

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Chayei Sarah	23 Nov. 2019	25 Cheshvan 5780	Gen. 23:1-25:18	1Kings 1:1-31	John 4:3-14

This week's Torah portion Chayei Sarah does not have positive or negative commandments.

For this year's Torah cycle, we will study from the teachings of Or HaChaim.

It is written (23:1), "And Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years, the years of the life of Sarah." We learned previously that the cause of her death was the Akeidah Yitzchak (Binding of Isaac) that he was nearly slaughtered by Avraham. As explained by Or HaChaim, the death of righteous, even though she died before her allotted time, Hashem rewarded her as if she had fulfilled her allotted time.

We measure life by quality rather than quantity. The righteous gives life to their days and the wicked their days give them life. In other words, the wicked have nothing but their physical existence and earthly pleasure, so they live only to the extent that they are given days in the world. Once they expire, they cease to exist. Who are the wicked? "Everyone doing sin also does lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." (1John 3:4) Simply put, the lawlessness is a rebellion against Hashem by not obeying His commandments. Therefore, it cannot be thought of as harmless, neutral, or imaginary. John is clarifying that one cannot sin without declaring oneself to be in direct opposition to God

Righteousness is the condition characteristic of faith, while lawlessness is the condition characteristic of unbelief. They have nothing in common. They are as different as light and darkness. Also, in Tehillim (Psalms) 45:7 says, "You [Hashem] have loved righteousness and hated wrongness." Saul (Paul) quotes this verse and cites in Hebrews 1:9, "You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness." The Greek text has *lawlessness* instead of *wrongness*. As our Messiah, Yehushua manifests the attributes of Hashem toward these two states: He hates lawlessness but loves righteousness. In Romans 6:19 makes it clear that we have a conscious choice to make: to live in the condition of lawlessness and do its deeds, or to serve righteousness and do its deeds.

Therefore, the repetition of "the years of the life of Sarah," the Torah is informing us of the doctrine of chesed (loving-kindness) with which Hashem judges His beloved ones. When it comes to any righteous person who does not complete his allotted time in this world, Hashem does not withhold the reward he would have earned had he lived his full allotted time. Meaning, Hashem rewards him even for the years he had not fulfilled as if he had lived a full allotted time.

It is written (23:2), "And Sarah died in Qiryath Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Kena'an, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." See ADB 11192019 for the meaning of Qiryath Arba. According to Zohar¹, "the land of Kena'an" is a name for the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), that is the demonic serpent who tempted Chava. Despite all this, the Torah is teaching us that Sarah was able to reach the great spiritual heights by engaging in a constant battle against *yetzer hara* "in the land of Kena'an." Abraham came "to mourn for Sarah" because she died and could no longer accomplish anything in this world; and he came "to weep for her," to cry over what was lost to the world because of her absence.

It is written (23:3), "Then Abraham rose up from beside his dead." The sages explain that before the grave is sealed, the soul of the deceased person sees and knows everything that happens in its presence. It conveys that although Sarah died, her soul was aware of what was happening in her presence. "And spoke to the sons of Heth, saying," indicates that something should be repeated to others. However, this cannot be since Abraham was already speaking to the entire community of Heth. Thus, there was no reason for the Torah to repeat Abraham's words to anyone else. Or HaChaim clarifies by saying that since all that Abraham was initially granted an estate for burial, he would be satisfied with any plot they would give him. Therefore, by saying, "spoke to the sons of Heth" implies that his initial request was not his ultimate message. Rather, he was paving the way "to say" what he really sought, which was the

¹ Zohar, I: 80a

field of Ephron. So, the following verses describes in detail how Abraham acquisitioned the field of Ephron and recognized by all as legally binding as explained in verse 9 as well as his intention to pay for the field from the beginning (v. 4).

It is written (23:4), "I am a sojourner (stranger) and a settler (resident) among you. Give me property for a burial-site among you, so that I bury my dead from my presence." Abraham is saying, "Even though I am a stranger, and not a member of your nation, I am nevertheless a resident in the land, and deserve to be treated kindly." The children of Heth might have been tempted to refuse to help Abraham because he was from a different nation. Abraham, therefore is pointing out that even though he was not a member of their nation, common decency still dictated that they should act with kindness toward him, since he lived among them.

