רמב"ן · אור החיים

Ramban & Or HaChayim

ראשון FIRST ALIYAH

23:1 *Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years.*

RAMBAN

A HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS 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 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 shanah (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].

OR HACHAIM

The life of Sarah was 127 years, etc. Why did the Torah use the term ויהיו to describe Sarah's life when everyone else's life is described by the word ויחי?

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 ויחי 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.

The Torah adds the word שני חיי 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 G'd does with the righteous. When such a righteous person dies "prematurely," for reasons such as in Sarah's case, G'd 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).

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 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 tranquillity

23:2 *Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her.*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAHAM CAME. Rashi comments: "From Beer-sheba." Now this does not mean to imply that Abraham remained in Beer-sheba — as is indicated in the verse, And Abraham abode at Beer-sheba, for how then would Sarah have been in Hebron? Rather, the intent is to state that Abraham had gone to Beer-sheba for the day for some purpose, and while there he heard of the death of Sarah and came from there to Hebron to mourn and weep for her. However, the expression of our Rabbis is, "And Abraham came — from Mount Moriah." This is in accord with the Midrash which the Rabbi [Rashi] previously cited which states that hearing of the Binding [in which her son had been made ready for sacrifice and had indeed almost been sacrificed] her soul flew from her and she died. It would appear that the Divine command concerning the Binding was delivered to Abraham in Beer-sheba for there he dwelt and he returned thereto after the Binding, for so it is written at the outset: And Abraham planted a tamarisk-tree in Beer-sheba and called there on the name of the Eternal, the Everlasting G-d. It further states, And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days. This refers to his dwelling in Beer-sheba, which is in the land of the Philistines, and it is there that he was commanded concerning the Binding. It is for this reason that he expended three days on the journey to Mount Moriah, for the land of the Philistines is distant from Jerusalem. On the other hand, Hebron is in the mountains of Judah, as Scripture testifies, and is therefore near to Jerusalem. Thus, when coming from the Binding, he returned to Beer-sheba, as it is said, So

Abraham returned to his lads and they rose and went together to Beer-sheba. This teaches us that he tarried there and dwelled in Beer-sheba for a period of years. Now if this was the case, Sarah did not die during that period immediately following the Binding for it would not be that Abraham lived in Beer-sheba while Sarah dwelt in Hebron. And so it also appears since Isaac was born in Beer-sheba for it is previously written, And Abraham journeyed from there towards the land of the south and abode between Kadesh and Shur and sojourned in Gerar, and Abimelech said to him, Behold, my land is before thee; abide where it is good in thine eyes. There in that land Abraham settled in the city of Beer-sheba, for so it is written, And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phicol the captain of his host spoke unto Abraham, saying. Though it is not written there that they came to him from Gerar, [as it is written in the case of Isaac], from which you might infer that Abraham lived in Gerar, this is not the case. Scripture clearly states that it was in Beer-sheba that they made the covenant. Similarly, you will see that when Hagar was sent away from the house of Abraham on the day that Isaac was weaned, she walked in the desert of Beer-sheba, for it was there that they lived. However, after many days, he [Abraham] journeyed from the land of the Philistines and came to Hebron, and there the righteous woman Sarah passed away. However, according to the Midrash [which states that Sarah died at the time of the Binding], we must say that Abraham and Sarah lived in Hebron at the time of the Binding, and there Abraham was commanded concerning it. The verse which states that On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, poses this difficulty: Since Hebron is near Mount Moriah, which is in Jerusalem, why did he not arrive at the mountain until the third day? The answer is as follows: The mountain which G-d had desired for His abode was not revealed to him until the third day. Thus for two days he wandered in the environs of Jerusalem, and it was not yet the Divine Will to indicate the mountain to him. After the Binding, Abraham did not return to his place in Hebron. Rather, he went first to Beer-sheba, the place of his tamarisk-tree, to give thanks for the miracle that befell him. It was there that he heard of the death of Sarah, and he came to Hebron. The two apparently divergent opinions — namely, that Abraham came from Mount Moriah and that he came from Beer-sheba — are thus one [since, as explained, on his way from Mount Moriah he went to the tamarisk-tree which was in Beer-sheba, there to give thanks for the miracle]. Accordingly, the verse which states, And Abraham abode at Beer-sheba, is intended to indicate that upon his return from the Binding he went to Beer-sheba, and from there he went to bury Sarah. After the internment he immediately returned to Beer-sheba and settled there for years. Scripture, however, concludes the subject of Beer-sheba all at once, and following that it tells of the burial, [which explains the lack of chronology in the verse, And Abraham dwelt in Beer-sheba]. It was there in Beer-sheba that Isaac married Rebekah, as it says, For he dwelt in the land of the South, the locus of Beer-sheba. It is thus the opinion of all the commentators that Abraham was in another place, and it was from there that he came to the burial. In my opinion, Sarah had a tent for herself and her attendants. And so it is written elsewhere into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maid servants. Sarah thus died in her tent, and Abraham came into her tent with a group of his friends to bewail her. [This is a simple explanation of the expression, and Abraham came.] It may be that the word vayavo (and he came) indicates that Abraham was bestirred to make this eulogy, and he began to make it, for all who bestir themselves to begin doing a certain task are spoken of in Hebrew as "coming to it." This usage is quite common in the language of Sages, as we learn in Tractate Tamid: "He came to the neck and left with it two ribs on either side.... He came to the left flank.... He came to the rump." And also (you have) their expression, "I have not come to this principle." In Scripture, likewise, you find, he came for his hire, meaning that he came for the purpose of this work and did it for his hire. However, it does not appear to me feasible that Abraham came from another city to Hebron. If that were the case, Scripture would have mentioned that place and would have expressly written: "and Abraham heard, and he came from such and such a place."

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 חברון, this is an allusion to the word חבור, 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. The story in Shabbat 152 about how the grave of Rabbi Achai bar Yoshiah was disturbed by diggers on a property of Rav Nachman and how Rabbi Achai reacted illustrates this concept. 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 G'd all his elements become transformed into the element fire which forms the basis of the soul. Kabbalists are familiar with this.

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).

to mourn Sarah and to weep for her. 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).

23:3 *Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying,*

OR HACHAIM

From before his dead one. It is assumed that the "dead one" was aware of what went on around her as long as the lid had not been put on the casket or equivalent (compare Shabbat 152). This also teaches that the dead is to lie on his back (Baba Batra 74).

He spoke to the Hittites, to say. The word לאמור is to counteract the impression that Abraham asked for something gratis when he said: תנו לי, "give me permanent possession, etc!" Abraham would not be satisfied with just any gift the Hittites were willing to give him, but this was only an introduction to negotiations leading to the acquisition of the cave of Machpelah.

Furthermore, the Torah wanted to explain why Abraham needed to speak to the Hittites, when the land in question belonged to one man only, and the whole transaction should have been simple and uncomplicated. A cave, unlike a field, could not be worked like a field, was not useful to its owner to build on, etc.; therefore normal proof of ownership might be difficult to establish by his heirs in the future. This is why Abraham wanted everybody present as witnesses. The purchase would be fully valid and would not ever be contested after all these preconditions had been met.

Abraham also wanted to refute any suggestion that he wanted something for nothing. By saying לאמור, he indicated that he would negotiate (establish a price) for this acquisiton.

23:4 *"I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial."*

RAMBAN

I AM A STRANGER AND SOJOURNER WITH YOU. It was customary for them to have separate burial grounds for each family and one burial ground for the internment of all strangers. Now Abraham said to the children of Heth: "I am a stranger from another land and have not inherited a burial ground in this land from my ancestors. Now I am a sojourner with you since I have desired to dwell in this land. Therefore give me a burying-place for an everlasting possession just as one of you." However, since Abraham used the word "t'nu (give), [which has the same root as matanah," (gift)], they suspected that he desired it from them as a gift. They therefore answered him: "You are not regarded by us as a stranger or sojourner. Rather, you are a king. G-d has made you king over us, and we and our land are subservient to you. Take any burial ground you desire, and bury your dead there. It shall be unto you a possession of a burial-place forever since no one of us shall withhold it from you."

OR HACHAIM

I am a stranger and resident. Abraham's description of his legal status is based on Maimonides Hilchot Zechiyah U-matanah 3,11: Whereas one must not give a gift to an idolator, one may either give a gift or sell to a resident stranger (גר תושב) because the Torah writes: "the resident stranger let live by your side" (Leviticus 25,35). We need to appreciate that our holy Torah applies reason, and especially so in our conduct on this earth. Just as we Jews are commanded to deal with resident strangers in a humane manner, so reason dictates that people all over the earth should conduct themselves with one another in a like manner. It is a universal obligation to enable resident strangers to live undisturbed and to be able to receive gifts. It is this principle Abraham alluded to when he said: גר ותושב אנכי תנו לי, "since I am a resident stranger, give me, etc." He made a point of using the word גר, alien, not just תושב, resident, in order to emphasise that though he was an alien, the fact that he resided amongst them entitled him to what he requested. There is a spiritual dimension to Abraham describing himself as an alien. He did not consider it seemly for a human being to describe himself as a "resident" on this earth, seeing that he looked forward to a permanent status in another, higher life.

so I may bury my dead one from before me. Abraham meant that he wanted to bury Sarah without delay. Furthermore, Abraham knew already that he would have to pay Efron a substantial price for a field not worth a fraction of the asking price, because it contained something he wanted. At the same time, he realised that once the local people would hear of the price he was prepared to pay they would conclude there must be a hidden treasure beneath that field that they did not know about. In order to forestall such speculations by the local population he emphasised already at this stage that he was only concerned with burying Sarah forthwith i.e. מלפני, and that because of the urgency of the matter he could not afford to haggle over the price. Under such circumstances, it did not matter how much he would have to pay, the locals would not mind and would not suspect him of ulterior motives.

