

# Life After Death: Sarah's Enduring Legacy

## 1st Aliyah: Genesis 23:1

וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה

("And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.")

Sarah dies at the age of 127. Her lifespan is deliberately listed as "100 years, and 20 years, and 7 years," because she maximized every stage of her life to its full potential. The **Chizkuni** points out that the *gematria* (the numerical value) of the word וַיְהִי (Vayehiyu—"and there were") is 37—the years of her life that she had Yitzchak. For Sarah, that was the most precious part of her life.

The **Midrash Tanchumah** teaches that Sarah died when she heard the news of the *Akeidah* (the binding of Isaac).

Avraham came to Chevron (Hebron) to bury Sarah. Hebron is called **Kiryat Arbah** because of the four couples traditionally buried there: Adam and Chavah (Eve), Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, and Yaakov and Leah.

The area also has four geographical names: **Chevron, Mamrei, Kiryat Arbah, and Eshkol (or Nachal Eshkol)**. Rabbi Alex Israel notes that if you look at an overview of Hebron, it looks like four distinct hilltops. Perhaps "Kiryat Arbah" means the "Four Towns," similar to the "Five Towns" area in New York.

The rest of the Aliyah is a very detailed negotiation where Avraham buys **Me'arat HaMachpelah** in order to bury Sarah. The **Bnei Chet** (Hittites) are happy to allow Avraham to bury his wife for free in their cemetery, but Avraham insists on buying a plot.

The Bnei Chet, who knew Avraham well, perceived him as a *ger* (a wandering nomad) who had no land of his own. If they simply gave him land to bury his wife, the *Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel) could always be taken back after Avraham died. However, Avraham explained that he is a **Toshav** (a settler/resident); he wants to establish a permanent place where his family can be buried and his future descendants can come to *daven* (pray) and get *Chizzuk* (strength/encouragement). Therefore, he insists on a detailed, legitimate sale with witnesses so there can never be any dispute as to who this land belongs to.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch beautifully notes that the only two places in the entire

**Tanakh** that give a detailed description of a real estate transaction are:

1. The acquisition of Me'arat HaMachpelah, which begins our ownership of the Land of Israel.
2. The purchase of a lot of land by Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) from his uncle just before the *Churban* (Destruction of the First Temple), to demonstrate our belief that we will one day return to Eretz Yisrael.

The Chittim summon Ephron, who first offered the land to Avraham as a gift but eventually sold it for a very high price: **400 silver coins** of international currency.

There is a wonderful story about when Moses Montefiore wanted to buy the area that is today **Mishkenot Sha'ananim**. The Sheikh Abed el-Latif offered to allow Jews to settle there for free; however, Montefiore wanted a legally binding document to avoid any complications. In the end, the Sheikh charged **£1,000**, reminiscent of what happened with Ephron.

## **2nd Aliyah: Genesis 23:20**

Once Avraham acquired the land, he buried Sarah.

וַיָּקֶם הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזִית-קֶבֶר מֵאֵת בְּנֵי-חֵת

("And the field and the cave that is in it were established for Avraham as a possession for a burial place, from the Children of Chet.")

Once Avraham bought the land, **וַיָּקֶם** (*va'yakom*)—it was elevated and established.

After successfully burying Sarah, Avraham summons his servant. The commentators all assume that this was Eliezer, but he is never named in the entire episode. Avraham charges his servant to find a wife for Yitzchak. Two conditions were stipulated: Under no **circumstances** was Yitzchak to marry a Canaanite, and Yitzchak was not allowed to leave the Land of **Israel**; the girl would have to come to Israel. The reason it was so important that Yitzchak not marry a local girl was to make sure that there was no cultural diffusion between Avraham's family and the local idol-worshippers. However, a girl who came **from** afar and would never go back home because Yitzchak could not leave the Land, would become completely influenced by Avraham's way of life.

