

**Temple Beth-El Torah Study...Genesis 23:1-2**

	<b>FOX</b>	<b>JPS</b>	<b>HEBREW</b>
<b>1</b>	Now Sara's life was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years, (thus) the years of Sara's life.	Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years.	וַיְהִי־לִי־תַיִתְּךָ֙ שָׁרָה֙ מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי־תַיִתְּךָ֙ שָׁרָה֙׃
<b>2</b>	Sara died in Arba-Town, that is now Hebron, in the land of Canaan. Avraham set about to lament for Sara and to weep over her;	Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her.	וַתָּמָת שָׁרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֵא אֲבְרָהָם לִסְפֹד לְשָׁרָה וּלְבִפְתָּהּ׃

**JPS...The Cave of Machpelah (vv. 1-20) Hayyei Sarah**

Abraham's spiritual odyssey reached its climax with the Akedah. For all intents and purposes, his biography is complete. But two important issues remain: the concern with mortality and the pre-occupation with posterity. The former finds expression in the acquisition of a hereditary burial site, the latter through the selection of a wife for Isaac so that the succession of the line may be secured. These are the topics of chapters 23 and 24., respectively.

The preceding episode closed with a genealogy that was designed to introduce the forthcoming marriage of Isaac. In a sense, therefore, chapter 23 breaks the narrative continuity. In reality, however, the death of Sarah and the purchase of Machpelah as a sepulcher are in proper chronological order. As 17:17 and 21:5 make clear, the matriarch was 90 years old when she bore Isaac. Since she was 127 at the time of her death, she died three years before Isaac's marriage at age 40 (25:20). This sequence of events is further confirmed by the statement that, in taking Rebekah to wife, Isaac "found comfort after his mother's death" (24:67).

The account of the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah is extraordinarily detailed, indicating the importance that the episode had assumed in the consciousness of Israel. There are several possible reasons for this emphasis. Not only is it the first recorded death and interment in the history of the Jewish people but it also concerns none other than Sarah, the first matriarch. Abraham's actions are indicative of the great respect for the dead and of the importance of proper burial that remain a characteristic of the Jewish faith. Machpelah is the first piece of real estate in the promised land secured by the founding father of the nation, and its acquisition presages the future possession of the entire land. Since all three patriarchs and three of the matriarchs eventually were interred in the cave, it most likely enjoyed popular veneration as a shrine and as a symbol of national and social unity. This may well have influenced David's choice of Hebron as the first capital of Israel. Finally, the narrative in a very real sense presents another mute affirmation of Abraham's faith. In the preceding chapter the divine promises were reiterated and expanded. Now Abraham faces harshly contrasting reality: to gain a mere burial plot he must receive permission from the local population and pay out a large sum of money. His insistence on acquiring the estate in perpetuity is an expression of faith that his descendants would indeed inherit the land.

The narrative itself is suffused with legal terminology and practice, an understanding of which is essential to its interpretation. First, Abraham labors under two disabilities that derive

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from his status as an alien. He cannot avail himself of local burial facilities without municipal permission, and he cannot acquire land. Second, even if these restrictions were to be overcome, he would still face the problem of procuring an inheritable estate to be used by future generations, for an alien could not normally own land in perpetuity (cf. Lev. 25:13). Third, apart from legal problems, there is still to be encountered the reluctance of landowners to part with their property, a pervasive and deep-seated attitude throughout the ancient Near East. Naboth's rejection of Ahab's offer to buy his vineyard exemplifies this tendency: "The Lord forbid that I should give up to you what I have inherited from my fathers!" (I Kings 2:13). At work there is a profound and complex emotional attachment to the estate, an emotion that is shaped by a powerful feeling of continuity with one's forebears and a compelling sense of responsibility toward one's family, clan, and posterity. The land is looked upon as an ancestral trust. All this is reinforced by the strong influence of communal solidarity, the consciousness that disposal of real estate to an alien may upset the local demographic balance, impair social cohesion, and weaken the community in its relationship with neighboring cities and tribes. Given these circumstances, it is small wonder that the entire community was involved in transacting a sale of land.

Abraham wishes to ensure that his purchase is final and irrevocable, his ownership absolute and incontestable. For these reasons, he refuses a gift: donations are notoriously insecure in law. They may be challenged by heirs or by other members of the family or community, or even by the donor himself should his goodwill wane. Only a payment that is manifestly accepted by the seller of his own volition ensures the unchallengeable nature of the transaction. That is why Ephron, not Abraham, must first state the price and why, once that is done, there is no further bargaining.

### **FOX...Purchase and Burial (Chapter 23)**

Even though he is now secure in God's covenant, Avraham must still live and function in the human world. His purchase of a burial plot for Sara shows us once more his dealings with his neighbors, here as their equal, and also establishes at last his legal foothold in Canaan, albeit with a small piece of land. The long conversations and considerable formality of the chapter, which are not unusual in an ancient Near Eastern context, contrast with the extreme brevity of the previous chapter.