23:5 *And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him,*

OR HACHAIM

...<underline>לאמור לו</underline>. The Hittites answered, ... <underline>to say to him.</underline> This means they appointed a single spokesman to speak on their behalf.

It also means that they were not unanimous in their approach to the matter of the sale. As a result they delegated someone to "speak to him" i.e. without making an immediate and final commitment. The eventual outcome already indicates that it was their original intention to exact a very substantial price.

23:6 *"Hear us, my lord: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead."*

OR HACHAIM

listen to us my lord ;" they meant: "please listen to our suggestion to select the best of our burial grounds and go ahead and bury your dead one. You do not have to ask permission from any individual to give you his plot without a fair equivalent." The reason for all this is that "not one of us would refuse you even the plot he had selected for his own burial." They said so in order to expedite Sarah's burial.

The expression אדני simply means "my lord," and does not represent a name of G'd.

23:7 *Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites,*

OR HACHAIM

...וישתחו... He arose and bowed down. Abraham explained to them that the reality was the exact opposite of what the Hittites thought. He did not consider himself as a prince amongst them; on the contrary, he considered them as deserving more honour than himself.

23:8 *and he said to them, "If it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar.*

RAMBAN

IF IT BE YOUR MIND TO BURY MY DEAD FROM BEFORE ME. The intent thereof is: "I will not bury my dead in another burial ground. However if it be your desire that I bury my dead, entreat for me to Ephron who has a cave at the end of his field, which is not used as his family burial-place but as a field." The meaning of the word milphanai, (from before me), is that if you will not do so I will entomb her in a casket. It may be that it means "my dead wife who is before me, and as an obligation I must hurry to bury her." The reason Abraham requested, and entreat for me, is that Ephron was a rich and distinguished person, as is indicated by his saying, What is that between me and thee? It would therefore not be to his honor to sell his ancestral inheritance, as was the case with Naboth of Jezreel. It was for this reason that Abraham did not go to Ephron to offer him an inflated price for the field, but instead he asked of the people of the city to entreat to him [Ephron] on his behalf in an honorable way.

OR HACHAIM

... אם יש את נפשכם. He said: "If it be your desire, etc. This may be understood similarly to what we are taught in Baba Batra 36: Members of the exilarch's household were not permitted to keep land merely as a result of having occupied it although no protest had been registered as the true owners were afraid to do so. The latter were advised to retain their documents proving their title to those lands. On the other hand, landowners were not in the habit of immediately protesting when rich people squatted on their land as they hoped the improvements made by the illegal squatters would eventually benefit them when they reclaimed their property.

When the Hittites addressed Abraham as "a prince of G'd," claiming that not one of them would deny Abraham his own burial plot, they could have alluded to either of two scenarios. 1) They described him as a great and powerful individual who was able to impose his will on the local population. They indicated that Abraham was aware that no one would dare protest what he set out to do. Just because he was a man of such calibre the usual practice of acquiring land by occupying it and no one protesting did not apply to him. As soon as they would feel powerful enough they would feel free to remove the body Abraham had buried on that land. What they conveyed was that their approval was only due to Abraham representing superior force. 2) A second way of interpreting the Hittites' response is as follows: Inasmuch as you are "a prince of G'd," you need not fear that we look upon you as a person who throws his weight around such as in the example quoted from the Talmud. Whereas the people in the household of the exilarch were suspected of robbery, no such motive would ever be attributed to Abraham. Abraham's righteousness was beyond question. Perhaps they used the word שמענו, "listen to us," in order to underline that they considered Abraham beyond reproof. Hearing this, Abraham responded: "if you truly wish me to bury my dead, etc." please act as brokers between me and Efron. Had it not been for the latter words of Abraham we would have been forced to conclude that the Hittites' offer was something based on duress.

23:9 *Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns, which is at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial site in your midst."*

RAMBAN

THAT HE MAY GIVE ME. The intent of this is "that he may give it to me in such a way that I will consider it as a gift (even) if I will buy it from him for its full value." It is for this reason that Abraham did not mention the word "selling." A similar usage is found in the verse, Thou shalt sell me food for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink, meaning "for the water which is usually given as a gift I will give money." It may be that such is the ordinary usage of the language to mention "giving" when describing sales transactions.

THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH. Rashi comments: "It had a lower and an upper cave. Another explanation [of why it was called Machpelah — the root of which is keiphel (double)] — is that it was 'doubled' on account of the four couples who were buried there: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah". But this is incorrect since Scripture states, the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah. Thus we see that it is the name of the place in which the field was located, and there is no need to search for a reason for the names of places. In Bereshith Rabbah, the Sages have said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, bent double the stature of the first man and He buried him there." In their opinion, this entire place was always called Machpelah though the people did not know the reason for it for Ephron sold him everything for the price of the field unaware that there was a grave in it. Abraham, on the other hand, desired only that he should sell him the cave which was in the end of the field, and the field might be retained by Ephron. But Ephron by way of good conduct or trickery, [possibly hoping to receive a higher price for the larger transaction], said that he would give him the field and the cave which was in it since it would be unbecoming for such an honorable person to own the cave as a possession for a burial-place while the field belonged to another. Abraham rejoiced at this suggestion, and he purchased it in its entirety for the price that Ephron mentioned.

OR HACHAIM

So that he may give me the cave of Machpelah. Abraham made a point of describing the transaction as a gift though perfectly aware that money would be changing hands, as indicated by the words "for full monetary value." Abraham was astute enough to purchase the cave in such a way that any future complaint was out of the question. He was also careful to add the words: "in your midst." The Zohar 1,128 points out that Efron never saw anything in that cave except darkness and calamity. This being so, Efron could have claimed later that in view of his having been unaware of the true value of the cave, his consent to sell it was based on a false premise, and he could have reversed the sale. This in spite of the rule that there is no validity to a claim of land having been over or underpriced at the time of sale. Abraham still worried about an idea expressed in the Jerusalem Talmud (compare Tossaphot Kidushin 42) that if the undercharge was 50% or more the sale is reversible although it is not reversible when the amount of the undercharge was between 15% and 50%.

There was also the concern that landowners of the adjoining property could claim that the land should have been sold to them in preference to an outsider, something known in Jewish law as דין המצר. Another consideration of Abraham was that

after the transfer of the cave someone might present a lien dated prior to the transaction which would require him to give up his claim. For all these reasons Abraham used both the expression of "gift" and "sale" when referring to the way he wanted to acquire the cave. This would protect his claim also under the heading of what is known in Jewish law as דין חליפין, i.e. acquisition by means of a symbolic transfer. Under this heading there is no such law as אונאה, reversal of the sale due to unfair pricing. This דין חליפין applies to transactions involving either real estate or chattels whereas such acquisition by a symbol representing the ultimate object does not apply to money, i.e. coins. Hence Abraham's reference to receiving the land as a gift. Our sages in Bechorot 50 phrased it thus: Rabbi Chaninah stated that every time the word "כסף" i.e. silver or money appears in the Torah, the meaning is "25 ,סלעים" silver coins of a standard denomination; the exception is the use of the word "shekel" in connection with the transaction involving Abraham and Efron. In that instance the meaning is קנטרין, a coin weighing four times the usual weight of the "shekel." This is the meaning of the Torah (Genesis 23,15) defining the "shekel" as being "four hundred shekel acceptable at any merchant." The fact that Efron arbitrarily changed the usual definition of the value of the "shekel," made the transaction unassailable in the future seeing he himself had set the terms of the sale. Concerning Abraham's fear that the דין מצר might be invoked by a neighbour in the future, Abraham ensured the presence and consent of all the local populace who would jointly act as his broker in the transaction. This would preclude any claim at a later date. It also demonstrated that there was no outstanding lien against the property as any such lienholder should have spoken up at that time, seeing he was present.

Abraham used the term אחוזת קבר, "a burial plot held in perpetuity," leaving Efron the option to use the remainder of the field if he so chose. Had Abraham not used the term אחוזה, Efron could have denied him access to Sarah's grave once he had buried her there.

23:11 *"No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead."*

RAMBAN

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE SONS OF MY PEOPLE. The intent thereof is to state: "Behold, all the people are present, and they are knowledgeable witnesses to the sale. Therefore do not fear denial or retraction, and so bury thy dead from now on, for it is yours and I cannot retract." But Abraham did not do so for even after he paid its full value in silver he first took symbolic legal possession of the field and the cave. He established them as his possession in the presence of the people of the city, and all those who came in at the gate of the city, the merchants and the residents who happened to be there, and after that he buried her.

OR HACHAIM

No my lord. The word "no" means that Abraham could not merely acquire the cave but had to buy the field it was situated on. Efron indicated that the reason he had decided to give the whole field to Abraham was that once it served as a cemetry it could not longer serve its original purpose. He implied all this by using the word שמעני, "listen to me carefully."