## **3rd Aliyah: Genesis 24**

Eliezer takes ten camels and a document stating **Avraham's** wealth and that Yitzchak was the sole heir, and left for Mesopotamia. According to *Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer*, the **journey from Eretz Yisrael** should have taken seventeen days, but miraculously,

Eliezer reaches his destination by **evening**. The *passuk* (verse) stresses that this was the time that the girls would come out to draw water from the well. Eliezer uses this fact to help him find Yitzchak's intended bride.

He *davens* (prays) to **Hashem** asking for a sign. If Eliezer would ask the girl:

הִטִּיגָא כִּדְרְךָ וְאֶשְׁתֶּה  
("Please incline your jar, that I may drink")

And the girl would answer, "Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink," then this would be the girl.

Let's unpack the logic of this request. Generally speaking, we are not allowed to ask **Hashem** for a **sign**, and indeed, this story is brought in the **Gemara** as an example of people who asked improperly but were answered anyway. However, there was a logic to it: The **House of Avraham** is a House of *Chesed* (loving-kindness). Anyone who would be fit **to carry on Avraham's dynasty** would have to fit that role. And indeed, we will see how Rivka is a perfect model of Avraham's mission.

However, there is a difference between being a **Ba'alat Chesed** (a mistress of kindness) and a doormat. Eliezer, a strong man, is there with ten servants, and he is making a young girl get water? Why is that a test? Why **can't** he have his assistants get the water? The clue is in the context of the well. I heard from Dr. Esther Shkop that in Middle Eastern cultures, there was a time set for women to go to the well because it wasn't a stone well like the fairy tales; it was a pool, and women would also bathe in it. As such, when the women came towards evening, no men were allowed near the water, so the only way for Eliezer to get a drink was if a woman would give him from her pitcher.

Eliezer does not specify that the girl needed to be **from** his family, but we see as soon as he finishes **davening**, his **Tefillot** (prayers) are answered: Rivka, Avraham's **grand-niece**, comes out towards the well.

Eliezer asks for a little water, and she gives him to drink. The word **וַתַּמְהֵר** (*Vatemaher*, "and she hastened") is repeated over and over, reminiscent of Avraham's actions with his guests. This is a **woman** who runs to do *Chesed*. Rivka also emulates Avraham in that she is asked for a little and does a lot. First she gives Eliezer to drink, then she offers to give water to the ten camels.

When she is finished watering all the **camels**, Eliezer gives Rivka extravagant gifts,

each one symbolizing her connection to **Bnei Yisrael** (the Children of Israel):

- The nose ring weighing a **Beka**, symbolizing the **half-shekel** the Jews would one day pay in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle): (שָׁמוֹת ל'ח:כ"ו).
- Two bracelets for the **two Luchot** (Tablets), weighing ten gold *shekels*, symbolizing the **Aseret HaDibrot** (Ten Commandments).

After giving these gifts, Eliezer asks Rivka who she is and if there is room for him to spend the night. Rivka reveals that she is Avraham's grand-niece and that her family had accommodation for guests.

#### 4th Aliyah: Genesis 24

Eliezer bowed and thanked **Hashem** for answering his **Tefillot** (prayers) beyond his expectations. Rivka runs with her characteristic **zerizut** (alacrity/haste) and informs her mother of everything that happened. Her brother, **Lavan**, also displays **zerizut**, but he uses it when he sees all the jewelry on Rivka. He rushes over to Eliezer to invite him over, hoping to try to get some more of his gold.

Notice that when Eliezer is in Canaan, and talking to Avraham or Yitzchak, he is called an **Eved** (servant), but Rivka's family perceives him as an **Ish** (man of importance). In comparison to Avraham, Eliezer is an **Eved**, but when compared to the corrupt people of Charan, Eliezer is the most noble character they have ever seen and is called an **Ish**.

Lavan invites Eliezer and his entire entourage—the camels, the drivers, the accompanying servants—to spend the night.

