

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Chayei Sarah**  
**November 7, 2015**

**פרשת חיי שרה**  
**כ"ה בחשוון תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 23:1-25:18

In this *parasha*, following the death of Sarah, Avraham purchases a burial plot and sends his servant, Eliezer, to identify a wife for Yitzchak. Eliezer finds Rivka and brings her to Yitzchak to become his wife.

The very end of the *parasha* recounts Avraham's death, followed by a listing of the descendants of Yishmael and notice of Yishmael's death. Chapter 25, verses 8-18 says:

**ח** ויגוע וימת אברהם בשיבה טובה, זקן ושבע; ויאסף, אל-עמיו. **ט** ויקברו אתו יצחק וישמעאל, בניו, אל-מערת, המכפלה: אל-שדה עפרון בן-צחר, החתי, אשר, על-פני ממרא. **י** השדה אשר-קנה אברהם, מאת בני-חת--שמה קבר אברהם, ושרה אשתו. **יא** ויהי, אחרי מות אברהם, ויברך א-להים, את-יצחק בנו; וישב יצחק, עם-באר לחי ראי.

**יב** ואלה תולדת ישמעאל, בן-אברהם: אשר ילדה הגר המצרית, שפחת שרה--לאברהם. **יג** ואלה, שמות בני ישמעאל, בשמותם, לתולדתם: בכר ישמעאל נבית, וקדר ואדבאל ומבשם. **יד** ומשמע ודומה, ומשא. **טו** חדד ותימא, יטור נפיש וקדמה. **טז** אלה הם בני ישמעאל, ואלה שמותם, בחצריהם, ובטירתם--שנים-עשר נשיאם, לאמתם. **יז** ואלה, שני חיי ישמעאל--מאת שנה ושלשים שנה, ושבע שנים; ויגוע וימת, ויאסף אל-עמיו. **יח** וישכנו מחילה עד-שור, אשר על-פני מצרים, באכה, אשורה; על-פני כל-אחיו, נפל.

**8** “And Avraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. **9** And Yitzchak and Yishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; **10** the field which Abraham purchased from the children of Chet; there was Avraham buried, and Sarah his wife. **11** And it came to pass after the death of Avraham, that God blessed Yitzchak his son; and Yitzchak dwelt by Be’er-lachai-ro’i.

**12** “Now these are the generations of Yishmael, Avraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bore unto Avraham. **13** And these are the names of the sons of Yishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the first-born of Yishmael, Nevayot; and Kedar, and Adbe’el, and Mivsam, **14** and Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa; **15** Chadad, and Tema, Yetur, Naphish, and Kedma; **16** these are the sons of Yishmael, and these are their names, by their villages, and by their encampments; twelve princes according to their nations. **17** And these are the years of the life of Yishmael, a hundred and thirty and seven years; and he expired and died; and was gathered to his people. **18** They dwelt from Chavilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled over against all his people.”

If the Torah is a book for the Jewish people, why does it list Yishmael’s descendants and mention his death?

Rashi (11<sup>th</sup> Century Franco-Germany) believes that as Yishmael aged, he atoned for his sin of laughing at and putting down Sarah at Yitzchak’s weaning party (chapter 21). Rashi interprets this from the verse that reads, “Yitzchak and Yishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah...” Not only did the sons work together to bury their father, but Yitzchak’s name is mentioned first, indicating that Yishmael recognized Yitzchak as the true heir of Avraham. Since Yishmael was, by this point, considered righteous, he merited having his descendants enumerated in the Torah.

Ramban (13<sup>th</sup> Century Spain/Palestine) agrees with Rashi about Yishmael’s atonement, and finds as further support the fact that Esav’s death is *not* mentioned, nor his life-span, in contrast to Yishmael’s.

Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi; 13<sup>th</sup> Century Provence) says the following: “The generations of Yishmael are mentioned in order to honor Avraham since he was his first-born, and to tell you that there were twelve princes, as Hashem had said to Avraham [17:20]. Even though he was the ‘son of the maid,’ Avraham loved him since he was his first-born, and God blessed him (Yishmael) for his (Avraham’s) sake, and Hashem gave him success as it says, ‘And God was with the boy and he grew [21:20]’ and he gave birth to twelve princes.”

In presenting the lineage of Yishmael, the Torah acknowledges the status of the Ishmaelites as direct descendants of Avraham. They are not disregarded, but given their due in the context of ancient history. The text also uses this section to establish boundaries, consistent with the theme in *Bereshit* of linking the land of Israel to one branch of Avraham’s descendants. The areas noted in the last verse are located in Central and Northern Arabia. Like the shepherds of Avraham and Lot who opted respectively to go left and right (chapter 13), Avraham’s two sons and their heirs, according to the Torah, chose different parts of the Levant in which to settle. Needless to say, this vision of harmonious coexistence has not always continued in the millennia since this statement, though we hope for its return even if we do not always agree on the particulars of how this should happen.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- How far back can you name your ancestors on each side of your family?
- At certain points in Jewish history, families kept what were called *Sifrei Yuchsin* (Books of Heritage). These were kept for generations with all of the ancestors and descendants listed in chronological order. Why do you think the Jews had these?
- The descendants of Yitzchak and the descendants of Yishmael all originate from the same ancestor, Avraham. How should this affect how Jews and Ishmaelites treat each other?