והמערה אשר בו as well as the cave situated on it." He meant that already at the very beginning of the discussions when the local people had indicated their willingness to relinquish their own burial plots in favour of Abraham, he, Efron had decided that the cave and the field were a single unit. The reason he repeated the fact that the transaction took place in full view of all the people was to make plain that no דין מצר could be invoked by anyone in the future.

23:13 *and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there."*

RAMBAN

'LU' (IF) THOU WILT HEAR ME. This is equivalent to saying, "If you, if you will hear me," and the purport thereof is like, "if you, if you would hear me," the redundancy being for the purpose of emphasizing the matter. Similar cases are found in these verses: Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; Art thou any better, better than Balak? And to speak against him, saying; And as for me, whither shall I go?; And I turned myself; And I saw myself; Seeing all the congregation are all holy. All these are examples of expressions of synonimity. In my opinion, this is also the case in the verse, If from a thread even to a sandal tie, if I take (anything that is thine), which is equivalent to saying, "If, from a thread even to a sandal tie, I take anything that is yours." It may be that [in the verse here before us the meaning is], "If you are as you have said." that is, if you are speaking what is in your heart concerning the matter, and if you will listen to me and consummate the sale. A similar usage of a missing word is found in the verse, And their brethren said unto them, What are ye? [which means, "What are you saying?"] In my opinion, a similar case of such usage is the verse, Wherefore am I? [meaning, "Wherefore am I in the world?"] Perhaps this is the opinion of Onkelos who translated here, "if you will do me a favor," meaning, "if you will do my will as you have said."

OR HACHAIM

He said to Efron, etc. The use of the word אך indicated Abraham's desire to proceed with a minimum of further discussion.

I have given the money for the field. Even if Efron had decided to give him the field as a gift, Abraham begged Efron to accept the money from him. If so, Abraham would accept the field as a gift.

23:15 *"My lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead."*

RAMBAN

LAND OF FOUR HUNDRED SHEKELS OF SILVER. According to Onkelos' opinion, the intent of this is that the land was so worth, [since he translated, "land worth four hundred shekels of silver."] Perhaps it was Ephron's intent to say that the price of the land was so fixed in that place for it was customary in most lands that the price of a field be fixed in accordance with its dimensions. In the words of our Rabbis, however, Ephron set an exorbitant arbitrary price, and Abraham, out of the willingness of his heart, listened and did according to his will, and magnified himself. If we follow the simple interpretation of Scrip-

ture, land of four hundred shekels of silver means that either Ephron bought it for that price, or it was so purchased by his forefathers.

שני SECOND ALIYAH

23:19 *And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan.*

RAMBAN

AND AFTER THIS, ABRAHAM BURIED SARAH HIS WIFE IN THE CAVE OF THE FIELD OF MACHPELAH BEFORE MAMRE — THE SAME IS HEBRON — IN THE LAND OF CANAAN. The reason why Scripture reverts to clarify the field, the place and the land is that the whole section mentioned the sons of Heth and Ephron the Hittite. Therefore Scripture mentions at the conclusion that the field was in the land of Canaan which is the land of Israel. And so it said at the beginning of the section: in Kiryath arba — the same is Hebron — in the land of Canaan. All this is to explain that the righteous woman died in the land of Israel, and there she was interred, as the Hittites were of the families of Canaan. In my opinion, the reason for the verses is only to mention that this was the land of Canaan, not the land of the Philistines. Having said, And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days, and since all his habitats were in that land — in Gerar, and the valley of Gerar, and Beersheba, and from there to Hebron and back — Scripture therefore mentioned that Hebron is in the land of the Canaanite who dwelt in that hill country, not in the land of the Philistines, which is mentioned in connection with Abraham. And in the end Scripture added a phrase to inform us that the cave was in the field of Machpelah before Mamre, for this was the name by which it was known. This section was written to inform us of G-d's kindnesses to Abraham, i.e., that in the land in which he came to live he was regarded as a prince of G-d, and each individual as well as all the people called him "my lord" although he did not tell them that he was a prince and a great man. Also, in his lifetime G-d fulfilled His promise to him: And I will make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. Moreover, his wife died and was buried in the inheritance of the Eternal. Further, Scripture wanted to inform us of the place of the burial of the patriarchs since we are obligated to honor the burial place of our holy ancestors. Our Rabbis said that this also was one of the trials of Abraham: he desired a place to bury Sarah but did not find it until he purchased it, [despite G-d's promise that the entire land would be given to him]. I do not know a reason for the words of Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, who says that the purpose of this section is to let us know the superiority of the land of Israel as regards the living and the dead, and also to fulfill the word of G-d which promised him that the land would be an inheritance of his. But what superiority of the land was thus demonstrated? Abraham would not have carried her to another land to bury her, and the word of G-d to Abraham applied to the whole land, and that was fulfilled only with his seed.

OR HACHAIM

...ויקם השדה. Afterwards the field stood as burial plot, etc. We need to understand why the Torah had to write the words: "afterwards," something that is obvious. What could be more natural than Abraham burying Sarah at the end of these negotiations? Besides, why did the Torah repeat the words: ויקם השדה, something we read already in verse 17?

The Torah wanted to confirm that the transaction complied with all and every legal form of acquisition. The words "afterwards" mean that once Abraham had weighed the money for Efron the latter had foregone all claim to that property in perpetuity. Maimonides explains it thus in chapter one of Hilchot Zechiyah Umatanah: "A Gentile loses his right to formerly owned property the moment he accepts the money as compensation for it. A Jew, on the other hand, does not acquire title to his new property until he has a written document. Once this has occurred the property in question is like land in the desert which anyone can stake a claim to." In other words, once the Gentile has accepted the money he loses all former claims. Had Abraham buried Sarah before giving the money to Efron, the fact that he gave the money to Efron afterwards would not have made a full acquisition, seeing that the act of possession expressed by his burying Sarah would not have been performed on land owned by him at the time.

We need to examine if the act of חזקה, i.e. using the land for one's own purpose, is actually legally valid when the act of such חזקה is performed on land previously owned by a Gentile. In chapter two of the above-mentioned tractate of Maimonides, he writes as follows: "In the case of formerly ownerless property, or property formerly owned by a proselyte, the fact that the squatter (Jewish) has eaten the proceeds of such land for a number of years does not constitute an act of acquisition of either tree or the land itself until such time as the squatter has performed an act on the body of the land itself. What kind of activity would qualify in such an event? In the case of a Jew having taken over the house of a proselyte or an abandoned house, if he whitewashed it or added a moulding about 60 centimeters high this would constitute a valid act of acquisition. If he took earth from high ground and transferred it to fill lower ground in the same piece of land this would be considered as an improvement of the earth and would qualify as an act of acquisition." It is clear therefore that if the squatter merely shifted some earth without specific intent to effect an improvement on that soil- even though he thereby levelled the ground,- this would not be enough to qualify under the heading of קנין, acquisition. Maggid Mishneh (a commentator on Maimonides) writes that if the squatter spread mats on the ground in order to be able to sit on it in comfort and to enjoy this, this would count as a valid act of קנין, acquisition. An alternative cited by the above commentator suggests that even spreading the mats merely in order to improve the appearance of the ground in question suffices. Rabbi Ibn Migosh concurs with the latter example. Thus far the quotation from Hilchot Zechiyah Umatanah. Granted that according to the first example cited by the Maggid Mishneh anyone who benefits from an act performed on the land he squats on performs a valid act of חזקה, Abraham benefited by having buried Sarah on that land and thereby performed an act of acquisition; however, according to the opinion of Rabbi Ibn Migosh that an actual improvement of the land has to take place, Sarah's burial would not have constituted such an improvement. How then did Abraham acquire that land (even though Efron had forfeited it)?

Perhaps the superstructure erected around the grave, and especially the sepulchral chambers dug within the earth which was customary at the time, constituted such an improvement in the

field under discussion. These sepulchral chambers were probably white-washed with lime to prevent the earth around them from crumbling. Now we can understand the reason the Torah repeated the words ויקם השדה. It means that after Abraham had buried Sarah the acquisition of that field by Abraham became complete.

24:1 *Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAHAM WAS OLD, WELL STRICKEN IN AGE. Scripture reiterates [Abraham's old age although it has already mentioned it] in order to inform us of the reason that he adjured his servant. Thus Scripture says that because Abraham saw himself to be very old and he thought that if he will send the servant to the land of his origin, perhaps before the messenger would return, he will have gone to his long home, he therefore adjured his servant — whose counsel Isaac would follow since he ruled over all that he had — that he should not take for him a wife from the daughters of Canaan. In Bereshith Rabbah, the Rabbis said: "Here it was old age combined with vitality; further on it was old age without vitality." By this the Rabbis wanted to explain that ba'im [literally: "coming" in days — mentioned above] — means the beginning of the days of old age, as the word ba'im indicates the present, just as, 'Haba'im' (those that come) in at these gates. But here it says that he was very old for already he was ba bayamim [literally: "he had come in days" — past tense], just as: Thy brother 'ba' (came) with subtlety.

