

5782 – Genesis 23-25 - Chayei Sarah (The life of Sarah)

^{23:1}Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. ²She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and **Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her**. ³Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, ⁴"I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here **so I can bury my dead**."

1. **וְאֶקְבְּרָהּ מִתִּי מִלְפָּנַי** — *That I may bury my dead from before me*. This is the first reference in the Bible to burial of the dead. Abraham places very great importance on assuring "his dead" of an honorable burial-place and his descendants have inherited this same preoccupation from him. Many of the rules concerning forms of burial and the mourning period are derived from the details of this passage.¹

As a wrapping for the soul which comes from the celestial spheres, the human body is lavished with the greatest care during its earthly life and the most profound respect at the moment the soul leaves it. *The body returns to the earth whence it came and the spirit ascends again to God Who gave it* (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The body is returned to the earth to blend again with it, while the soul remains and "ascends again to God." **For Judaism, burial of the mortal remains signifies that the material part of man finally disintegrates, while the spiritual soul survives in its individuality.** The pagans who believed in the transmigration of souls² **considered the body as the only perpetual part of the human being**. Consequently they practiced necromancy³, embalmed their corpses, mummified them, and erected mausoleums and pyramids in their honor. Opposed to this materialist concept is the nihilist doctrine of freethinkers. **They show their belief in nothingness** after

death by having their dead cremated⁴. But Judaism affirms its faith in the immortality of the soul by returning the body to its original source without deifying or annihilating it, while the immaterial and imperishable soul rejoins its sphere of emanation in the metaphysical regions.

The exceptional importance which Abraham attached to the acquisition of a burial place for Sarah was certainly in keeping with his desire to reveal these fundamental principles of monotheistic religion to the pagan people of Canaan.

a. Luke 9:57-62

⁵⁷As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, **"I will follow you wherever you go."** ⁵⁸Yeshua replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

⁵⁹He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, **first let me go and bury my father**." ⁶⁰Yeshua said to him, **"Let the dead bury their own dead**, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." ⁶²Yeshua replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

1) "The call to be a sage's disciple in first-century Israel often meant leaving relatives and friends and traveling the country under austere conditions."⁵

a) It also meant total commitment—a prospective disciple first had to be sure his priorities were in order.

2) According to M. Peah ("Corner") 1:1, a person "benefits from the interest" in this world from certain things such as honoring one's father and mother, while "the principal" remains for him in the world to come. "But," the passage goes on, "the study of Torah is equal to them all." (Yeshua) said something similar: **as important as honoring one's parents is, leaving home to study Torah with him was even more important.**

3) "Although the burial of the dead is meritorious, especially for a child to bury a parent, the work of the Kingdom had absolute priority."⁶

a) "The explanation that those who are spiritually dead should bury the deceased among their number is not satisfactory."

1 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Bereishis*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.) pp. 303-304.

2 The transmigration of souls is also called reincarnation, and it is closely linked to the idea of *karma*. Reincarnation and *karma* are both religious concepts of Hinduism and Buddhism, though certain aspects of both differ based on the religious tradition. **The transmigration of souls is the belief that, after death, the soul or spirit migrates to another physical or metaphysical (i.e., outside the realm of human sense perception) state.**

Transmigration depends on *karma*, the belief that one's actions in life, good and bad and morally ambiguous, when taken as a whole and weighed in the balance, will determine the nature of one's next existence. ... The idea of karma is that, if a person lives a good life, he will go to a "higher" plane of existence and, if the sum of his acts in life is negative, he will descend to a "lower" plane—<https://www.gotquestions.org/transmigration-of-souls.html>

3 The supposed practice of communicating with the dead, especially in order to predict the future.

4 Nihilism involves rejecting all religious and moral principles in the belief that life is meaningless.

5 David Biven, *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus*, (En-Gedi Resource Center), pp. 17.

6 Samuel Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament*, (KTAV), p. 159.

b) The translator read *le'mekbar*, "to bury" instead of *lemekaber*, "to the burier, to the undertaker"—in other words, **"let others who share your responsibility to bury the dead, bury him, you follow me."**

c) **"A disciple was expected to put Torah, and his teacher, from whom he learned Torah, before his family.** Apparently, it was this attitude to Torah that characterized Levi. Moses blessed Levi with these word, "He [Levi] said of his father and mother, 'I have no regard for them.' He did not recognize his brothers or ac-knowledge his own children, but he watched over your word and guarded your covenant" (Deu 33:9)."

b. 1Corinthians 15:35-41

³⁵But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" ³⁶How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸But **God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.** ³⁹Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

c. 1Corinthians 15:42-50

⁴²So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. **The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;** ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴**it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.** If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body ...