The narrative strikes a curious balance between the emotional reality of the situation (e.g., the repetition of "dead," "presence," and "bury") and the requirements of legal procedure ("Hear me," "give title," and "holding").

### **JPS...THE DEATH OF SARAH (vv. 1-2)**

#### **V. 1**

#### ***Sarah's lifetime...***

- **JPS...**The span of Sarah's life. The repetition underscores this unique biblical specification of a woman's age at death and testifies to Sarah's great importance as the first matriarch.

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- **BEKHOR SHOR**<sup>1</sup>... It is not the [usual] way to record the deaths of women, even righteous ones, unless it is by means of a deed. For behold we find only Sarah, Rachel, and Devorah -- Rivka's wetnurse -- and Miriam on the withdrawal of the well. Sarah's death is mentioned since she makes known to us how the grave was acquired with riches (and this is one of the tests [of Avraham]). Devorah's death is mentioned to make known how the name of the place is called Alon-Bachut. Rachel's death is mentioned to teach why she is not buried in Ma'arat haMachpela. And why is it that their years are not numbered, except for Sarah? Since she is the most important of them all.
- **RASHBAM**<sup>2</sup>... even though the Torah never revealed the ages of other women, in Sarah's case it became necessary to inform us of this, as her death was directly related to the purchase of the cave of Machpelah. The Torah therefore told us for how many years Sarah lived after having become a mother at the advanced age of 90.
- **CHIKUNI**<sup>3</sup>... People fond of dabbling in the allusions found through the numerical value of words or whole sentences, will note that the numerical value of the word ויהיו equals the "life of Sarah," in other words, Sarah's real life commenced with the birth of Yitzchok, at which time she was 90 years old, whereas she died on the day of the binding of Yitzchok 37 years later. This is the numerical value of the word: ויהיו. As long as a person has no child he or she is considered as dead. (Talmud Nedarim, 64)
- **OR HACHAIM**<sup>4</sup>... Why did the Torah use the term ויהיו to describe Sarah's life when everyone else's life is described by the word ויהי? Midrash Hagadol 23:2 claims that the reason Sarah died was that she was unable to make peace with the fact that Isaac was spared at the last moment. She thought he refused to be the sacrifice. The expression ויהי or ויהיו always alludes to some painful experience, whereas the expression ויהי does not. The Torah wanted to allude to the grief which caused Sarah's death.

Another reason why the Torah phrases Sarah's lifetime in this unusual manner may be based on Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 32 where Sarah's death at that time is described as due to the fact that Satan informed her of Isaac's imminent death. The word ויהיו then reflects a "new existence, " הויה, i.e. although she had been allocated a certain number of years at birth, the trauma caused by Satan's information cut short her years. The reason the Torah speaks about חיי שרה, is to remind us that whereas the righteous give life to their days (such as Sarah), the reverse is the case with the wicked.

### *127 years, the years...*

- **IBN EZRA**<sup>5</sup>... Hebrew usually first lists the larger numbers and then the smaller ones. But we also find the opposite, an example being Scripture's enumeration of Jacob's years (Gen. 47:28).

<sup>1</sup> Torah commentary (Middle-Age France, c.1145 – c.1195 C.E.) focusing on pshat and written by Yosef Bekhor Shor.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, or Rashbam, (c. 1085-c. 1158) was Rashi's grandson and a leading French Tosafist out of Troyes.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (1250-1310) was a French rabbi and student.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (1696-1743), a Talmudist and kabbalist, wrote *Or HaChaim*, his commentary on the Torah.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra (1089-c.1167) was a biblical commentator and philosopher in the Middle Ages from Spain.