AND THE ETERNAL HAD BLESSED ABRAHAM IN ALL THINGS. I.e., with riches, possessions, honor, longevity and children, which are all the treasures of man. Scripture mentions this in order to say that Abraham was perfect in every detail, lacking in no respect save seeing his son have children who would inherit his superior position and his honor. This was why he desired it. Now our Rabbis have a wonderful insight into this verse. They said: "And the Eternal had blessed Abraham 'bakol' (in all things). Rabbi Meir said that Abraham was blessed in that he did not have a daughter. Rabbi Yehudah said that he did have a daughter. Acheirim say that he did have a daughter and her name was Bakol." Rabbi Meir thus explained that Abraham did not have a daughter. This was a blessing for Abraham for he could not have married her except to the cursed sons of Canaan. If he were to send her to his country, she would also worship the idols as they did because a woman is subject to the authority of her husband. Indeed, Abraham did not want his worthy children from his wife Sarah to go outside the Land, and surely not that they worship the idols. Rabbi Yehudah, however, explained that Abraham did have a daughter since the Merciful One did not even cause him to lack a daughter, and that was the blessing implied by the expression, in all things, for he had everything that people desire, completely without exception. Then came Acheirim and mentioned the name of the daughter. Now truthfully, the intent of Acheirim and their controversy with Rabbi Yehudah were not merely to inform us of the name of this daughter. Far it be from them to expend the great and generalized blessing of Abraham on this matter, i.e., that Scripture is saying that G-d blessed him with one daughter with that name. However, Acheirim established a new interpretation on this verse, a very profound matter, and they explained with it one of the secrets of the Torah. Thus they said that the word bakol hints at a great matter, namely, that the Holy One, blessed be He, has an attribute called Kol (All), so called because it is the foundation of everything. It is with reference to this attribute that it says, I am the Eternal that maketh 'Kol' (all). And this is also what Scripture says, And the profit of the earth is 'bakol' (in all), that is to say, the profit of the earth and the abundant goodness that is bestowed upon all that come into the world is on account of this attribute Kol. It is the eighth attribute of the thirteen attributes. And there is another attribute called bath [literally "daughter"] that emanates from it, and with it He moves everything. This is "the Court of the Holy One, blessed be He," that is hinted at in the word, Vahashem (And the Eternal), in all places. It is called kalah (bride) in the book of The Song of Songs because it is comprised of hakol (the All), and it is this attribute which the Sages have surnamed Knesseth Yisrael (the assembly of Israel) in many places because it is the gathering of hakol (the All). It was this attribute which was to Abraham as a bath because he was the man of kindness, and he conducted himself in accordance with it. This was why Acheirim said that this blessing with which Abraham had been blessed in all things does not allude either to his having begotten a daughter from his wife Sarah, as Rabbi Yehudah said, or not, as Rabbi Meir claimed, but instead it hints at a great matter, i.e., that he was blessed with an attribute called bath which is contained in the attribute Kol, and is therefore also called Kol, being analogous to the expression, For My name is in him. Thus Abraham was blessed in heaven and on earth. This is why he said, By the Eternal, the G-d of heaven and the G-d of the earth. This matter is to be found hinted at in the traditions of our Rabbis in many places. Thus they said in the Midrash Chazita: "Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai asked Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yosi, 'Have you possibly heard from your father of the meaning of the verse, The crown wherewith his mother hath crowned him?' He said to him, 'Yes.' He asked, 'How?' He replied, 'It is like a king who had an only daughter whom he loved very much, and he would call her "my daughter." This did not completely express his love for her until he called her "my sister." Still he was not satisfied until he called her "my mother." In the same way, the Holy One, blessed be He, loved Israel in the beginning and called them "My daughter." It is this which Scripture says, Hearken, O daughter, and consider. This did not completely express His love for them until He called them "My sister," as it is said, Open to me, my sister, my love. Still He was not satisfied until He called them "My mother," as it is said, Attend unto Me, O My people, 'ule'umi' (O My nation). The word is written le'imi (O My mother).' Then Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai arose and kissed him on his head, and he said to him, 'Had I come to listen to this word of yours it would have been sufficient.'..." Now, had the commentator who prides himself on his knowledge of the Torah's secrets known this, his lips would be dumb and not deride the words of our Rabbis. Therefore, I have written this in order to silence those who speak arrogantly against the righteous one.

OR HACHAIM

And Abraham was old, etc. Inasmuch as Abraham felt that he had aged and also in view of the fact that G'd had greatly blessed him, he worried that the servant who was in charge of all this wealth while his master was visibly aging would develop notions of marrying his daughter to Isaac. Eliezer might want to secure Abraham's wealth for himself through the marriage of his daughter to Abraham's son. This is the reason Abraham made Eliezer swear an oath concerning the fact that his son was not to marry someone of Canaanite descent. Eliezer

would thus get the message that his daughter was not suitable marriage material for a son of Abraham who was blessed whereas the Canaanites were cursed (compare Bereshit Rabbah 59,9).

24:3 *and I will make you swear by the* LORD, *the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell,*

RAMBAN

AND I WILL MAKE THEE SWEAR BY THE ETERNAL. It would have been proper for Abraham to command his son Isaac that he should not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. But since it was his wish to dispatch someone during his lifetime to his country and his family, and he made the servant swear to do so whether in his lifetime or after his death, therefore Abraham found it necessary in any case to make the servant swear to go there. In addition he found it necessary to say to him, "I command you that you should not take a woman for my son of the daughters of Canaan. Instead you are to go to my country and take for him a wife from my father's house." Now having required the servant to swear to this, he no longer found it necessary to command Isaac at all for he knew that he would not transgress his father's wish or the oath which he made his servant swear, as the matter was indeed known to Isaac. It is also possible that the servant Eliezer was the administrator of his possessions, and Abraham commanded him to marry off Isaac in accordance with his will and cause him to inherit his estate on this condition, [namely, that he marry in accordance with his father's wish]. This is the significance of the expression, that ruled over all that he had.

THE G-D OF THE HEAVEN, AND THE G-D OF THE LAND. The Holy One, blessed be He, is called the G-d of the Land of Israel, as it is written, They know not the manner of the G-d of the land, and it is further written, And they spoke of the G-d of Jerusalem, as of the gods of the people of the earth. There is a secret in this matter which I will yet explain with the help of G-d. However [in Verse 7], further on where it says, Who took me from my father's house, it does not say "the G-d of the land" because he [Abraham] was then in Haran or Ur of the Chaldees. So also the Rabbis have said: "He who lives outside the land of Israel is as if he had no G-d, as it said, For they have driven me out this day that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of the Eternal, saying, Go, serve other gods.

OR HACHAIM

among whom I dwell. Abraham countered Eliezer's assumption that inasmuch as the very proximity of Abraham causes one to be included in the blessing G'd promised to Abraham this did not mean that one's basic status of being cursed (as a result of Noach's curse) had been revoked. Abraham also wanted to dispel the notion that his presence and his status among such people as Aner, Eshkol and Mamre would become endangered if he did not take a wife for Isaac from their families.

24:4 *but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac."*

OR HACHAIM

rather you shall go to my country and to my birthplace, etc. This was part of the oath also; Eliezer was to secure a wife for Isaac in Abraham's birthplace. This is why Eliezer is described as immediately taking the camels, etc.

24:5 *And the servant said to him, "What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came?"*

RAMBAN

PERADVENTURE THE WOMAN WILL NOT BE WILLING. The meaning [of the definite article in the word ha'ishah] is that it refers to "the woman to whom I will speak of all the women there", or it may mean the woman who is fit for Isaac.

24:7 *The* LORD, *the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, 'I will assign this land to your offspring'—He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there.*

RAMBAN

FROM MY FATHER's HOUSE, 'UMEI'ERETZ MOLAD'TI' (AND FROM THE LAND OF MY NATIVITY). Rashi comments: "From my father's house — from Haran. And from the land of my nativity — from Ur of the Chaldees." If this is so, the expression, Unto my country and to 'molad'ti' thou shalt go, must also refer to Ur of the Chaldees. But Heaven forbid that the sacred seed should mix with the sons of Ham, the sinful one! Even if one would say that Abraham had some family there from the seed of Shem, the fact is however that the servant went to Haran as his master said! Now perhaps the Rabbi [Rashi] thinks that eretz molad'to(the land of his birth) was Ur of the Chaldees, but molad'ti means "my family," and my country means the land wherein he lived. But all these are futile words since here, in the verse before us, he said, And thou shalt take a wife for my son from there, [and according to Rashi, who explained ume'eretz molad'ti, mentioned in this verse, as meaning Ur of the Chaldees, it would follow that Abraham commanded Eliezer to go there to get a wife from the children of Ham]! Moreover, Abraham stayed in the land of Canaan for a longer period than he did in Haran, and so why should Haran be called his country simply because he lived there for some time? Instead, the meaning of the expression, unto my country and to 'molad'ti', is "unto my country in which I was born," [namely, Haran in Mesopotamia], for there he stayed and from there his ancestors came, as was already explained. In Bereshith Rabbah we find: "From my father's house — this is the house of his father. And from the land of my birth — this is the environs [of his father's house]." It is possible that unto my country and unto 'molad'ti' means "Unto my country and unto my family," for he did not want a wife to be taken for Isaac even from the people of his country but only from his family. Similarly in the verse, And thou shalt take a wife for my son from there, [the word misham (from there)] alludes to the expression, from my father's house, mentioned at the beginning of the verse. And so did the servant say when quoting Abraham, And thou shalt take a wife for my son of my family, and of my

father's house, and again he said, quoting his master. Then shalt thou be clear from my oath when thou comest to my family. These words were said by the servant to honor them so that they would listen to him.