"Give me property for a burial-site among you, so that I bury my dead from my presence." The meaning here is that Abraham is requesting that they agree to the matter quickly and not hold him back from burying Sarah right away. By saying this, he is conveying another message and that is he wanted specifically the field of Ephron and pay for it.

Now, if Abraham said he was going to pay for it from the beginning, the children of Heth might think, "Why is he willing to pay a huge amount of money for the land? He must have noticed something special about the land which makes it worth many times more than we think it is worth." Therefore, Abraham prefaced his request for Ephron's field by saying, "that I bury my dead," and emphasizing that he needed to buy the field to bury the "dead from my presence." "This is the reason I am willing to offer a large sum," but had his dead wife not been "before him," he would not buy anything.

It is written (23:5), "And the sons of the Heth answered Abraham, saying to him." They first conveyed their message to a single person who then spoke to Abraham on their behalf. The phrase, "saying to him" indicates that the children of Heth did not really reach an agreement among themselves this matter. Meaning, they did not decide to let Abraham take any burial plot for free. Therefore, by "saying to him" was mere words which they did not intent to honor. As it will show later, Abraham paid the full price for the land.

It is written (23:6), "Hear us, my master: You are a prince of Elohim among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial-sites. None of us withholds from you his burial-site, from burying your dead." By saying, "hear us," the sons of Heth is telling Abraham to accept the things they were telling him. That is, you go ahead and select "the choice of our burial-sites...and bury your dead," as all of us agreed not to "withhold" you from "burying the dead in your presence."

It is written (23:7), "So Abraham rose and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth." By bowing down to them, he is demonstrating to them the opposite of what they just said that he does not consider himself "a prince" over them. But that he considers them to be higher stature than he.

It is written (23:8), "And spoke with them, saying, 'If it is your desire that I bury my dead...'" In verse 6, it seems clear that the children of Heth wanted Abraham to take the land from them to bury Sarah. However, Abraham's response seems that is not their true intention. Thus, the verse says, "If it is your desire."

There is a law of *chazakah* that if someone claims a real estate is his but does not have a bill of sale, he is considered as a legal owner of the property provided that he lived there for three years without being challenged. If the original owner remained silent for three consecutive years, this is taken as an indication that he indeed transferred ownership of the property to the occupant. However, this law does not apply to exilarch (leader of the community), in this case, Abraham, for they are powerful and the original owner can be silenced by force or fear of force. Thus, when the sons of Heth said, "in the choicest of our burial-sites. None of us withholds from you," they are saying that since Abraham was a force to reckon with, they are helpless to do anything against him. Therefore, "None of us can withhold from you." As such, when they said, "Hear us," meaning "Listen carefully to us what we say."

Now, in verse 6, it says, “You are a prince of Elohim among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial-sites. None of us withholds from you his burial-site, from burying your dead.” One way of looking at this verse is that since Abraham is “a prince” and powerful, he can do as he wishes, and no one will challenge him.

It is written (23:9), “Let me have (grant) the cave of Makpelah which he has...” Abraham is very particular with his words to acquire the cave in a way that would leave no room for the acquisition to ever be legally challenged. What is the reason behind this negotiation? The Zohar² explains that the cave of Makelah’s spiritual qualities. Since Ephron had never noticed anything except darkness and chaos in the cave, he might discover such spiritual qualities and cry out “fraud” in his transaction with Abraham, and void the sale. Abraham was therefore worried that Ephron might try to void the transaction at some time by claiming that he was grossly underpaid for the cave, since it was truly worth far more than whatever Abraham would end up paying. The sages explain that when Abraham and Sarah walked into the cave, they saw Gan Eden, and burial site for Adam and Chava. They also explain that all souls are returned to Hashem through this cave. This is one of the reason Esau fought against Yosef for burial rights when he brought Ya’akov to bury in the cave. Therefore, Abraham said, “Let him (Ephron) give it to me for the complete amount of silver,” that is full price.

“As a property for a burial-site among you.” Abraham now addresses another concern of adjoining property around the cave and the concern of a possible lien against the cave. Thus, he appointed all the townspeople as brokers to the sale. Thereby, each person was considered to have consented to the sale, and the claim of being the owner of adjoining property and therefore having rights to the property was nullified. Thus, he insisted that the acquisition of the cave take place in the presence of all the children of Heth to ensure permanent validity of the sale.