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- **RASHI**<sup>6</sup>... (literally, 100 years, 20 years and 7 years) — The reason the word שנה, *shanah*, is written at every term is to tell you that each term must be explained by itself as a complete number: at the age of one hundred she was as a woman of twenty as regards sin — for just as at the age of twenty one may regard her as having never sinned, since she had not then reached the age when she was subject to punishment, so, too, when she was one hundred years old she was sinless — and when she was twenty she was as beautiful as when she was seven (Genesis Rabbah 58:1)... the word years is repeated and without a number to indicate that they were all equally good.
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM**<sup>7</sup>... *The reason שנה is written with every set...* I.e., and Scripture does not gather the ones and the tens in a set, and the hundreds in a separate set, as it did in Parshiyos Bereishis and Noach. Rashi's is not asking why it says שנה for 100 years whereas it says שנים for seven years, for also in Parshiyos Bereishis and Noach it is always written שנה for hundreds, and שנים for smaller numbers. Rather, Rashi's question is about the middle שנה, written after twenty, for שנה is never written three times. Perforce, it is meant to be expounded upon. Since one of them is to be expounded, so too are the rest to be expounded.
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM**... *That every set is to be explained by itself...* I.e., each set bears its own meaning and does not join with the other sets to form a single sum, as numbers composed of ones, tens and hundreds usually do. This is because the repetitive שנה divides them, placing the ones on their own, and so the tens and the hundreds. According to this [Midrashic interpretation], it is not twenty-seven plus one hundred. Rather, twenty-seven represents the first years within the one hundred.
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM**... *At one hundred years old she was like a twenty year old, regarding sin...* Rashi implies that from this comparison we learn that all Sarah's days were good. But Rashi's next comment — “The years of Sarah's life, they were all equally good” — implies that “The years of Sarah's life” comes to teach that all her days were good. If so, Rashi seems to be contradicting himself! But in fact, this is not a question. On the contrary, from the comparison of one hundred to twenty regarding sin, we would not know that at one hundred she was beautiful as at twenty, since we learn only one quality from each set by itself. Therefore, we still need “The years of Sarah's life, they were all equally good.” A further answer: Since שנה is repeated in order to compare one hundred to twenty, which are the first twenty years counting from her birth [see previous entry], therefore, the “twenty-seven” years are within the one hundred and are not the additional years after the one hundred that the verse's simple meaning infers. If so, we might think that during the twenty-seven years after the one hundred, she had sin and not beauty. This is why we need “The years of Sarah's life,” to tell us that they were all equally good. And from “The years of Sarah's life” alone, we would know just that her years were equally good in one quality. Thus it says שנה after each set, to compare them in both qualities: lack of sin and that she possessed beauty. And “The

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105) was a medieval French rabbi and author.

<sup>7</sup> Sifte Chachamim was a commentary on Rashi's commentary on Torah. It was written by Shabbethai ben Joseph Bass (1641-1718).

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years of Sarah's life" applies to both [qualities, telling us that in all her years she possessed beauty and she was without sin]. (R. Meir Stern<sup>8</sup>)

- **SIFTEI HACHAMIM...** *Just as when she was twenty she was not considered as having sinned...* Question: Here, Rashi implies that right after turning twenty she was subject to [Heavenly] punishment. But regarding "Noach produced Sheim..." (5:32), Rashi said that before the Torah was given, people were not subject to [Heavenly] punishment until the age of one hundred? The answer is: Sarah was subject to punishment right after turning twenty because they accepted the Torah upon themselves—and after the Torah was given, people were subject to punishment from the age of twenty. Thus, Scripture is telling us that even by post-Torah standards, she was without sin. (Re'm<sup>9</sup>)
- **DAAT ZKENIM**<sup>10</sup> ...according to Rashi all the years that Sarah lived on this earth were equal in the sense that she was a good person during all these years. When we look at the way the Torah describes the years of Yishmael after his death, (Genesis 25,17) the Torah describes them in the same terms, i.e. ; ואלה שני חיי ישמעאל מאת שנה ושלושים שנה ושבע שנים; does Rashi imply that the Torah compliments Yishmael in the same manner as it complimented Sarah? When we accept that the word "ואלה, and these," are a hint that he had become a penitent, as Rashi derives from the manner in which his burial is described in the Torah in same verse from the fact that he is described as having been gathered into his forefathers, and we know that a proselyte is considered as if newly born from the day of his conversion, i.e. free from sin, it follows that the years he had lived prior to this have now been converted as a prelude to his conversion, i.e. as part of that conversion process. Another way of explaining the Torah's wording of the death and burial of Yishmael: the Torah did not preface his death with the unusual words: "and the lives of Sarah were," words which alert us that they must have more meaning than the plain text suggests. When Sarah's death is reported the word ,חיי "lives of," is mentioned twice, not only once. This calls for closer examination. Rashi, therefore was quite correct in alerting his readers to this.
- **RAMBAN**<sup>11</sup> ... Rashi comments: "The reason the word 'years' is written at every term is that it informs you that each term must be interpreted by itself. At the age of one hundred she was as a woman of twenty as regards sin [for at the age of twenty she had not sinned since she had not reached the age when she was subject to punishment], and at the age of twenty she was as beautiful as when she was seven." Rashi wrote similarly on the verse, the years of Abraham's life.

However, this exegesis of his is not correct. In the case of the verse, the years of the life of Ishmael, it is stated exactly as in the verse, the years of Abraham's life, whereas these years of Ishmael were not all equally good since Ishmael was wicked in his early years, and

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<sup>8</sup> I am not sure who this is referring to. There is a contemporary R. Meir Stern who is a current dean of a yeshiva in the USA and a Talmud scholar.

<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (Re'em) (c. 1455-1525 or 1526) was a Turkish Talmudist, Halachic expert, and a mathematician.

<sup>10</sup> Daat Zkenim is a Torah commentary compiled by later generations of scholars from the Franco-German (Ba'alei HaTosafot) school in the 13th century.

<sup>11</sup> Nachmanides, or RAMBAN, (1194-1270) was a Sephardic Rabbi, philosopher, physician, Kabbalist, and biblical commentator.