After Eliezer feeds his camels and then sits down with the family. Unlike the angels in the previous Parsha (who first eat and then deliver their message), Eliezer insists on first completing his mission before eating.

The first thing Eliezer explains is that he is Avraham's servant. Until now, the family had thought that this visitor was Avraham himself; they were shocked that this was just the servant. It is a curious phenomenon that the entire conversation is **recorded in such detail** when the Torah is famous for being extremely brief with words. We are meant to compare and contrast the original events and the way Eliezer tells them to learn how to conduct ourselves during negotiations: what to say, and what to leave out. For example, when Eliezer met Rivka, he was so convinced she was the right girl, he first gave her gifts and then asked who she was, but when he retold the story, he said he first asked who she was and then gave the gifts. He realized the family would not appreciate his **Emunah** (faith) and would think of him as reckless.

One of the motifs of Eliezer's speech is to stress that all of this has come **from Hashem**. When he describes Avraham's wealth, he says Avraham has been blessed by **Hashem**:

וְה' בֵּרַךְ אֶת־אֲדֹנִי מְאֹד וַיִּגְדַּל

("and Hashem has blessed my master exceedingly, and he has become great.")

He also stresses that Yitzchak was a miracle child, born in Sarah's old age. Then he explains how Avraham reassured Eliezer that **Hashem** will help him succeed:

ה' אֲשֶׁר־הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לִפְנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכּוֹ אִתָּךְ וְהִצְלִיחַ דְּרָכְךָ

("Hashem, before whom I walked, will send His angel with you and make your journey successful.")

He retells how he *davened* to **Hashem** and how his *Tefillot* were immediately answered, and he ends off:

וָאֶקֵּד וְאֶשְׁתַּחֲוִה לֵה' וְאֶבְרַךְ אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אֲבִרְהָם אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת לְקַחַת אֶת־בֵּת־אֲחִי אֲדֹנִי לְבָנוֹ:

("And I bowed down and prostrated myself before Hashem, and I blessed Hashem, the G-d of my master Avraham, who led me on the path of truth to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son.")

He bowed and thanked **Hashem** for giving him success.

He is implying that this all comes from **Hashem**, and they **can't** stop any of it from happening. The family understands the unsaid part because they reply:

וַיַּעַן לָבָן וּבְתוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִה' יֵצֵא הַדְּבָר לֹא נוֹכֵל דִּבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ רָע אוֹ־טוֹב:

("And Lavan and Betuel answered and said, 'The matter has gone forth from Hashem; we cannot speak to you bad or good.'")

When Eliezer is looking for a girl in the first half of the *perek* (chapter), the theme of *Chesed* and *zerizut* is highlighted because that is what Avraham would want in a daughter-in-law. However, when Eliezer tells the story to the pagan, superstitious family, he emphasizes that these events were all serendipitously orchestrated by **G-d**, and they would do well not to get in the way.

When the family agrees to the match, Eliezer bows and thanks **Hashem**.

### 5th Aliyah: Genesis 24

Eliezer gives the family gifts to seal the deal, and then they all sit down to eat. The meal effectively turns into an engagement party.

However, the next morning, there is a slight snag in the plans. Eliezer asks permission to take **Rivka** immediately, but **Lavan** and his mother ask Eliezer to allow Rivka to stay a year or at least ten months to prepare.

This **foreshadows Lavan's behavior** in the future, where he will continuously find ways to delay Yaakov (Jacob) from leaving with his daughters.

### The Mystery of Betuel

Where is **Betuel**? **Rashi** brings a Midrash that Betuel died the previous night, and that the family wanted Rivka to stay for the year of mourning. In fact, in a bizarre breach of ancient etiquette, they call in Rivka and ask her opinion! In truth, once the father agreed to a match, the girl had no say, but Lavan and his mother were trying to convince Rivka **behind Betuel's back**, to stay.