Abraham also said, “As a property for a burial-site” without mentioning Sarah. Earlier in verse 4, Abraham said, “for a burial-site among you, so that I bury my dead from my presence.” Now, in this verse, he mentions “a burial-site” without the name of Sarah. Since Abraham asked for the cave only, the surrounding field would still remain as Ephron’s. And Ephron, in the future, might not want the people to trespass on his property to bury the dead in the cave. Although the permission to walk through the field to gain the access to the cave was certainly implicit in its sale for burial, he might claim that he sold the cave only to bury Sarah. This is the reason why Abraham only said, “As a property for a burial-site,” not only for Sarah, but as well as in the future.

It is written (23:11), “No, my master, listen to me! I shall give you the field and the cave that is in it. I shall give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I shall give it to you. Bury your dead!” It appears that Ephron is agreeing with Abraham’s request for the cave of Makpelah. The sages question why the verse starts with, “No, my master, listen to me!” And since Abraham had yet not received anything, what does Ephron mean by saying, “I have given you the field”? Or HaChaim explains that Ephron was saying to Abraham, “I have already decided to give it (field) you.” Because, once the cave is designated as a cemetery, then the surrounding area would be worthless. Therefore, Ephron is emphasizing to Abraham that he has to buy not only the cave but the field as well.

“I shall give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people.” Meaning, as far as the cave is concerned, we (the sons of Heth) has given you to bury the dead (v. 6) which I have given you. Then the verse continues, “I shall give it to you. Bury your dead!” The repetition of “I shall give it to you,” shows that he is giving the cave in view of the children of Heth, thus Abraham should not have any fear of a possible claim that might rise on the law regarding “the owner of adjoining property, which Abraham addressed by saying, “intercede (approach) Ephron...for me.”

It is written (23:13), “And he spoke to Ephron...If only you would hear me! I shall give the amount of silver for the field, take it from me, and let me bury my dead there.” The sages point out, “If only,” meaning he (Ephron) should stop talking and just finalize the deal! Since Ephron would give the land to Abraham in everyone’s presence, it would be impossible for owners of neighboring properties to later lay claim to Ephron’s land as their silence at the closing of the deal would be viewed as proof of consent.

² Zohar, 1:128a

“I shall give the amount of silver for the field, take it from me, and let me bury my dead there.” Meaning, Abraham was saying to Ephron, “Just as you decided to give me the field as a gift, I too decided to give you the money for the field as a gift. So, accept the money from me as a gift, and I will then accept the field and the cave as a gift from you. Then I will bury my dead there.”

It is written (23:19, 20), “And after this Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Makpelah, before Mamre, that is Hebron, in the land of Kena’an. Thus, the field and the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial.” As always, we need to ask ourselves the reason Torah is repeating itself to understand hidden messages, rather treasures in the verse. For example, “It [the cave of Makpelah and its surrounding field] were deeded to Abraham,” (v. 20) when it clearly stated in verse 17, “the field and the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, which were within all the surrounding borders, were deeded.” Also, why does the Torah says, “And after this” (v. 19) as it is clear from the order in which the Torah describes the events that it was only “after this” that Abraham buried Sarah.

First and foremost, the Torah is teaching us that Abraham purchased the cave of Makpelah and its surrounding field legally and without deceit according to the laws of Torah. Therefore, when the Torah says, “And after this,” it means that Abraham did not bury Sarah until he received the deeds to the cave and its field from Ephron. The Talmud³ and Shulchan Aruch does not consider the property purchased until he receives a bill of sale from the seller. This is the reason we get a “sales receipt” when we purchase something from the store.

Secondly, by burying Sarah in the cave of Makpelah, Abraham is announcing to the children of Heth, that from this moment on the cave and its field is no longer considered as “ownerless” and no one can claim them as their property in the future. As explained briefly above, when Esau challenged Yosef on the legality of the cave, it was Naphtali who ran to Mitzrayim to get the deed to the cave of Makpelah and its surrounding field.

³ Bava Batra, 54b