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only in the end did he repent of his evil ways. Furthermore, the repetition of the word “year” at every term would seem to indicate an intent to distinguish between them and, thus, should not be interpreted to imply equality. Rather, the use of the word *shannah* (year) and *shanim* (years) in this instance is the customary usage of the Hebrew language, while that which the Rabbis have said in Bereshith Rabbah, “At the age of one hundred she was as a woman of twenty as regards sin,” is an interpretation which they derived only from the redundant expression, the years of the life of Sarah, which includes them all and equates them. The Rabbis would not make a similar interpretation of the verse concerning Abraham [since in his case Scripture does not conclude with a similar comprehensive expression].

- **CHIZKUNI...** Rashi comments on the reason why the word: “שנה year,” is repeated here three times, when the Torah could have simply written: “מאה עשרים ושבע שנה, one hundred and twenty seven years.” He suggests that the Torah wished us to know that Sarah was as free from sin at a hundred as she had been at twenty, and that she was as beautiful at twenty as she had been at seven. This, of course, raises the question why the Torah, in reporting the death of Yishmael at 137 years (Genesis, 25,32) used exactly the same formulation? We can answer this by pointing out that when reporting Sarah’s age, each group of years is reported separately, as an individual unit, whereas when reporting Yishmael’s age at death, the groups of years are introduced in the construct mode, i.e. מאת, not מאת, i.e. all the years had the same common factor. Not only that, but the Torah sums up her years once more with the words: “שני חיי שרה, the years of Sarah’s life,” i.e. all her years were earmarked by a common denominator. If, when Avraham’s death is reported our sages have seen fit to read something into the way his years are reported, although there too just as at the death of Yishmael we find the word מאת in the construct form, this can be accounted for by the word: “ימי, days of,” which are superfluous and therefore available for interpretation. (Genesis 25:7) Rashi also adds that Sarah was free from sin at twenty as if this was something exceptional; this sounds strange as at that time everyone was free from sin, i.e. not held accountable until the age of twenty? We must understand Rashi as if he had written: “just as she was free from sin at 20, she remained free from sin until the end of her life. Accountability for sins at the age of 12 or 13 for females and males respectively, commenced only after the Torah had been given. [Our midrashim describe Yishmael as “innocent” when expelled by Sarah, as he was below 20 years of age. Ed.] Sarah had not required cosmetics at twenty anymore than she had required it at the age of seven. We know from Rivkah, who accepted jewelry at the age of three in order to enhance her appearance, that girls in those days felt the need to enhance their natural charms at an early age. (Compare Genesis 24:22) There is a Midrash in pessikta zutrata according to which the reference to her being one hundred as meaning that she was as beautiful at a hundred as she had been at twenty, whereas she was as free from sin at twenty as she had been at seven.
- **OR HACHAIM...** The Torah also alludes to the almost one hundred years that Sarah suffered either the anguish of childlessness or the animosity which developed between Ishmael and the son she finally bore at the age of ninety. We know from Rachel, (Genesis 30:1) that a woman's feeling of being unfulfilled when she has no children can cause her to

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consider her life as not worth living. The years in which Sarah "really lived," therefore, were only the last twenty seven years of her life during which she was able to enjoy Isaac's development in undisturbed tranquility.

- **RABBEINU BAHYA**<sup>12</sup>... The unusual way about describing Sarah's lifetime is only the repetition of the words "שני חיי שרה," the years of the lives of Sarah." From these words our sages derive the message that all her years were lived in the same state of piety, etc.

A Midrashic approach (Bereshit Rabbah 58:1) to these words: "at 100 she was as free from sin as at 20; at 20 years of age she was as beautiful as at seven years of age." The meaning of these words is that just as a girl's looks are apt to improve after she has reached the age of seven, Sarah's looks kept improving even after she had reached the age of twenty (which is usually the time when physical beauty is at its best). Man's life is divided into three periods. 1) youth, i.e. the period when one grows towards maturity. 2) maturity; roughly the period between 20-30 before one's physique begins to decline. 3) old age, a period when decline becomes visible.

Another Midrashic approach: The verse may be divided into the sections ויהיו חיי שרה, that the numerical value of the life of Sarah was equivalent to the numerical value of the word ויהיו i.e. 37. These were the 37 years during which she was able to practice motherhood, having given birth to Yitzchak when she was 90 years old. The second part of the verse which mentions the number 127 records the number of years she lived not from her point of view but from an historian's point of view.

We find something similar when the Torah reports the years of Yaakov's life in Genesis 47:28. The numerical value of the word ויהי is 34, i.e. a combination of the 17 years Yaakov enjoyed Joseph's company after he had been born and the last 17 years of Yaakov's life when he again enjoyed Joseph's company. These 34 years were the only truly happy ones he experienced.