Additionally, it is possible that Rivka was completely absent from the dinner and negotiations and was unaware of what was agreed. In order to fulfill her destiny, she needs to make her own free-will choice of **Lech Lecha** (Go forth).

That's why you see the word **LECH** stressed in the *passuk*:

בראשית כ"ד:נ"ח

וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְרִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶיהָ הֲתֵלְכִי עִם־הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְתֹאמְרִי אֵלָיו:

("And they called Rivka and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go.'")

### The Blessing and the Symmetry

They send Rivka off with an entourage of maidservants and bless her. This blessing, as the **Rashbam** points out, is a **mirror image** of the blessing that Yitzchak receives at the end of the *Akeidah*:

Rivka's Blessing (Genesis 24:60):

וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ אַחֲתֵינוּ אֵת הָיִי לְאַלְפֵי רַבְבָּה וַיִּרְשׁ זֶרְעָה אֶת שְׂעַר שְׂנָאיו:

Yitzchak's Blessing (Genesis 22:17):

(יז) כִּי בָרַךְ אֲבִרְכְּךָ וְהִרְבֵּה אֲרֻבָּה אֶת זֶרְעֲךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכִחְלוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל שְׁפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׁ זֶרְעֲךָ אֶת שְׁעַר אֲבִיּוֹ.

The end of the *Aliyah* describes the meeting between Rivka and Yitzchak:

There is a beautiful symmetry between the beginning of the *perek* and the end. Eliezer first met Rivka by a well, and now Rivka sees Yitzchak for the first time coming back **from a well, *Be'er Lachai Ro'i***. Eliezer prayed and then saw Rivka; here, Yitzchak was **davening** and then he saw Rivka. Eliezer arrived just before evening, and Yitzchak sees Rivka just before **evening**.

The passuk says that:

וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׁוּם בְּשָׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עָרֶב

("And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening.")

### Yitzchak's Role: Farmer or Davenner?

- **Rashbam** and **Ibn Ezra** explain that Yitzchak was a farmer, and he was tending his crops. This is symbolic of Yitzchak's role as one of the *Avot* (Patriarchs). He perhaps had the hardest job: walking in the footsteps of Avraham the revolutionary. Yitzchak is not **innovating** anything; rather, like a farmer, he tends to the "seeds" that Avraham planted, and with quiet persistence, makes sure that they flourish and grow.
- **Rashi** interprets *lasuach* as "to speak"—that Yitzchak was **davening Mincha** (the afternoon prayer). Rashi explains that when Rivka saw Yitzchak standing in prayer:  
"She saw his lordly appearance and gazed at him in astonishment" (*Bereshit Rabbah* 60:15).

The **Netziv** adds that Rivka was so overcome with awe when she saw Yitzchak that she felt a deep inadequacy, as if she wasn't worthy of being his wife. And we see that Rivka and Yitzchak do not have the same direct relationship that Avraham had with Sarah and Yaakov had with his wives. She could never talk to him directly and share her opinions because she felt so inadequate in his presence. This is why Rivka goes to the **Yeshiva of Shem and Ever** (for spiritual guidance) and does not discuss it with Yitzchak, and why she has to resort to trickery to give Yaakov the *berachos* (blessings).

Sforno has a different explanation. The term:

וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא

("and he lifted his eyes and saw")

means looking for something that you want. It's used for Avraham and his guests, or when Avraham saw Har HaMoriah. Yitzchak knew that Eliezer had gone on his behalf, and he was davening for the success of the mission. There is a beautiful symmetry that both Yitzchak and Rivka "lift their eyes and see" what they want: their Tefillot are answered in each other.

## The Return of the Shechinah

בראשית כ"ד:ט"ז

וַיְבִיאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֶּאֱהָבֶהּ וַיִּנָּחֶם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ:

("And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother, and took Rivka, and she became his wife; and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother.")