AND WHO SPOKE 'LI' (UNTO ME). Rashi comments: "The word li means 'in my interest,' just as in the verse, which He spoke 'alai' (concerning me). In the same way, in every case where li and lo and lahem follow the word dibur (speaking), they are to be explained in the sense of al (concerning). For proper usage of the verb dibur [in the sense of speaking to a person, the pronouns li and lo and lahem are not appropriate, and] only eilai and eilav and aleihem are appropriate, and their renderings in the Targum are imi and imei and imhon. In the case of the word amirah, however, the expressions li and lo and lahem are appropriate." In the section of Vayeitzei Yaakov, Rashi brought [proof of his above mentioned principle which states that li or lecha, etc., following the word dibur, must be explained in the sense of al (concerning)] from that which is written there, that which 'dibarti' (I have spoken) 'lach,' [which must be interpreted to mean "in thy interest and concerning thee"] since He had never spoken to Jacob before this occasion. But this difference is not valid for we find: And now go, lead the people unto the place of which 'dibarti' (I have spoken) 'lach'; And the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic; And thou shalt drive them out, and make them to perish quickly, as the Eternal hath spoken unto thee. Similarly the verb amirah is used with both li and eilai: And they shall say 'li' (to me), What is His name? What shall I say 'aleihem' (to them)? And as for [the verse which Rashi mentioned as his proof], that which 'dibarti' (I have spoken) 'lach,' [which must mean, as Rashi said, "concerning thee," since He had never spoken to Jacob before this occasion], its interpretation is as follows: "that which I have said to you now that I will give the land to you and to your seed, and I will bless you." [Thus the word lach (to you) follows the understood verb "give" and is not related to dibarti.]

24:8 *And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there."*

RAMBAN

THEN THOU SHALT BE CLEAR FROM THIS MY OATH. Abraham did not permit him to take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of Canaan, but he would be free [from the oath if Isaac were to do it on his own] and the Eternal do that which is good in His sight. But Rashi wrote, "And take a wife for him from the daughters of Aner, Eshkol or Mamre." Now if they were Canaanites, far be it from him! And in truth they were of the seed of Canaan for Scripture says, Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol, and brother of Aner. And in Bereshith Rabbah, the Rabbis have said: "That thou shalt not take a wife, etc. He warned him against the daughters of Canaan, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre." For it was with reference to Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre that Abraham said, Among whom I dwell, since he did not dwell among all the Canaanites as they were many nations. But he warned him against these his confederates, and all the more against the others. But the verse, Then thou shalt be clear from this my oath, means that the servant would be free from the oath if Isaac would want to do it on his own, and Abraham relied on his knowledge that his righteous son Isaac would listen to his father and that he would beware of them and go instead to Ishmael or to Lot and the other nations. It is possible that from this my oath is a hint to that which he said, And thou shalt take a wife unto my son from there, since perhaps the oath was for everything, [meaning that the oath covered two points: a) that he should not take for him a wife from the daughters of Canaan, and b) that he should go to his family. In case they refused, he would be free from the second oath, while the first oath would always remain in effect]. Accordingly, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath does not allude to that which Abraham told him, Thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, [since he never freed him from this oath]. This explains the word zoth (this) — [thou shalt be clear from 'this' my oath — implying there was another oath from which he was not freed]. Therefore, the servant said, That I may turn to the right hand, or to the left, and he did not say, "I would return [to the land of Canaan," since he was not freed from the oath not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan].

OR HACHAIM

and you will be relieved of this oath of mine. This means that Eliezer will be relieved of the duty to take a wife for Isaac from Abraham's birthplace; the oath not to take a wife for Isaac from the local Canaanites would remain in force, however, seeing it was something under his control.

only do not bring my son back there. Abraham did not make Eliezer take an oath concerning this part of his instructions. This was only an answer to Eliezer's question how to act if the bride to be refused to come to the land of Canaan.

24:9 *So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him as bidden.*

OR HACHAIM

He swore to him concerning the matter. An absolute oath concerning a Canaanite girl, and a conditional oath concerning the need to find the girl in Abraham's birthplace should the girl refuse to move to the land of Canaan.

שלישי THIRD ALIYAH

24:10 *Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor.*

RAMBAN

AND ALL THE GOODS OF HIS MASTER BEING IN HIS HAND. Rashi comments: "This refers to a deed of gift of all his possessions which he wrote in favor of Isaac so that they would be eager to send him their daughter." And so it is also stated in Bereshith Rabbah, "He carried with him a disposition of property." According to this opinion, the verse stating, And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac, means that he caused him to take possession of the belonging at the time of his death so that the other children would not contest his ownership, just as it is said, And he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived. If so, the word "taking" applies also to the second part of the verse, And the servant 'took' ten camels, and departed, and all the goods of his master he took in his hand. Perhaps [the words of the verse are to be transposed as follows]: "And the servant took ten camels and all the goods of his master in his hand, and departed." Others explain the sense of the verse as meaning that immediately upon being sworn, the servant

himself went and took many camels from his master's camels because all his master's goods were in his hand, he being the officer and captain over all and authorized to take from him whatever he desired, just as the verse says, that ruled over all that he had. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the meaning of this verse is similar to that of the verse concerning Hazael, general of Aram, And Hazael went to meet him [Elisha the prophet], and took a present with him, and every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, [which means "and 'of' every good thing of Damascus]." Here too Scripture states that he took in his hand of all his master's goods ten camels' burden. The sense of the verse concerning Hazael is that the camels carried all that was good and excellent among those species of fruits and precious things that were found in Damascus or in his master's house, and in addition they carried a present with them. In a similar sense is the verse, ten asses laden with the good of Egypt, [which means laden with the good and excellent fruits of Egypt]. The verses, however, shorten expressions when the subjects are understood.

OR HACHAIM

Ten camels, etc. One reason that Eliezer took ten camels was that relative to Abraham's wealth this was equivalent to an ordinary person taking one single camel loaded with gifts.

Another reason is that the number ten simply means "many," as we find in Samuel I 1,8, where Elkanan asks Channah if he was not worth more to her than "ten sons?" The meaning there is clearly not the number ten, but "ten" as indicative of a large number.

The reason the Torah adds that the camels belonged to his master (something we would have assumed even without it being mentioned) is that these camels were specially trained to answer Abraham's specific needs. They were capable of carrying especially heavy loads.

The Torah adds: וכל טוב אדוניו, "and all the good things of his master," to tell us that Eliezer took the choicest of all the precious possessions of Abraham. This was in order to persuade the girl in the event that she would initially refuse to move away from her parental home. Seeing that her husband-to-be possessed such wealth might change her mind. The word בידו means the same as שבידו, something that was under Eliezer's control (inasmuch as he was in charge of all of Abraham's possessions).

24:12 *And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with my master Abraham:*

OR HACHAIM

He said: "G'd! please make it happen, etc. Eliezer was certain that his master's prayer that G'd would send His angel ahead of Eliezer to facilitate his mission would be fulfilled. He added a prayer expressing the hope that he would be found worthy to be the instrument through which Abraham's prayer would be fulfilled. It happens on occasion that the prayer of the original petitioner goes unanswered due to the unworthiness of the petitioner's messenger.

The reason Eliezer had to proceed in this order was that he feared Abraham's family might deceive him and try to palm off one of their maidservants on him, claiming that she was their family. He therefore stipulated that the girl to be regarded as suitable for Isaac should proceed to do more than he asked of her by also offering to water his camels. This would be characteristic of a girl who was related to Abraham. In fact Rebeccah described herself immediately as a daughter of Bethuel (verse 24).

24:14 *let the maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master."*

RAMBAN

HER THOU HAST APPOINTED FOR THY SERVANT, EVEN FOR ISAAC. Rashi comments: "She is fit for him since she is charitable and worthy of admission into the house of Abraham. And thereby shall I know — this is a petition: 'Let me know through her that Thou hast shown kindness unto my master.'" If so, Eliezer is saying, "I know for certain that You have appointed her for Your servant Isaac." But in that case [his petition, which still indicates a doubt as to whether she was the appointed one,] does not connect well. Its interpretation however is as follows: "Make it happen to me this day that the girl to whom I will speak be the one that You have appointed for Your servant Isaac, and with this, show kindness to my master Abraham for with this I will know that You have shown kindness to him if she be of his family and of good mind and of beautiful appearance." And so he said [when recounting the events of the day]: And let it come to pass, that the maiden, etc., let the same be the woman whom the Eternal hath appointed.

24:15 *He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, the son of Milcah the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder.*

RAMBAN

WHO WAS BORN TO BETHUEL THE SON OF MILCAH THE WIFE OF NAHOR, ABRAHAM's BROTHER. Because Nahor also had children from his concubine Reumah, they always described the lineage of Bethuel by saying that he was the son of Milcah who was the mistress of the household. And because the girl mentioned her father's mother first, as it says, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah — for such was customary among the girls, analogous to the verse, And she told her mother's house — therefore Scripture mentions in the verse before us that he [Bethuel] was the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor. But the servant later said, And she said, The daughter of Bethuel Nahor's son, for he corrected the matter as is ethically proper. However, he did say, whom Milcah bore unto him, in order to state that Bethuel was the son of the mistress and not the concubine.

OR HACHAIM

Before he had finished speaking, etc. This means that Eliezer was still addressing G'd when Rebeccah materialised. He realised immediately that she was slated to become Isaac's wife.