Another way of looking at the words ויהיו חיי שרה is that they refer to the hereafter. This would reflect the fact that the Torah reported her death immediately after she had heard that Yitzchak's soul had "flown" to heaven as a result of his having been offered to God as a sacrifice. The form ויהיו would hint that both her soul and that of Yitzchak departed from earth at the same time to take up permanent residence in the celestial regions. The word ויהי or ויהיו basically means that something exists permanently. The word "שני, years of," is deliberately omitted at that point as the very word "year" implies something of limited duration. The same word does, however, appear at the end of our verse, as at that point the Torah underlines another aspect of the message it tries to convey. At that point the Torah speaks about Sarah's life on earth. Naturally, in that context the words "years of" are very relevant.

- **ALTER**...The Hebrew is still more extravagant in its use of repetition, unusually repeating "year" after a hundred, after twenty, and after seven. The same device of stylistic emphasis is used in the obituary notices of Abraham and Ishmael.

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<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340) was a commentator on Tanach.

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- **RADAK**<sup>13</sup>... When reporting the death of Avraham and Ishmael, seeing that the verses commenced with the words *שני*, these words are not again repeated at the end of the respective verses. It is possible that in all of these instances the word *שני* at the end is a hint that the persons concerned lived until the completion of that particular year.
- **CHIZKUNI**... According to Rashi, the apparently superfluous words: “the years of,” mean that she retained all her virtues in equal measure throughout her life. The wording used by the Torah when reporting Yishmael’s life does not lend itself to such an interpretation, seeing that up until his death we had never heard anything about his age, as distinct from Sarah. It is clear therefore that the words underlined earlier were meant to relay an additional message to the reader.
- **OR HACHAIM**... The Torah adds the word *שני היי שרה*, the years of Sarah's life, to allude to the fact that she "completed" the years of the life allotted to her, but that the immediate cause of her death was the information brought her by Satan. As to my second explanation that she "lost" a number of years of the life that had been intended for her, you need to understand the kindness that God does with the righteous. When such a righteous person dies "prematurely," for reasons such as in Sarah's case, God does not deduct from the sum total of their achievements what such a person would have achieved had he not died before his allotted time. The Torah therefore tells us that Sarah received full credit for all she would have accomplished had she lived out her remaining years (Tanchuma (3 פרשת כי תשא

### V. 2

#### *Sarah died...*

- **CHIZKUNI**...it is most unusual for the Torah to report the fact that a woman died. (Miriam, Moses’ sister’s death are exceptions, Numbers 20:1 as are Rachel’s premature death in Genesis 35:18, and Deborah, Rivkah’s nursemaid in Genesis 35:8.) When such a death is reported it is not only a compliment to the virtuous lives these women had lived, but is always associated with a remarkable event. Sarah’s death is associated with the enormous amount of money paid by her husband for acquiring the land for burying her. Rachel’s premature death is reported so that we should know where she has been buried. Deborah’s death is reported so that we should know why the place where this occurred became known subsequently as “*אֹרֶן בְּכוֹת*, oak of mourning.” [Also in order to draw our attention to the fact that her mistress, Rivkah’s death has not been reported. Ed.] Miriam’s death was the reason that the well that had accompanied the Israelites throughout their long march in the desert ceased flowing.
- **SFORNO**<sup>14</sup>... She did not die until a fitting successor was born and Avraham was apprised of the fact.

#### *Kirinth-arba...*

<sup>13</sup> Rabbi David Kimhi (1160-1235) was a French medieval rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.

<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforza (1475-1550) was a biblical commentator, philosopher, and physician from Italy.

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- **JPS...** The origin of this earlier name of Hebron is unclear. The first part of the name means “city.” According to the tradition of Joshua 14:15 and 21:11, Arba was an important personage among the aboriginal population. Another suggestion takes ‘*arba*’ as an abbreviation of a non-Semitic *arbi’lum*, also the name of a Mesopotamian city. Perhaps the most likely explanation is “city of four,” meaning four settlements that confederated and so received the name “Hebron,” which may well mean “confederation,”....
- **ALTER...** ...some scholars think the earlier name is a Hebraization of a non-Semitic place-name, which would have been given to the town by its “Hittite” inhabitants.
- **RASHI...** literally, the city of the Four, and it was so called because of the four giants who lived there: Ahiman, Sheshai, Talmai and their father (Numbers 13:22). Another explanation is that it was so called because of the four couples who were buried there, man and wife — Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah (Genesis Rabbah 58:4).
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM... So called because of the four giants that were there...** *Re’em* writes: However, I do not know what brought *Chazal* to say that Kiryas Arba was named after the four giants [or the four couples], when the city’s ruler was himself named Arba! It is written: “And the name of Hebron previously was Kiryas Arba; he was the greatest man among the giants” ([Yehoshua 14:15](#)). *Chazal* should have said that Kiryas Arba means “the city of the man named Arba,” and then explain why *he* was named Arba, rather than why the *city* was named Arba. The *Re’em* answers: Perhaps it is because *Chazal* found a reason for the city to be called Arba, but not for its ruler to be called Arba. Therefore they explained that the city was so called because of [the four giants or] the four couples — and the city’s ruler was also called Arba, after his city’s name.
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM... Another explanation: So called because of the four couples that were buried there...** Both explanations are needed, because each on its own raises the question: Why does the city’s name not reflect the reason for its origin? If after the four giants, it should be named Kiryas Anakim, and if after the four couples, it should be named Kiryas Zugos — but not Kiryas Arba. Since it makes no difference that there were exactly four giants, or couples, the city should not be called after a number which is not the reason for its name. That is why Rashi uses both explanations — to say that Kiryas Arba is called after the fact that it contains certain things which relate to the number four. E.g., it has four giants and four couples. But it was not called after one thing alone. Furthermore, we could even say it was called after the thing itself, but was called a number for the sake of brevity. The word “Arba,” alludes to two things the city has, both related to the number four. And since both are equally alluded to, both are included. (*R. Meir Stern*)
- **IBN EZRA...** ...The identification of Arba with Abraham is homiletical, as Abraham was not of that race. When Sarah died Abraham was elsewhere; hence Scripture states, and Abraham came.
- **CHIZKUNI...** there is an opinion that the reason why the location where she died is mentioned, while the locations where the other matriarchs died were not mentioned is that