⁵⁰I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

^{23:6}"Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."

1. נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים אִתָּהּ בְּתוֹכֵנוּ — *You are a prince of God in our midst.* R' Yose the Galilean⁷ said, "Since the abominable practices of the Egyptians are considered on a par with those of the Canaanites, **why did the latter**

live in peace longer than the Egyptians? It is because they behaved in a worthy fashion toward Abraham. They honored him, even though they did not share his views" (Leviticus 18:3).

a. Genesis 12:1-3

¹The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ²"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³**I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;** and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

^{23:8}He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf ⁹so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you."

1. וּפְנֵעוּלִי בְעֶפְרוֹן — *And intercede for me with Ephron.* Abraham had long been aware of the cave of Machpelah, situated at the end of Ephron the Hittite's field in Hebron. He had discovered the cave while chasing the fleeing "young calf" which he intended to give to the three strangers who came to visit him after the circumcision ... He had caught the calf in front of the cave, where it had stopped. Abraham had smelt the sweet fragrance of Paradise wafting from the cave, and had had a vision of dazzling light. He recognized then that the cave contained the graves of Adam and Eve. From that time onward he was obsessed with obtaining this cave as the burial place for himself and his family. With all his soul he wanted to own it, and waited for the right moment to make it his (Zohar).

But after Sarah died, Abraham could not negotiate directly with Ephron for the cave. With the esteem the people of Hebron had for him, Abraham would have offended them had he spoken to just one individual without consulting the city council. And so he proceeded with tact and diplomacy. First he gave a preamble which in general terms revealed his request to bury his wife (ibid.). Then, having won over the council, he begged them to intercede with Ephron on his behalf.

Why was Abraham so anxious to acquire the burial place of Adam and Eve as a family possession in perpetuity? To be sure, every nation has its pantheon,⁸ which usually contains the remains of its national heroes and represents a high point of patriotic sentiment. But **Abraham**, in contrast, **wanted to make the Jewish pantheon a symbol of the spirit**

⁷ Jose the Galilean was a Jewish sage who lived in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. He was one of the Tannaim, the rabbis whose work was compiled in the Mishna.

⁸ The Jefferson Memorial in Washington D.C. is modeled after the Pantheon in Rome. Four quotations from Jefferson's writings are carved into the walls of the memorial chamber.

of universalism. For him, Judaism was the realization of the mission of Adam, that is, of man par excellence. After the ideal plan conceived for all humanity had failed, following the original sin, Abraham was the first to attempt to repair this flaw and to fulfill this calling for humanity. **Basically his religion was that of every human being. "You are Adam"** (man par excellence) said the prophet Ezekiel to the Jews (34:31). And the Divine commandments addressed to the Jewish people were given in order that man do them and live by them (Leviticus 18:5). **They are offered to all men regardless of race, regardless of origin.** This universal character was of the utmost importance for the patriarch. It determined the choice of the burial place for Abraham and his family. Abraham considered himself the successor and repository of Adam's mission, and he did not hesitate to pay any price ...

a) Ezekiel 34:31

¹You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD."

CJB—"You, my sheep, the sheep in my pasture, **are human beings**; and I am your God," says *Adonai ELOHIM*."

JPS—And ye My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, **are men**, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.'

KJV—And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, **are men**, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.

TNK—For you, My flock, flock that I tend, **are men**; and I am your God -- declares the Lord GOD.

וְאַתֶּן צֹאֲנֵי צֹאן מִרְעִיתִי אָדָם אֲנִי

Lit., *you (pl.) my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, men (or Adam) you (pl.) are ...*

- 1) **This midrash involves the idea that all of God's people are "Adam."** Just as Adam "fell" and his "fallen nature" was passed to all mankind, it is our responsibility to "make things right," i.e., to repair what is "broken"—to live in such a way so as to make this world a better place—to restore harmony to creation.