Rebeccah was coming out. G'd timed her appearance to coincide exactly with Eliezer's prayer so that he would not meet another girl by mistake while Rebeccah, who had been born to Bethuel, was the intended mate for Isaac. I have explained this in connection with 22,20 where the Torah mentions that Abraham had received word of her birth.

24:17 *The servant ran toward her and said, "Please, let me sip a little water from your jar."*

RAMBAN

AND THE SERVANT RAN TO MEET HER. Rashi comments: "Because he saw that the waters rose in the well when she approached it." In Bereshith Rabbah the Rabbis said, "And she filled her pitcher, and came up. All the women went down and filled their pitchers from the well. But this one, as the waters saw her they immediately rose. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her, 'You are a sign of blessing to your children.'" It would appear that the Rabbis derived this interpretation upon observing the language, And she filled her pitcher, and came up, for it does not say, "and she drew water and filled [the pitcher]." Now this miracle happened to her only the first time for afterwards it is written, and she drew. The servant, when recounting the day's events to them, said: And she went down unto the well, and drew water. That was because he thought that perhaps they would not believe in the miracle.

OR HACHAIM

let me please sip a little water, etc. Eliezer actually asked for less than he had originally stipulated, seeing he meant to ask her "to incline her jug in order to let him drink (extensively)." Not only did he only ask to take a sip, but he stressed that he wanted only a little water. He also failed to ask her to incline her jug in order to give him to drink. Our sages (Bereshit Rabbah 60,5) explain that Eliezer saw that the waters rose towards Rebeccah. This is when he realised that she was not a Canaanite girl and that she was destined for Isaac. He became afraid that he might forfeit an opportunity by insisting on the conditions he had made in his prayer, and proceeded to ask for the minimum possible. He wanted to make it easy for the girl to meet his request.

24:18 *"Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink.*

OR HACHAIM

She said: "drink my lord, etc. Instead of letting Eliezer merely sip a little water, the girl offered that he drink freely, as much as he wanted. She did not want him to have to use his hand to drink out of, but she lowered the jug to make it more convenient for him. The word ותשקהו, means that not only did Eliezer not have to lift the jug to his lips but she placed it so that he did not even have to tilt it. She brought the jug to the level of his mouth.

Rebeccah purposely did not add the words: "I will also water your camels" immediately. Had she added the words immediately, before Eliezer had finished drinking, the latter might have cut short his own drinking knowing that Rebeccah would still have to go to the trouble of watering the camels. As long as she had not offered this, Eliezer had no reason to entertain such considerations.

24:19 *When she had let him drink his fill, she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they finish drinking."*

OR HACHAIM

When she completed giving him to drink, etc. Seeing that the Torah does not describe Eliezer as having finished drinking, it is clear the Torah wants us to know that she kept bringing him water until he stopped drinking.

It is also possible that Rebeccah judged when Eliezer should stop drinking, seeing that weary travellers who have gone without water for a long time are not the best judges of when they may be drinking more than is good for their health.

We may view the matter also in light of what the Talmud teaches in Berachot 40, based on Deuteronomy 11,15 that one must feed one's animals before eating oneself. This ruling applies only when there is no danger to the life of the person involved. If his life is in danger, concern for his own health takes precedence over the wellbeing of his animals. When Rebeccah heard Eliezer ask for some water she concluded that she faced a man whose need for water was immediate. This is why she said to him: "drink!" As soon as she had given him sufficient water to ensure he was not in danger of dehydrating she suggested giving water to his camels, the ones which normally should have been looked after first. This is why the Torah phrases Rebeccah's action in such a way that we understand that as soon as was practicable she turned her attention to the camels, giving them to drink. She added that she would continue until the camels had finished drinking, meaning that in the case of the camels she was not going to rely on her personal judgment of when the animals had had enough to drink. She kept drawing water for the camels until they stopped drinking.

24:21 *The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her, silently wondering whether the LORD had made his errand successful or not.*

OR HACHAIM

And the man was amazed at her, remaining silent, etc. The Torah explains here that though Eliezer had no longer any reason to await Rebeccah's completing her task of watering the camels seeing she had already done much more than he had stipulated in his prayer, he kept his peace. One of the reasons he waited before enquiring from her about who she was may have been that he wanted to test whether she would indeed complete the onerous task of drawing water for all the ten camels as she had promised to do, or if she would tire in the process and carry out less than she had promised. As soon as she completed watering all the camels he gave her the jewelry intended for Isaac's bride.

24:22 *When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel, and two gold bands for her arms, ten shekels in weight.*

RAMBAN

AND THE MAN TOOK A GOLDEN RING... AND TWO BRACELETS UPON HER HANDS. This verse omits the deed for it should have said: "And the man took a golden ring and put it upon her nose and two bracelets upon her hands." Therefore I say that the interpretation of the verse is as follows: And the man took a golden ring and two bracelets which would be upon her hands, and he said to her, Whose daughter art thou? And after she had told him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, he put the ring upon her nose and the bracelets upon her hands, as he told them. Here, however, Scripture omits the actual giving, and similarly in many places.

OR HACHAIM

on her hands. This means that the bracelets fitted her as if made to fit her specific measurements. Eliezer placed this jewelry on Rebeccah's hands as a sign of acknowledging G'd's personal guidance in his mission thus far.

24:23 *"Pray tell me," he said, "whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?"*

OR HACHAIM

Whose daughter are you? Tell me, etc. The Torah lumps both these questions together to show that Eliezer did not entertain any doubts that the girl must belong to Abraham's family. Had he entertained such doubts he could not have enquired immediately about the chance of lodging in her parents' home until he had clarified who her parents were. He merely wanted to know her father's name. He added his enquiry about staying at her parents' overnight to emphasise that this had nothing to do with her father's name, that he was convinced G'd had guided him to the right family.

24:24 *She replied, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor."*

OR HACHAIM

The daughter of Bethuel whom Milkah bore for Nachor. Rebeccah emphasised that she was not the daughter or granddaughter of a concubine, but of the ranking wife.

רביעי FOURTH ALIYAH

24:29 *Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man at the spring—*

OR HACHAIM

Rebeccah had a brother called Laban. Our sages observe that whenever the Bible mentions righteous people, their name precedes them, whereas the reverse is the case when the Bible mentions wicked people (Esther Rabbah 6,3). Examples are Ruth 2,1; 1,2. Samuel I 25,3. It is puzzling then that Laban is introduced here in the manner of the righteous. In order to understand this we must pay attention to the verse describing Laban as running. Our sages in Yalkut Shimoni 109 state that as soon as Laban saw the nose-ring on Rebeccah he became greedy for money. This does not throw any light on our problem. The Torah should have written: "As soon as he saw the nose-ring, etc., Laban ran," instead of mentioning the fact that Laban saw the nose-ring after he had already commenced to run towards Eliezer. Besides, why did the Torah repeat the words: "to the man outside at the well" in verse 29 and then again in verse 30?

The fact is that Laban was sincerely concerned about his sister's innocence, suspecting that the gifts to her of the jewelry by a total stranger could have been the beginning of an immoral relationship between them. The Torah here describes Laban as if he were a righteous person because it acknowledges his concern for his sister's chastity.

When the Torah states: "it was when he saw," this shows that Laban reacted first to what he saw and subsequently to what he heard. As long as he had not yet heard what transpired between the two he put an ugly intepretation on the manner in which he thought his sister had obtained the jewelry, suspecting Eliezer of seducing Rebeccah. Laban nevertheless continued on his way to meet Eliezer and to offer him hospitality.

24:30 *when he saw the nose-ring and the bands on his sister's arms, and when he heard his sister Rebekah say, "Thus the man spoke to me." He went up to the man, who was still standing beside the camels at the spring.*

OR HACHAIM

he came to the man who was still standing by the camels. What do the words: "he was still standing, etc." teach us? According to Yalkut Shimoni 109, Eliezer interpreted Laban's running as an hostile act and he invoked the holy name of G'd as a result of which the camels stood over the well in the air. This is why the Torah describes the camels as "הגמלים על העין." Eliezer himself stood on top of the camels. He called out to Laban from an elevated position whereupon Laban addressed him with the words: "come in blessed one of the Lord!" If nothing unusual had occurred Laban would have reversed the wording of his invitation saying: "Why should you remain outside, come in blessed one of the Lord!"

Another reason why Eliezer is reported as remaining standing by the camels maybe that the Torah wants us to know that the mere fact that Rebeccah had indicated that there was lots of room in her father's home for Eliezer to spend the night together with his entourage was not enough reason for him to follow her to her home.

The wording of Laban's invitiation, prefaced by his description of Eliezer as a man blessed by the Lord, indicates that Laban did not invite him wholeheartedly but merely to save him the disgrace of having to remain outdoors, i.e. למה תעמוד בחוץ? Even when the wicked perform an act of graciousness such an act reflects a degree of their basic reluctance to do good.