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Avraham had sent her there before taking Yitzchok with him to be offered as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. He did not want her to have any knowledge of this. Avraham and Sarah at that time had been residents of Be'er Sheva. Another commentator claims that Sarah had moved from Be'er Sheva for health reasons as the climate in Chevron (mountainous instead of desert) was more likely to cure her. When she heard why Avraham had taken Yitzchok to Mount Moriah she died. This is why Avraham had to come all the way from Be'er Sheva to mourn and bury her. Had she died in Be'er Sheva, Avraham could have buried her there without problems as he was at home there.

- **CHIZKUNI...** ...A different version found in midrashim, is that the name of that town is due to it changing ownership four times one after another. First it belonged to the tribe of Yehudah; then it became the private property of Calev of that tribe; subsequently it became a city of priests, and eventually one of the cities of refuge. (Compare B'reshit Rabbah 58:4)....
- **RADAK...** this is where Avraham and Sarah resided after they had left Beer Sheva.
- **OR HACHAIM... Sarah died at Kiryat Arba...** We must not misunderstand that Kiryat Arba was the cause of her death. The reason the town was mentioned and was so named is to tell us that it was built on the four basic elements. Death normally implies a departure from, or disintegration of, the four basic elements that a body is composed of. When the Torah adds that "Kiryat Arba" is also known as הברון, this is an allusion to the word הבור, something that is joined together. The message is that when the righteous "die," this is not to be viewed as a process of disintegration. The righteous are still called "alive" even when they have ceased to function in regular bodies on this earth.... What all this means is that while the righteous are alive in this world, the four basic material elements that every human being is composed of become transformed into something spiritual and attach themselves to their souls by means of the good deeds that such persons perform during their sojourn on earth. Maimonides illustrates this somewhat in the fourth chapter of Hilchot Yesodey Torah where he describes that one element is capable of becoming transformed into another element which was similar to it, i.e. earth can be transformed into water. When man cleaves to God all his elements become transformed into the element fire which forms the basis of the soul. Kabbalists are familiar with this.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** ....The Torah teaches that it was a great privilege to be buried in the same burial ground reserved for such outstanding individuals as Adam, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov....

The reason the town was called “קרית ארבע, the city of Four,” is because four pairs of outstanding human beings were buried in the cave of Machpelah there. They are: Adam and Chavah, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah, and Yaakov and Leah. The mystical dimension of the name הברון is that the soul of everyone buried in that cave joins (מתהבר) the celestial city of God, i.e. the four encampments of the שכונה. Our patriarchs would not have made great efforts to be buried there had they not been aware of a profound spiritual dimension involved. They knew that transfer to the עולם האמת from that site would be a crucial experience for them. It is the place from which the souls return to their origin, the throne of God's glory.

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**OR HACHAIM...** *in the land of Canaan...* The Torah adds the (apparently superfluous words) "in the land of Canaan." This is an allusion to the fact that this present world is called ארץ כנען, a simile for the evil urge, Satan. This is so because the existence of Satan is the incentive for us to overcome him and to attain holiness and sanctity (Zohar 1:80).

