

- (ג) וַיִּקָּם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־חַת לֵאמֹר.
- (ד) גִּרְוֹתוֹשֵׁב אֲנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם תָּנוּ לִי אַחֲזֵת־קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָה מִתִּי מִלְפָּנַי.
- (ה) וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־חַת אֶת־אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ.
- (ו) שְׂמַעְנוּ אֲדֹנָי נְשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכְנוּ בְּמַבְחָר קִבְּרֵינוּ קֶבֶר אֶת־מִתְּךָ אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־קֶבְרוֹ לֹא־יִכְלָה מִמֶּךָ מִקֶּבֶר מִתְּךָ.
- (ז) וַיִּקָּם אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְעַם־הָאָרֶץ לִבְנֵי־חַת.

to Gan Eden above by being buried in Kiryas Arba (i.e., *Me'aras HaMachpelah*). [This answers Question 2.]

It is for this reason that the Torah states “to eulogize Sarah” rather than “to eulogize *her*.” The emphasis on her name tells us that Avraham was coming to eulogize her only because of who she was (and not for any of the other reasons). She was Sarah, the great *tzaddekes* — connected to the highest worlds — and there is an obligation to mourn the death of a *tzaddik*.²¹ [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to
Question 2

Answer to
Question 3

BUYING A BURIAL PLOT FOR SARAH

Consider the following questions:

1. Why did Avraham speak first to *Bnei Cheis* and request a burial place? Since Avraham wanted specifically to buy *Me'aras HaMachpelah*, he should have gone immediately to Efron (who owned it) and spoken to him!

21. See *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah* 340:6–7.

22. The term “*Bnei Cheis*” means literally “the children of Cheis” and is generally used to refer to the inhabitants of that area, the Hittites. However, the Alshich understands the term as a reference specifically to the leaders of the Hittite nation. We shall therefore use the term “*Bnei Cheis*” without further translation.

2. In verse 3, the word "לֵאמֹר" (*to say*) seems superfluous. What is it coming to tell us?
3. In verse 4, why does Avraham mention that he is both *an alien and a resident* (גֵּר וְתוֹשֵׁב)? Aren't these two terms somewhat contradictory? And why does he add the word "עִמָּכֶם", *with you*?
4. Verse 5 could just have said, "[*Bnei Cheis*] answered Avraham." Why does it add the seemingly superfluous words, "*saying to him*"?
5. Verse 6 should say, "*Listen to us, our master,*" or "*Listen to me, my master.*" Why does it switch from the plural "*us*" (*Listen to us*) to the singular "*my*" (*my master*)?
6. What is the relevance of Avraham being called "*a prince of God*"?
7. Verse 7 states that Avraham bowed down *to the people of the land, to Bnei Cheis*. Are these two groups of people or one? And why does Avraham bow to them?

To help us answer these questions, let us look at the words of the Ramban in his commentary on these verses (*Bereishis* 23:4). The Ramban explains that the custom in those days was that any person who was a resident in a given land owned plots in which he could bury his family's dead. However, anyone who was not a resident of that land was not entitled to that privilege; he would have to bury the dead of his family in a special area set aside for foreigners. They were not allowed to purchase a permanent family burial plot, no matter how much they were willing to pay for it.

Based on this preface we can understand why Avraham first addressed himself to *Bnei Cheis* rather than to Efron, who was the owner of *Me'aras HaMachpelah* that he wished to purchase. Avraham wanted a burial place, not just for Sarah but also for himself and the other couples who would be buried there (namely, Yitzhak and Rivkah, and Yaakov and Leah). He therefore needed to purchase a permanent family plot. But this was something that was

not allowed under the law of the land, since he was not a resident there. If he had addressed himself directly to Efron, Efron would have answered that it was illegal for him to sell Avraham the land for this purpose. He would claim that even if he personally wanted to sell it to him, the town authorities would not allow it. Avraham therefore turned first to the leaders of the town. He wanted to persuade them to give him the status of a resident rather than that of a foreigner so that he would be legally entitled to purchase a permanent burial plot. In this way, he could then turn to Efron — or even better, get the town leaders to turn to Efron — to request that he sell him *Me'aras HaMachpelah*. Efron would then have no excuse to refuse Avraham. [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to
Question 1

Now we can understand what the seemingly superfluous words at the end of verse 3, “Avraham... spoke to *Bnei Cheis*, **to say**” are coming to tell us. Avraham spoke first to the leaders of the town (*Bnei Cheis*) because he wanted them “to say” to Efron that he should sell the field to Avraham and not be concerned about the legal ramifications of the sale. In other words, that they should approve his request and then speak to Efron on his behalf. [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
Question 2

This also explains why Avraham calls himself both an *alien* and a *resident* (Question 3). He was telling the leaders of the city, “In truth *I am an alien* here. I am not a resident here and do not have the right to buy a permanent burial place. But please, give me the status of a full-fledged *resident* “with you” — that is, by your good graces — so I can bury my dead.” [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to
Question 3

The leaders of the city (*Bnei Cheis*) replied to Avraham that he should not be concerned; they would certainly grant his request since “you are like a *prince of God in our midst*.” By giving Avraham this unusual title, *Bnei Cheis* were telling him: “If you were just a normal prince or leader who had been appointed to that position through some human officer or king, then we would have been able to refuse your request. We would have claimed that it is not right to ignore the law of the land that

(1) Avraham was old, coming with days, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything.

(2) Avraham said to his slave,²³ the elder of his household, who was in charge of everything he had, “Please place your hand under my thigh.

(3) I will make you take an oath by Hashem, the God of the heavens and the God of the earth that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites amongst whom I dwell.

(4) Instead, go to my land and to my kindred, and you shall take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak.”

forbids giving a burial plot to a foreigner — and the authority who made you a prince would agree! But since it is from God that you have been appointed a prince over us, we and our laws are subject to your authority, and therefore you may *bury your dead in the best of our burial plots.*” [This answers Question 6.]

Now, one might suspect that *Bnei Cheis* were insincere when they gave Avraham this exalted title. Perhaps it was simply their custom to flatter people in this manner. In order to make it clear that this was not the case, the Torah introduces their words with the seemingly redundant words “*saying to him*” (verse 6). *They answered Avraham, saying to him* — meaning to him and to him alone — “*You are a prince of God in our midst.*” There is no one as great as you amongst us, and we mean what we say with complete sincerity.” [This answers Question 4.]

Furthermore, Avraham might have been concerned that only the officials who were talking to him felt this way. Therefore the people who addressed him spoke in the plural, “*Listen to us.*” Do not think that some of us are against you. All of us are united in our agreement to your request, since our respect for you is so great.” This explains as well why the speakers then switched to the singular form, addressing Avraham as “*my master.*” They meant to convey: We all respect you to this degree; it is as if each of us individually is saying to you, “*You are my master.*” [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to
Question 6

Answer to
Question 4

Answer to
Question 5