burial based on this passuk of Yishmael's heritage. Then keep going in the pessukim and it becomes clearer. It lists Yishmael's children, and then tells us that they were leaders of their respective nations. Yishmael found his role, and his children were leaders. This is what they were meant to do. One could view this as Yishmael's reward to settling his over-achieving aspirations, or simply that him and his descendants were always meant to be leaders of other

nations, and Yishmael had to understand that he wasn't supposed to get Yitzchak's portion. Now that Yishmael realized this, the Torah tells us about his family and lineage. That leads to the end of Yishmael's life, his painless death (that we already explained), and the end of Parshat Chayei Sarah.