Rashi (Genesis 24:67):

האֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ – וַיְבִיאָהּ הָאֵלֶּלֶה וְנִעֲשֶׂת דּוֹגְמַת שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ, כְּלוֹמַר וְהָיָא שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ. כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהִיטָה שָׂרָה קִיּוּמָהּ, הָיָה נֹר דּוֹלֵק בְּאֵהֶל מִעֶרֶב שָׁבֵת לְעֶרֶב שָׁבֵת, וּבִרְכָה מְצוּיָה בְּעִיסָהּ, וְעַנְיָן קָשׁוּר עַל הָאֵהֶל, (וּמִשְׁמַתָּה פֶּסֶקוֹ, וְכִשְׁבָּאת רִבְקָה חָזְרוּ. בְּרַאשִׁית רַבָּה (בְּרַאשִׁית רַבָּה ס' ט"ז):

**Rashi** explains that when Yitzchak brought Rivka into the tent, she became a replica of Sarah his mother. This is because **Sarah's tent is a replica of the Mishkan** (Tabernacle). While Sarah was alive, three miracles were constant: a Shabbat candle burned all week, blessing was found in the dough, and a cloud (representing the Divine Presence, or *Shechinah*) hovered over the tent. When Sarah died, these miracles ceased. Once Rivka entered, the miracles—and the **Shechinah**—returned.

Also, Rivka is not just a wife; she is one of the **Imahot** (Matriarchs). Before Yitzchak could marry her, she had to prove not only that she was a potential wife but also that she could be one of the *Imahot*, and she passed the test with flying colors.

## 7th Aliyah: Genesis 25

Avraham takes a third wife: **Keturah**. With Keturah he has six children.

### Who is Keturah?

**Rashi** brings a Midrash that Keturah was **Hagar**. The name *Keturah* means "incense"



or "perfume," implying that her deeds were now as sweet as incense after she had purified herself. However, **Rashbam** disputes this. He uses the *passuk*:

וְלִבְנֵי הַפִּילָגְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם

("And to the sons of the concubines that Avraham had...")

to prove that Avraham had one main wife, Sarah, and **two Pilagshim** (concubines): Hagar and Keturah.

There is a Midrash that says Avraham had three wives: Sarah was a descendant of **Shem**, Hagar a descendant of **Cham**, and Keturah a descendant of **Yefet**. **Rashbam** sees this as a fulfillment of the blessing of: "**Veniv'recha vecha kol mishpachot ha'adamah**" ("and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed"). He translates **Veniv'rechu** as "and through you will be **grafted**." Avraham influenced the entire world literally through his descendants.

### The Exclusion and the Inheritance

However, only one son will continue his legacy and be the one to carry on the covenant forged with **Hashem**. For this reason, Avraham gives all his other children gifts in his lifetime and sends them away to make clear that **Yitzchak is his true heir**.

According to the opinion that Keturah is Hagar, Avraham gave these children all the wealth that Pharaoh had **originally given him when he went down to Egypt**. This wealth had been acquired under shameful circumstances and had caused a rift between him and Lot, and he wanted nothing to do with it. Instead, he returned it to Hagar, who was the daughter of Pharaoh (according to tradition), so he is returning the gift to the rightful **heirs**.

### Avraham's Death

The *perek* ends with Avraham's death, Yitzchak dwelling in **Be'er Lachai Ro'i**, and a detailed description of **Yishmael's descendants** and his own death.

Conclusion:

### The Enduring Life and Legacy of Sarah

The *Parsha* is called **Chayei Sarah**—The Life of Sarah—yet it begins with her death. This is the Torah's profound way of affirming that her influence is what defines the next generation. Sarah was the essential, resolute partner in the covenantal journey, a

commitment revealed through the very structure of their narrative.

### The Chiastic Structure: Sarah at the Center

When we examine the Torah's presentation of Avraham and Sarah's life together, we find a meticulous **chiastic structure** (A-B-C...C'-B'-A'), a literary mirror that draws all events toward a single, defining center.