24:32 *So the man entered the house, and the camels were unloaded. The camels were given straw and feed, and water was brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men with him.*

RAMBAN

AND THE MAN CAME INTO THE HOUSE. Eliezer is the man who entered the house. And he ungirded the camels — this refers to Laban who acted ethically towards his guests, unharnessed their camels and gave them straw and fodder, and he also gave water to wash the feet of Eliezer and the feet of the men that were with him. It must refer to Laban for it would be unlikely that it was Eliezer who gave water to wash his own feet and those of his men. A similar case is the verse, And there passed by Midianites, merchantmen, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit. The words, and they drew, refer back to the brothers of Joseph mentioned in the preceding verse, and not to the Midianites. And so in the verse, Then said Ziba unto the king [David]: According to all that my lord the king commandeth his servant, so shall thy servant do; but Mephibosheth eateth at my table as one of the king's sons. [The concluding words, but Mephibosheth eateth], are the words of David and not Ziba. There are many such verses. Now the purport of the expression, and he ungirded the camels, is that he unloosened the bands on their necks, as it was customary to lead them knotted, or perhaps they travelled with saddles girded upon them, just as is expressed in the verses: Let not him that girdeth on his armor boast himself as he that putteth

it off, Loose thyself from the band of thy neck. Now Rashi wrote, "He removed their muzzles for he had closed their mouths so that they might not graze in other peoples' fields." And in the words of Bereshith Rabbah, "He removed their muzzles. Rabbi Huna and Rabbi Yirmiyah asked Rabbi Chiya the son of Rabbi Aba, 'Were not the camels of our father Abraham like the ass of Rabbi Pinchas ben Ya'ir, etc.?'" This question is intended to contradict [the interpretation which maintains that the ungirding refers to] the removing of the muzzles for it is impossible that the piety in the house of Rabbi Pinchas been Ya'ir should have been greater than that in the house of our father Abraham, and just as the ass of Rabbi Pinchas ben Ya'ir did not have to be guarded against eating things which its master was forbidden to feed it, all the more so were the camels of our father Abraham. There was thus no need to muzzle them for no injustice befalleth the righteous.

24:45 *I had scarcely finished praying in my heart, when Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew. And I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.'*

RAMBAN

BEHOLD, REBEKAH CAME FORTH WITH HER PITCHER ON HER SHOULDER. This indicates that while he was in her house he heard her name, or perhaps she told him her name at the beginning even though it is not mentioned in Scripture.

OR HACHAIM

I had not yet finished speaking (praying). Eliezer said this so no one should think that Rebeccah's actions had been prompted by what she had overheard Eliezer saying.

24:47 *I inquired of her, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' And I put the ring on her nose and the bands on her arms.*

OR HACHAIM

...ואשים הנזם על אפה. "I asked her....and put the ring on her nose. He changed the sequence of events in his report so that Laban and his father in their craftiness should not be able to claim these trinkets as belonging to Bethuel since Rebeccah had obtained them as reward for services rendered. If, however, Rebeccah had obtained the jewelry only after she had identified herself as the daughter of Bethuel, it was clear that they were meant to effect the betrothal between her and Isaac, her father not being able to claim them as belonging to him.

חמישי FIFTH ALIYAH

24:60 *And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "O sister! May you grow Into thousands of myriads; May your offspring seize The gates of their foes."*

OR HACHAIM

May you become thousands and myriads. The reason Laban stressed the word "you" was that he was aware that Isaac would continue the Abrahamitic tradition and found great nations. Although this fact itself was anathema to wicked people such as Laban, they preferred that Rebeccah would be the founding mother than any other wife Isaac might marry. We must accept the psychological fact that the wicked hate the righteous even if the latter are their own flesh and blood.

24:61 *Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.*

RAMBAN

AND REBEKAH AROSE, AND HER MAIDS. Scripture relates that after they gave permission for Rebekah and her nurse to go, as well as for Abraham's servant and his men, Rebekah rose and called her maids. And they rode upon the camels, and followed the man because he led them on the way.

AND THE SERVANT TOOK REBEKAH, AND WENT HIS WAY. The purpose of this is to tell of his zealousness for after having left the city with all the women following him, the servant took Rebekah to him and did not part from her in order to guard her against any mishap along the way. And Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that it means that he walked with Rebekah and never felt the weariness of the journey until Isaac came and met him.

24:62 *Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negeb.*

RAMBAN

AND ISAAC 'BA MIBO' (HAD JUST COME) FROM THE WELL LAHAI-ROI. Scripture states that Isaac had just now come from the well Lahai-roi, having returned from the well of Lahai-roi to which he had previously come. Had the verse stated, "Ba (he came) from the well of Lahai," it would have appeared as if he lived there. Therefore, it was necessary to explain ba mibo as meaning that he returned to his city from the temporary visit that he had made to the well of Lahai-roi, for he abode in the south country and he was returning to his city. It is possible that since the word mibo is an infinitive, it indicates that Isaac constantly went to that place since it was a place of prayer for him because of the revelation of the angel there, and he abode in the south country near there. And so did Onkelos translate it, "He came from his coming," [thus indicating that he was in the habit of so doing]. In Onkelos' opinion this was Beer-sheba for he translated both between Kadesh and Shur and between Kadesh and Bered as "Rekem and Chagra." If so, that place — the place of the tamarisk-tree of Abraham — was suitable for prayer. Now Isaac came from that well while he was on his way to another city which was on the same road as his city, and he went out towards eventide to converse in the field with his companions and friends who were there. He met the servant and Rebekah, whereupon they all walked together to the city, and Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent.

24:64 *Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel*

RAMBAN

AND SHE SAW ISAAC. Rashi comments: "She saw his lordly appearance and felt abashed of him." And Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained that the latter verse, [namely, Verse 65, And she said unto the servant, What man is this], preceded Verse 64. Thus the expression, And she said unto the servant, means "And she had already said to the servant." In Ibn Ezra's opinion there are many such verses in the Torah. This is truly so, but here it is not correct, for in this case you would have to mix the

verses and transpose their parts as follows: And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and she saw Isaac [Verse 64] — and she said unto the servant: What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant said: It is my master [Verse 65] — and she alighted from the camel [Verse 64] — and she took her veil, and covered herself [Verse 65]. In my opinion [we need not mix the verses, but the sense thereof is as follows]: When Rebekah saw a man walking in the field towards her, hastening on the road and walking in the field towards them, she knew that he had come to see them and greet them or to bring them into his house for lodging, and so she did as was ethically proper for women, and she stood modestly.

AND SHE ALIGHTED ('VATIPOL') FROM THE CAMEL. Rashi comments: "She let herself slide towards the ground, as the Targum renders it, 'She inclined herself [towards the earth but did not actually reach the ground]. Similarly, Let down thy pitcher was translated by Onkelos to mean 'incline.' And He bowed down the heavens — the Targum translates: 'and He bent.' A similar case is the verse, Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, which means though he bends himself towards the earth, yet he shall not touch the ground." But Onkelos' opinion is not that she let herself slide off the camel to the earth, for if so, she actually fell off the camel and did not just incline herself. Similarly, all expressions of "inclining" merely mean a bending towards one side. Onkelos' opinion, however, is that on the camel upon which she was riding she bent herself towards one side in order to turn her face away from him. A similar case, in my opinion, is the verse: And when Naaman saw one running after him, 'vayipol' from upon the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? The word vayipol here only means that he bent himself in the chariot towards the runner who was on the ground to ask of him whether all is well. And so indeed it is said there, When the man turned back from his chariot to meet thee. It is possible that as far as Onkelos is concerned, the expression, from on the camel, is like "on the camel," [the letter mem in the word mei'al (from on) being redundant]. A similar case is the verse, For great 'mei'al' the heavens is Thy mercy, [which means "for great on the heavens is Thy mercy," and not "from on the heavens"]. A redundant letter mem like this is also found in these verses: There shall be no more 'misham' an infant of days, nor an old man, [which means "there shall be no more there," and not "from there"]; Ye waters that are 'mei'al' the heavens, [which means "ye waters that are on the heavens," and not "from on the heavens"]. In line with the plain meaning [of Scripture, however, the letter mem in the word mei'al is not redundant, but instead] it is like the mem in the verse, And, behold, there came many people 'miderech' (from a way) round-about. [And thus in the verse before us, mei'al hagamal would mean that she alighted "from on the camel."] There are many similar verses.

24:67 *Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.*

RAMBAN

AND ISAAC BROUGHT HER INTO HIS MOTHER SARAH'S TENT. The construct is missing here [for the noun ohel (tent) appears with the definite article, and in this form it cannot be used in construct with "his mother Sarah." The verse then should be understood as if it were written, "and Isaac brought her into the tent which was the tent of his mother Sarah."] There are many cases like this. The purport of the verse is to tell of the honor that Isaac bestowed upon his mother for from the time that Sarah died they did not take down her tent because they said, "Let not another woman come into the tent of the honorable mistress." But when he saw Rebekah he brought her into that tent in her honor and there he took her as his wife. This is the meaning of the words, and he loved her, and he was comforted, indicating that he was deeply grieved for his mother, finding no comforter until he was comforted by his wife through his love for her. Otherwise, what reason is there for Scripture to mention a man's love for his wife? But Onkelos explained: And Isaac brought her into the tent and, behold, she was like Sarah his mother. It is for this reason that Scripture mentions the love he had for her because it was on account of her righteousness and the aptness of her deeds that he loved her and was comforted by her. And so the Rabbis mentioned in Bereshith Rabbah, "Before Sarah died there was a blessing of miraculous increase in the dough. [After her death it stopped, and when Rebekah came the blessing reappeared."]