### *Abraham proceeded/came...*

- **JPS...** The Hebrew verb *b-w-*, "to come," may have this sense of preparation for action when used in conjunction with another verb.
- **RASHI...** from Beer-Sheba.
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM... From Beer Sheva...** You might ask: How does Rashi know this? The answer is: Since the verse does not specify where he came from, it must be from where he dwelled before. And Beer Sheva, written in 22:19, is the only place mentioned by Scripture in which Avraham dwelled after the *Akeidah*.
- **TUR HAARUCH<sup>15</sup>...** According to *Rashi* he came from Beer Sheva. Nachmanides adds that *Rashi* did not mean to imply that at that time Avraham resided in Beer Sheva on a permanent basis, whereas Sarah had resided in Kiryat Arba, (Chevron) as it is quite inconceivable that Avraham and Sarah lived in different locations from each. Avraham heard the news of Sarah's death while he was in Beer Sheva on "business." Some commentators think that Avraham at the time was in the process of establishing residence in Beer Sheva, and had wanted to prepare everything before bringing Sarah there also.

According to the *Bereshit Rabbah*, Avraham arrived on his returned from Mount Moriah to find that Sarah had died from the distress that Yitzchok had been sacrificed. Nachmanides writes that according to the report in the Torah the commandment to offer up Yitzchok as a burnt offering was issued when Avraham was in Beer Sheva, where he resided at the time. This was the meaning of 22:34-35 "he planted an orchard in Beer Sheva and he resided there for many years." This is why it took him three days to get to Chevron, seeing that the land of the Philistines was not that close to Chevron. If Avraham would have had to return from Mount Moriah to Chevron it would not have taken more than a single day at most, whereas the Torah reports that it took him three days to reach Mount Moriah on his way to binding Yitzchok on the altar there. If the *Midrash* were correct in saying that Sarah died [precisely during the time Avraham performed the binding of Yitzchok, we must assume that at the time of the *Akeydah*, Avraham and Sarah had both lived in Chevron, so that the meaning of 22:4 "it was on the third day (of Avraham and Yitzchok's journey to Mount Moriah)" must be that God for reasons best known to Him, did not want Avraham to locate the mountain until the third day of his journey. He had been walking in the neighborhood until God indicated to him which of the mountains He had had in mind. The reason that he went to Beer Sheva after the binding of Yitzchok was to give thanks for the miracle he had been allowed to experience, and while there the news of Sarah's death reached him. It is the consensus of all the commentators that Avraham was not at home at the time that Sarah died.

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<sup>15</sup> Tur HaAroch, a commentary on the Torah, is written by R' Jacob ben Asher (c. 1269 - c. 1343), known as Ba'al ha-Turim.

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My personal opinion is that Sarah had a tent which served as her home as well as the home for her maidservants. She died within her own tent, and the words ויבא אברהם simply mean that he came to her tent upon hearing what had happened. It is also possible that the term described Avraham's preparation to eulogize Sarah appropriately. Whenever a person prepares himself to carry out a certain assignment, the term used to describe the preparation for such an undertaking is ויבא, He came, i.e., "he became ready." In my opinion, it is most unlikely that the word ויבא means that Avraham came from another city, as the Torah would have mentioned from which city Avraham had to come in order to make burial arrangements for Sarah.

- **RADAK...** he came from outside the house as he had not been present when Sarah died... Alternately, he had been out of town at the time when Sarah died.
- **RASHBAM...** even if he did not arrive from out of town, it is perfectly in order to describe his arrival in order to mourn Sarah by the words ויבא אברהם.

### *to mourn/eulogize . . . to bewail/weep...*

- **JPS...** The specific rites and the time period involved are not given because the focus of interest is on the next scene.
- **RASHI...** The narrative of the death of Sarah follows immediately on that of the Binding of Isaac, because through the announcement of the Binding — that her son had been made ready for sacrifice and had almost been sacrificed — she received a great shock (literally, her soul flew from her) and she died (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 32).
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM... Sarah's death immediately follows the Akeidah of Yitzchok...** Rashi does not mean that the sections are juxtaposed, because if so he should have said this at the beginning of the Parshah. Furthermore, how does he know that this is not the section's proper place, [so that the juxtaposition is significant]? Rather, [Rashi means that the events] are juxtaposed in time, as *Chazal* had an oral tradition that Sarah died close to the *Akeidah*, and they found support for this in the phrase, "Avraham came." [Although Avraham came from Beer Sheva, he was there for just a short while..., so it is as if he came straight from the *Akeidah*.] (*Re'm*)
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM... And almost not been slaughtered, her soul departed from her and she died...** You might ask: Should Rashi not have said, "Almost *been* slaughtered"? The answer is: An emissary came from Mount Moriah, told her about the *Akeidah*, and began to say how her son had been prepared for slaughter. He delayed the end of his account that Yitzchok was actually saved from slaughter. He "almost" told her that Yitzchok had "not been slaughtered," but a moment before, she became so shocked by his words that her spirit and soul departed. (*Mahara'i*<sup>16</sup>)
- **IBN EZRA...** The word *livkotah* is to be rendered to weep for her.
- **SFORNO...** Literally, "to eulogize *for* Sarah" — a eulogy is for the honor of the deceased.
- **RADAK...** to eulogize her with words and elegies.

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<sup>16</sup> Israel Isserlin ben Petachia (1390-1460) was an Austrian Talmudist and Halachist.