The Torah was given to the Jewish people to facilitate this process (Lev 18:5), i.e., to facilitate "life"—in this world and in the world-to-come.

This is the "universal" message of Judaism—that these principles are **"offered to all men regardless of race, regardless of origin."**

a) Leviticus 18:5

³Keep my decrees and laws, for **the person who obeys them will live by them.** I am the LORD.

- b) *Tikkun Olam*: In Jewish teachings, any activity that improves the world, **bringing it closer to the harmonious state for which it was created.**⁹

Tikkun olam implies that while the world is innately good, its Creator purposely left room for us to improve upon His work.

All human activities are opportunities to fulfill this mission, and every human being can be involved in *tikkun olam*—child or adult, student or entrepreneur, industrialist or artist, caregiver or salesperson, political activist or environmentalist, or just another one of us struggling to keep afloat.

2) 1Corinthians 15:21-22

²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For **as in Adam all die, so in Messiah all will be made alive.**

^{24:1} Abraham was now very old, and the LORD had blessed him in every way.

1. **בָּא בִּימֵי** — *Well on in years.* Literally, "in the days" (with the definite article). In this supplementary detail the Sages of the Midrash see a reference to the fact that Abraham "advanced toward the days par excellence"—those of the next world. They tell us that the days of his earthly life were, for him, **just a "passage leading to the next world."** His life was made up of "double days," those of existence here on earth and, potentially, those of the World to Come. **For the Jew, life on earth is not an end in itself. Even in old age he continues to "advance toward the days to come."**

^{24:31} I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, ⁴but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

1. **אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי** — *That you not take a wife for my son.* Between a son of Abraham and a daughter of Canaan there is a spiritual and moral abyss so profound that any understanding between them remains forever illusory. The son of Abraham must not under any circumstances come under the influence of a Canaanite woman. However, **the patriarch does accept marriage with an Aramean woman**, of his land and his birthplace. To be sure, the inhabitants of Aram were idolaters too. **But Abraham knew their basic character. He knew that it was healthy and pure and that among them idolatry was just an intellectual deviation which could be corrected. But the Canaanites were**

⁹ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3700275/jewish/What-Is-Tikkun-Olam.htm

morally corrupt; they were perverted to the very depth of their souls and Abraham could not hold out any hope of finding a pure, chaste, and innocent woman among them, one who could offer his son the treasure of nobility of sentiments and conduct (*Drashos HaRan*¹⁰ ch.5).

a. 2Corinthians 6:14-16

¹⁴**Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.** For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵What harmony is there between Messiah and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Lev 26:12).

1) Deuteronomy 22:10

¹⁰Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.

2) **This principle also applies to yoking two oxen together of unequal strength.**

^{24:11}He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; **it was toward evening**, the time the women go out to draw water.

1. **לְעֵת עֶרֶב** — *At evening time*. The same time as that mentioned later

(verse 63) when, after reciting his prayer, Isaac looks up and discovers his future wife. This is the time which best fits Isaac's personality and destiny. His father Abraham rose like a star in the firmament of humanity. He made the world resplendent with his love of God and love of others. He was like the radiance of dawn. It was he who instituted the morning prayer (Berachos 26b). But Isaac sees his fortunes waning in comparison with the glorious rise of his father. Isaac's life no longer resembles the rising sun with its dazzling brightness; **rather it is like the close of day as the shadows of night are approaching**. And so Isaac's time is twilight, designated as the time of ... harshness in nature and in existence. At day's end, Isaac chooses to address God in prayer (מִנְחָה ["offering"]) and give account of his actions.

Isaac's character also differs from his father's. Feelings of love overflowed in Abraham's spirit. In Isaac these were subordinated to the rigorous discipline of obedience to God. The bonds that bind Isaac to the sacred altar, ready for sacrifice, are the symbol of this submission with absolute devotion. The early-morning eagerness so enthusiastically

manifested by the father gives way in Isaac to harsh discipline, which asserts itself at the trying hours of the day, just before the day ends.