שישי SIXTH ALIYAH

25:3 *Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim.*

RAMBAN

ASSHURIM, AND LETUSHIM, AND LEUMMIM. Rashi comments: "These were the names of clan chieftains. But I cannot reconcile Onkelos' translation with the language of the text." It appears to me that Onkelos was of the opinion that Asshurim means camps, companies that travel the roads from city to city, just as it says, a company of Ishmaelites. Onkelos thus considered Asshurim as being derived from the expressions, To His steps ('ba'ashuro') hath my foot held fast; His steps ('ashurav') do not slide. And Onkelos' opinion of Letushim is that they are the ones who dwell in tents that are scattered over the face of the earth, resting today in one place and tomorrow in another, for the letter lamed and nun interchange in many places, [thus Letushim would be like Netushim (scattered ones)] just like lishchah and nishchah, [both of which mean "chamber"]; And on that day men were appointed over 'haneshachoth' (the chambers). From this root is derived the expression, a sword 'netushah,' which is the same as letushah (sharpened). And of the word Le'ummim Onkelos said ulenagvon, [which is Aramaic for the Hebrew word] iyim (islands). Onkelos was stirred to this translation by the word hayu [and the children of Dedan 'hayu' (were) Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim], when it would have been proper to express it similarly to the verse, And Mitzraim begot Ludim, and Ananim, and Lehabim, and Naphtihim. And in Bereshith Rabbah we find: "Rabbi Shmuel the son of Rav Nachman said that even though we translate these names and say, 'Merchants, flaming ones, and heads of peoples,' all of them were heads of peoples." The matter is as I have explained. The translators rendered Asshurim as "merchants, those who walk the road." From the word Letushim (sharp, shiny) they derived "men of wickedness," their faces are faces of flame, burning as torches, from the roots: to sharpen (liltosh) his plowshare, and his coulter; He sharpened (yiltosh) his eyes upon me. But Rabbi Shmuel the son of Rav Nachman said that even though they are accustomed to thus

translate these names, they are still only the proper names of the heads of people, there being no descriptive name among them at all. And such is the case.

25:6 *but to Abraham's sons by concubines Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East.*

RAMBAN

BUT UNTO THE SONS OF THE CONCUBINES, THAT ABRAHAM HAD. By way of the plain meaning of Scripture, since it was said to Abraham, For in Isaac shall seed be called to thee, and in no other seed, all his consorts were concubines to him, not as wives since their children would not be among his heirs. Thus, Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, was his concubine. However, Keturah he took unto himself as a wife for if she whom he took as a concubine had been a handmaid in his house, Scripture would not have said, And Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. She is called "concubine" in Scripture — it is written in Chronicles, And the sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine — only for the reason that I have explained, [namely, that it had been said to Abraham, For in Isaac shall seed be called to thee]. Thus we note that Abraham took unto himself a wife from the daughters of Canaan! And should you say that she was an Egyptian or from the land of the Philistines, we may yet question why he did not send to his country and to his kindred as he did in the case of his son. But the answer is that he guarded only the seed of Isaac since it was concerning him that the Covenant was made. Furthermore, Scripture does not say, "And Abraham took a wife by the name of Keturah, the daughter of a certain Hivite or Philistine or Egyptian from a certain land," as it says concerning Esau's wives and similar cases. Rather, Scripture mentions only Keturah's name because she was a Canaanite, and therefore it cut short her genealogy. Scripture does so in many places where it is not concerned with the genealogy. Perhaps Keturah was called "concubine" because she was a handmaid who was descended from a family of slaves. And if she was a handmaid in his [Abraham's] household and he had connection with her, Scripture would not mention her genealogy since even among the matriarchs, such as Zilpah and Bilhah, it mentions only their names. Now Rashi wrote, "Wives are those whom a man marries with a marriage-contract; concubines have no marriage-contract, as it says in reference to the wives and concubines of David, in Tractate Sanhedrin." But the matter is not so. A woman is called a concubine only when there is no betrothal, for a marriage-contract is only a Rabbinic ordinance. And the correct text in Tractate Sanhedrin is: "A concubine has no marriage-contract or betrothal." However, it is possible that the sons of Noah too when they married wives, as is their law, by intercourse, were accustomed to write them a marriage-contract which granted dowry and gift. However, for one who wished to be a concubine to them, whom he could send away when he pleased and whose children would not be among his heirs, he would not write anything. But according to the opinion of our Rabbis that Keturah is Hagar, she was certainly a concubine [since it clearly says that Hagar was Sarah's handmaid].

OR HACHAIM

And to the sons of the concubines, etc. The Torah does not mention that Abraham bequeathed any gifts to Ishmael when he expelled him. We have explained on Genesis 17,5 that Ishmael was himself a slave and as such anything that would be given to him would automatically not be his but his master Isaac's who was the rightful heir of Abraham and Sarah.

25:7 *This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred and seventy-five years.*

OR HACHAIM

AND THESE ARE THE DAYS OF THE YEARS OF THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM, WHICH HE LIVED. He was precise in saying "which he lived," in accordance with the words of our Rabbis, of blessed memory (Bereishit Rabbah 63), who said that five years were lacking to him before the day on which Esav committed five transgressions. This is why he said "which he lived" — meaning: not the years that were allotted to him, for they were more than this, but rather, these are what he actually lived.

Completed is Parashat Chayei Sarah.

25:8 *And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin.*

RAMBAN

OLD AND FULL OF YEARS. He witnessed the fulfillment of all the desires of his heart and was sated with all good things. In a similar sense is [the verse written in connection with Isaac's life], and full of days, which means that his soul was sated with days, and he had no desire that the future days should bring something new. This is as it is said of David: And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honor. This is a story of the mercies of the Eternal towards the righteous ones, and of their attribute of goodness by virtue of which they do not desire luxuries, just as it is said of them, Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and not as it is said of other people, He that loveth money shall not be satisfied with money, and as the Rabbis have commented thereon: "No man leaves the world having amassed half of his desires. If he has a hundred, he desires two hundred. If he succeeds in acquiring two hundred, he desires to make of it four hundred, as it is said, He that loveth money shall not be satisfied with money." In Bereshith Rabbah the Rabbis have said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, shows the righteous in this world the reward He is destined to give them in the Coming World, and their souls become full and they fall asleep." The Sages were stirred by this and they explained the verse which says, and full of years, with this vision [of the reward that G-d shows the righteous before they die].

25:9 *His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre,*

RAMBAN

AND HIS SONS ISAAC AND ISHMAEL BURIED HIM. In the language of Bereshith Rabbah, "Here the son of the handmaid bestowed respect upon the son of the mistress" [since he yielded precedence to Isaac].

25:11 *After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled near Beer-lahai-roi.*

RAMBAN

AND ISAAC DWELLED BY THE WELL LAHAI-ROI. I.e., near that place, or perhaps because it was not a city, Scripture says that he pitched his tent near the well.

שביעי SEVENTH ALIYAH

מפטיר MAFTIR

25:17 *These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; then he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his kin.—*

RAMBAN

AND THESE ARE THE YEARS OF THE LIFE OF ISHMAEL. It appears plausible in line with the simple explanation that Scripture relates, in the case of the sons of the righteous, their generations and the number of their years in order to inform us that the seed of the righteous shall be blessed. However, it did not relate the number of Esau's years for he outlived Jacob, and the narrative was concluded with the death of Jacob. Hence, Scripture did not want to return to the life of Esau since it had already mentioned his generations in their appropriate place. In the Midrash of our Rabbis there are many reasons for the Scriptural account of Ishmael's years. The correct one among them is that he was righteous, a man of repentance, and Scripture tells of him as it does with all righteous people.

AND HE EXPIRED ('VAYIGVA'). Rashi comments: "This expression — 'expiring' — is only mentioned in the case of righteous people." But in the Gemara the Rabbis objected, "But it says 'expiring' with reference to the generation of the flood: And all flesh expired that moved upon the earth, etc., and every man; Every thing that is in the earth shall expire." And the Gemara answers: "We were referring to [those places where it mentions both] 'expiring' and 'gathering,'" [as it says in the case of Abraham and in the present verse concerning Ishmael]. The intent of the Rabbis is that the expression "expiring" indicates death without prolonged sickness and without pains. This death is merited only by the righteous people, [and concerning their death both "expiring" and "gathering" are mentioned]. But the men of the generation of the flood, who were overthrown as in a moment, and no hands fell upon them, as also those who died in the desert — with them Scripture therefore mentions only "expiring": when our brethren expired. And so is the sense of the verse, And that man expired not alone in his iniquity, meaning that his iniquity did not cause him instant death. But when Scripture so mentions the term "expiring" in reference to death together with the word vayei'aseph (and he was gathered [unto his people]) or vayamoth (and he died), it hints to the death of the righteous ones. In the words of Bereshith Rabbah, "And Abraham expired, and died, Rabbi Yehudah the son of Rabbi Ilai said, 'The early pious men used to suffer with intestinal disease for about ten or twenty days before death, thus establishing the principle that illness cleanses from sin.' Rabbi Yehudah said, 'All who are said to have expired died of intestinal disease.'" There in Bereshith Rabbah the Rabbis also said, "Everything that is in the earth 'yigva' — will shrivel." It would appear that to the Rabbis, the word gviyah (expiring) was analogous to Their flesh shall consume while they stand upon their feet. So also is the opinion of Onkelos who translated here ve'isnagid, meaning "fainting," similar to the expressions: "isnagid (he became faint) and sighed"; "You might think he may pay as a fine five negidim (emaciated) oxen." It is so said in the case of the flood, as Scripture states, And He blotted out every being. And in the case of Ishmael it is stated in the verse before us: And he expired and died, as a man who is powerless and dies, and this is the measure meted out to righteous people. Toldoth