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- **CHIZKUNI...** He did so as he could not bury her until he had secured a suitable plot where to bury her.
- **HAKTAV VEHAKABALAH**<sup>17</sup>... In general one weeps over the termination of the life of the deceased before eulogizing the loss to the living. For the righteous, however, death is not a tragedy because they are then able to attain greater heights. Thus it is only the loss to the living that is a cause for weeping.
- **KLI YAKAR**<sup>18</sup>... Usually weeping precedes eulogizing because the mourner's sense of loss diminishes with time. In Sarah's case, however, her absence was felt more each day.
- **KITZUR BAAL HATURIM**<sup>19</sup>... The small "kaf" signifies that Abraham cried, but not too much because she was elderly, and also because she caused her own death when she passed judgment for her own deeds onto another (cf. TB Rosh Hashanah 16b) and therefore was punished first, and one does not eulogize someone who dies by suicide.
- **OR HACHAIM...**To mourn her departure from the world, and to weep for her on account of the personal loss he had sustained. One can also understand it in the reverse sense, i.e. he mourned the absence of her righteous presence, and he wept because she had tasted death and her sun had set (her benign influence on the people surrounding her).
- **TUR HAAROCH...** At this point the Torah does not add the words: "and to bury her," as he had not yet secured a suitable site where to bury her.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...**The two words לספוד לשרה i.e. mentioning her name which was well known to all those present, need clarification. We would have expected simply "לספדה ולבכותה," to eulogize her and to weep for her." The reason the Torah did not write this abbreviated version is that it is the custom of the professional eulogizers to again and again mention the name of the departed whom they eulogize. We find that when David eulogized King Shaul and his own intimate friend Yonathan, that he spoke to Shaul and Yonathan the beloved and the cherished ones." Seeing that in the same chapter (Samuel II 1:18) David already had mentioned both Shaul and Yonathan by name, he could have now referred to them by the pronoun "they." Nonetheless, during the course of that eulogy David mentions both Shaul and Yonathan by name no fewer than six times.

In our verse, all the Torah had to write was that Avraham set out to "weep for her, and to bury her." After all, burial is the principal act of true kindness one performs for one's dead and concludes the acts of eulogizing and weeping. Burying a human being is one of the great acts of kindness which God Himself performs on occasion. Had the Torah written the sequence of the words we mentioned, the impression this would have created amongst the readers would be that all these activities occurred one immediately after the other. The truth is that whereas eulogizing and weeping occurred consecutively, there was quite an interval

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<sup>17</sup> *HaKtav VeHaKabalah* was composed in c.1829 - c.1839 CE by Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, a 19<sup>th</sup> century German rabbi and Torah scholar.

<sup>18</sup> Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser (1809-1879) was a Hebrew grammarian and Biblical commentator from the Russian Empire.

<sup>19</sup> *Kitzur Ba'al HaTurim* (Toledo, Spain, c. 1280 - c. 1340) is an abridgement of the Torah commentary written by Jacob ben Asher, or Ba'al HaTurim, who was a halachic scholar and biblical commentator in Medieval Spain.

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before Sarah was finally laid to rest. Avraham first had to secure a plot of land in which to bury Sarah.

I believe further that if Avraham and Yitzchak came from out of town in order to eulogize Sarah, etc, then the Torah should have written that “Avraham and Yitzchak came to eulogize, etc.” Yitzchak most certainly should also have eulogized his mother and wept for her. In fact, his duty to do so would have been even greater than Avraham’s seeing that he was her flesh and blood. In addition, the love Sarah must have lavished on Yitzchak whom she bore after waiting for him for 90 years must certainly have evoked reciprocal feelings in Yitzchak so that he would have eulogized her.

Perhaps, at this point in the story Yitzchak had not heard yet that his mother had died. Seeing that Sarah’s death had been attributed to the binding of Yitzchak, people might have tried to withhold the information from him as long as possible. This is most likely the reason why we do not hear a single word about Yitzchak in the whole paragraph, neither during the eulogy and weeping nor even during the burial ceremony. In fact, we have not heard a word about Yitzchak ever since he took part in the binding on the altar. Although Avraham had told the lads that both he and Yitzchak would return to them from the mountain, the Torah did not report that this happened. All we were told is that “Avraham returned to his lads” (22:19). We would have expected the Torah to write that “Avraham and Yitzchak returned to the lads.”

Possibly, Yitzchak had decided to remain for some time on Mount Moriah until he became forty years of age when he married Rivkah. At that point the Torah does mention that Yitzchak had come from באר לחי חוּאִי, “from the well of the Living One who Sees,” the well at which Hagar’s prayers had once been answered.

According to Bereshit Rabbah 58:5 the words “Avraham came,” mean that he came from Mount Moriah, that Sarah heard about what had transpired there, as a result of which her soul departed from her. This is the reason why this paragraph follows the one of the binding of Yitzchak.