And so Isaac's destiny is bound up with the time of evening. It was then that Eliezer made his way to the well to meet Isaac's future wife. Water is the element of tenderness (דֶּקֶד), the symbol of peaceful elements having the power to appease and temper the harsh forces of nature. It is through the intimate blending of this gentleness, representative of femininity, and the severe rigor which is the essential trait of Isaac's character that Eliezer wants to see perfect harmony created in the union of the future couple (from the Zohar). Accordingly, it is by the well of water that events take place which lead to the finding of a wife for Isaac.

^{24:62}Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev.

1. **וַיֵּצֵק בָּא מְבוֹא בְּאֵר לַחַי־רֹאִי** — *Now Isaac came from having gone to Beer-lahai-roi*. It was at this well that Hagar had sought refuge (16:14). Accordingly Rashi¹¹ explains: "**Isaac had gone there to bring Hagar back as a wife for his father Abraham**." While the father sends his servant to find a wife for his son, the son thinks only of restoring the conjugal home of his recently-widowed father. Only after Isaac brings Abraham's former wife back to him does he go to pray to Providence regarding his own impending marriage. What a contrast between the spirit of our forefathers—so natural and so human—on the one hand and, on the other, the mentality of our own age, so often affected by unwholesome sentimentality (excessive tenderness, sadness, or nostalgia)!

a. Genesis 25:7-11

⁷Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age ... and he was gathered to his people. ⁹**His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah** near Mamre ... ¹⁰the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. ¹¹After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.

1) Romans 12:18

¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

2) Romans 14:19

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

¹⁰ Written by the famous Talmudist and Halachist R' Nissim ben Ruvein (Ran) in the fourteenth century, *Derashos HaRan* is a collection of homilies (*Derashos*) that are a classic exposition of the fundamentals of the Jewish religion.

¹¹ Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), today generally known by the acronym Rashi, was a medieval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and commentary on the Hebrew Bible.

3) Hebrews 12:14

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy;
without holiness no one will see the Lord.

1. יֵצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה — *Isaac went out to supplicate in the field.* Rashi:

"The word שׂוּחַ means prayer. (Similarly in Psalms 102:1.) R' Shimon¹² said, Did he not have a house or another place to pray? Yet he prayed in the field which Abraham had acquired, near the cave of Machpelah. There Isaac perceived what seemed to him a perfume from Paradise and there he felt the closeness of the Shechinah" (Zohar). Thus it was **to his mother's grave that Isaac went in order to collect his thoughts before making the most important decision of his life.**

a. The notion that *Machpelah* is also the burial site of Adam and Chava is an important component of Jewish thought regarding the afterlife.

- 1) In Jewish literature, we have it that Abraham chose the cave of Adam and Chava as a burial place **because it marked the entrance to the Garden of Eden.**
- 2) The term "Garden of Eden," is the common Jewish term for paradise—and **why we refer to "paradise" as "Abraham's Bosom."**

a) Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²**The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side (lit., "Abraham's bosom"). The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In hell (i.e., *sheol*), where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' ²⁵But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'**

12 Shimon bar Yochai, also known by his acronym Rashbi, was a 2nd-century *tanna-itic* sage ... active after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. He was one of the most eminent disciples of Rabbi Akiva, and attributed by many Orthodox Jews with the authorship of the Zohar, the chief work of Kabbalah.

- 3) Our "forefathers" (and "foremothers") are often referred to as "those who sleep in Hebron" or "those who sleep in *Machpelah*."
- 4) And, it is sometimes said that the resurrection of the dead will begin in *Machpelah*.

a) Pirke Mashiach,¹³ BhM 3:73-74

In that hour, [Messiah] goes up and brings glad tidings to those who sleep in Machpelah, and says to them: "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, rise! Enough have you slept!" And they reply and say: "Who is this who removes the dust from over us?" And he says to them: "I am the Messiah of the LORD. Salvation is near, the hour is near." And they answer: "If it is really so, go and bring the tidings to Adam the first man, so that he should rise first." In that hour they say to Adam the first man: "Enough have you slept!"

5) 1Thessalonians 4:13-16

¹³Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep ... ¹⁴We believe that Yeshua died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Yeshua **those who have fallen asleep in him.** ¹⁵According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and **the dead in Messiah will rise first.** ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.

13 *Pirke Mashiach*—a Midrash fragment of Persian provenance, dating from the 7th-10th century C.E. This midrash, which almost certainly dates from the Arab period, describes (among other things) the enormous *beit midrash* ("house of study") of the future.