Letter	Event (Genesis Chapter)	Thematic Significance
<b>A</b>	<b>Avraham's extended family</b> (Gen. 11:27)	The initial historical and familial origin.
<b>B</b>	The first command of <b>Lekh Lekha</b> (Gen. 12:1)	The initial call to journey and covenant foundation.
<b>C</b>	The famine forcing Avraham to <b>Egypt</b> ; pretending Sarah is his sister (Gen. 12:10)	Testing the security of the marriage and the promise in exile.
<b>D</b>	<b>Separating from Lot</b> (Gen. 13)	Separating the chosen line from the unchosen family.
<b>E</b>	Avraham <b>saving Lot</b> from capture (Gen. 14)	Avraham acts as a righteous warrior and intercessor.
<b>F</b>	<b>Brit Bein HaBetarim</b> (Covenant of the Pieces) (Gen. 15)	The initial divine covenant to promise land and seed.
<b>G</b>	<b><u>CENTRAL THEME: The struggle between Sarah and Hagar</u></b> (Gen. 16)	The pivotal challenge of realizing the covenant promise through a legitimate heir.
<b>F'</b>	<b>Brit Milah</b> (Covenant of Circumcision) (Gen. 17)	The established human sign of the covenant (mirroring F).
<b>E'</b>	Avraham <b>saves Lot through Prayer</b> (Sodom/Amorah) (Gen. 18–19)	Avraham acts as a righteous intercessor (mirroring E).

<b>D'</b>	Avraham <b>separates from Yishmael</b> (Gen. 21:8)	Separating the chosen line from the unchosen seed (mirroring D).
<b>C'</b>	A famine and Avraham goes to <b>Gerar</b> ; pretending Sarah is his sister (Gen. 20)	Testing the security of the marriage and the promise in exile (mirroring C).
<b>B'</b>	<b>Lekh Lekha for the Akeida</b> (Binding of Isaac) (Gen. 22)	The final, ultimate command to journey and fulfill the covenant (mirroring B).
<b>A'</b>	<b>Avraham's family tree</b> (through Nachor/Extended Family) (Gen. 22:20)	The resulting familial and historical context (mirroring A).

The entire arc—from the command of *Lech Lecha* to the final family tree—pivots on the ultimate climax: **The struggle between Sarah and Hagar and the subsequent *Brit Milah***. This was the crucible of the covenant. Sarah's heroic and selfless act of inviting Hagar to help Avraham fulfill the dream of a child, and her subsequent painful necessity to **"humble her"** to protect the spiritual destiny of Yitzchak, was the central, life-defining act. The Angel's instruction to Hagar—to humble herself—highlights that the path into Avraham's dynasty requires this humility and sacrifice. Sarah's entire existence was tied up in securing this future. Her passing—which occurred when she learned of the *Akeida*—serves as the final, dramatic proof that her life and Yitzchak's destiny were one.

### Securing the Legacy in the Parsha

With the central work complete, Avraham's final actions in **Chayei Sarah** are the structural completion of the chiasm, the tangible A', B', and C' elements that lock the divine arrangement into place. Now that Sarah is gone, Avraham must make the most difficult decisions to protect his family and his line. His commitment becomes the continuation of her demanding work:

1. **Insisting on buying Chevron:** Establishing an undisputed, permanent claim to the Promised Land.
2. **Commanding that Yitzchak not marry a local:** Preventing cultural dilution and ensuring the purity of the spiritual path.

3. **Sending away all his other sons:** Clearly designating Yitzchak as the exclusive inheritor of the covenantal *Beracha*.

Through these deliberate and often difficult choices, Avraham continues the foundational investment Sarah made in their marriage and in the future of *Am Yisrael*. The *parsha* is called **Chayei Sarah** because her spirit of resolute preservation and her strategic heroism lives on, shaping and securing the destiny of the Jewish people after her physical passing.