

דור ולך ודור בא והארץ לעולם עומדת

Dor holech v'dor ba, v'ha'aretz l'olam omedet

One generation leaves and another generation comes; the earth is eternal

Kohelet 1:4

Earlier this month, on Shabbat *parshat Chayei Sara*, I lost my dear *sabta*, Dina bat Moshe v'Sara (Dina Yatom Lerner.) Sabta Dina spent almost 40 of her 96 years living with my parents. Growing up, Sabta Dina was an integral part of my nuclear family.

Sabta Dina was not Orthodox in the conventional sense of the word; however, she was deeply religious. She lived her life by maxim in *Pirkei Avot* (4:20): “*Rabi omair: Al tistakel bakankan ela bemah sheyaish bo* – Do not look at the container, but at what is in it.” When I was a child I started to wear a *kippah* all the time. Sabta Dina’s response was to repeatedly stress that “it’s not the *kippah* on your head that makes you religious – it’s how you behave and how you treat others.”

This ethic of downplaying outward appearances of religiosity in favor of treating all people with respect has profoundly influenced my entire extended family. Regardless of our individual level of observance, all members of my family are extremely tolerant of each other. We are able to come together as a family for life-cycle events despite our theological differences. Thus, Sabta Dina’s ethic has led us all to a strong sense of family cohesiveness.

Sabta Dina was our family’s sole remaining representative of her particular generation. Therefore, her death comes not only as a personal loss – it is also an irretrievable loss of our family’s link to our heritage. At this time of generational transition, the above *pasuk* from *Kohelet* seems especially appropriate.

As Jews, we believe that *ma’aseh avot siman l’vanim* – the actions of our ancestors are a guide for future generations. It is not surprising, then, that *parshat Chayei Sara* deals with the very first generational transition the Jewish people faced. By beginning and ending the *parsha*, the deaths of *Sara Imainu* and *Avraham Avinu* help emphasize the *parsha*’s dominant theme of generational transition. My family can look to *parshat Chayei Sara* for guidance as we face our own generational transition.

One message about generational transition embodied in the *parsha* and consistent with Sabta Dina’s ethic is the importance of family cohesiveness. At the end of the *parsha*, we read that Yitzchak and Yishmael came together to bury Avraham. The *midrash* implies that Yitzchak and Yishmael were indeed able to conduct a relationship later on in life, to the point that they were able to cooperate in their father’s funeral arrangements. Thus, one of Avraham’s

successes was the ability to inculcate in his offspring a sense of family responsibility and cohesiveness despite their individual differences.

Being the last representative of her generation, Sabta Dina was in many ways the glue that held our family together. As matriarch of the family, she provided a focal point for family celebrations. She demanded of all of us an attitude that led to family cohesiveness.

No longer having Sabta Dina in common, we will need to find ways to stay together as a family, rather than drifting apart over time. Sabta Dina valued and appreciated her children, 14 grandchildren, 34 great-grandchildren, two great-great-grandchildren, and her entire extended family. She especially enjoyed family *smachot*, and made efforts to attend these, despite her advanced years and the sometimes substantial personal discomfort that such travel entailed. I can think of no greater tribute to Sabta Dina's memory than to work as a family to ensure our continued cohesiveness and togetherness.

May we all be comforted among the mourners of Tziyon and Yersushalayim.

Danny Geretz

<i>Avraham Avinu</i>	Abraham our (fore)father
<i>Kippah</i>	Skullcap or <i>yarmulke</i>
<i>Kohelet</i>	The Book of Ecclesiastes
<i>Midrash</i>	Rabbinic legend
<i>Parsha(t)</i>	Weekly Torah portion (of)
<i>Padan Aram</i>	Mesopotamia
<i>Pasuk</i>	Verse
<i>Pirkei Avot</i>	Ethics of the Ancestors
<i>Sabta</i>	Grandmother
<i>Sara Imainu</i>	Sara our (fore)mother
<i>Smachot</i>	Joyous occasions