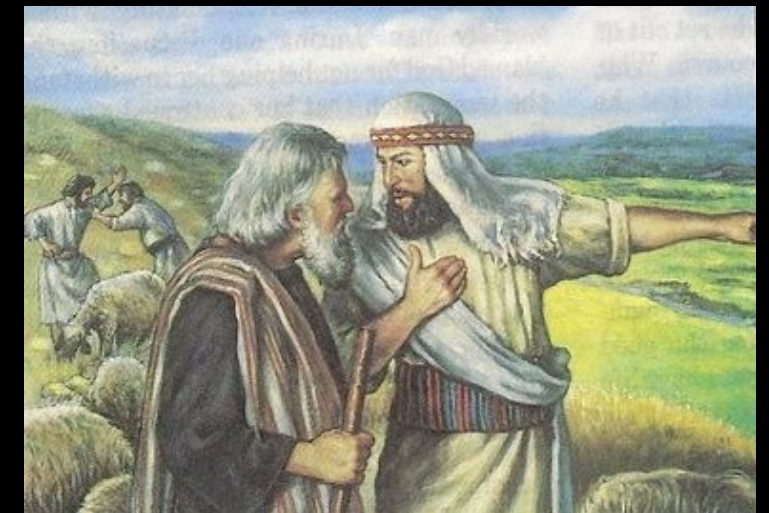


The First Jews



Sarah & Abraham
שָׂרָה & אַבְרָהָם



To be a Student of Abraham

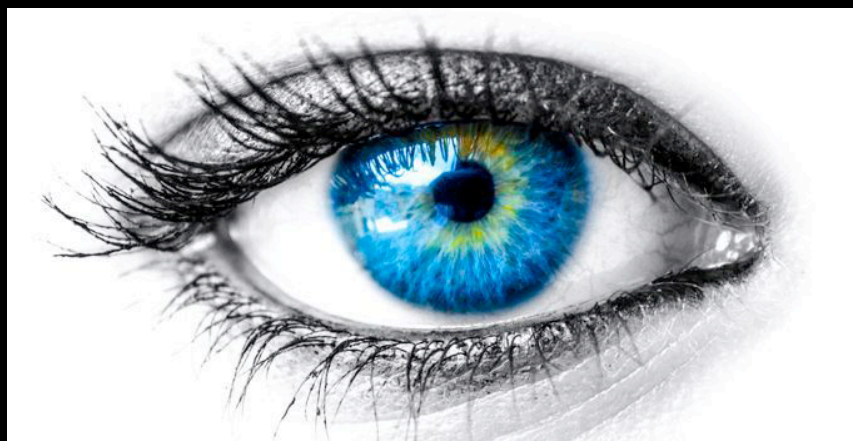
כָּל מִי שֵׁישׁ בִּידּוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הֵלֵלוּ, מִתְלַמְּדֵיּוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ

Whoever possesses these three things, is of the disciples of Abraham, our father;

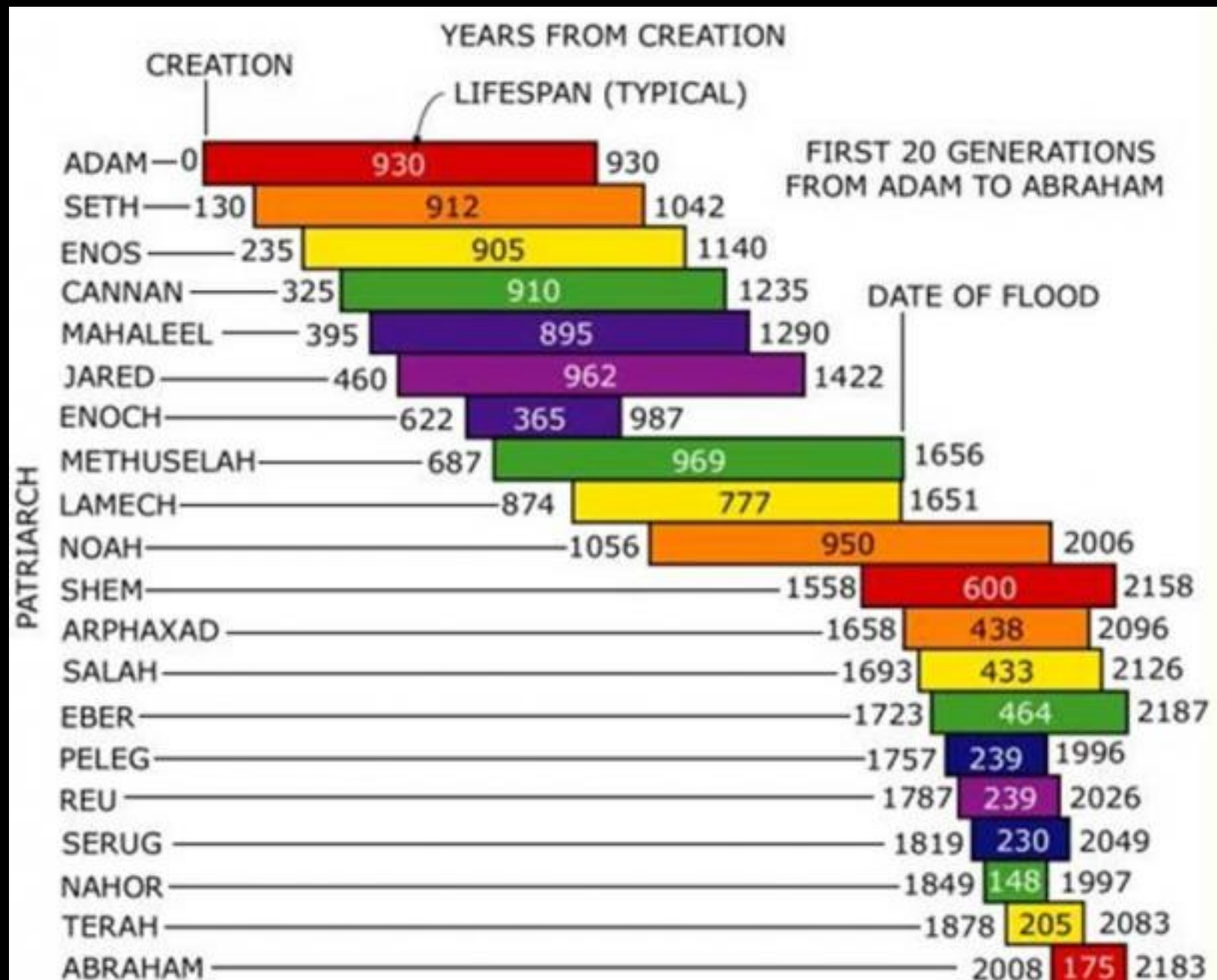
1. A Good Eye (See the Good / Generosity)
2. A Humble Spirit (Humility)
3. A Low Temperance (Careful with Desires)

עֵינַי טוֹבָה
וְרוּחִ נְמוּכָה
וְנַפְשִׁי שְׂפֵלָה

Source: Pirkei Avot - Ethics of the Fathers - Chapter 5:19



Who was Abraham?



3 Patriarchs - *Avot* - אבות

Abraham - *Avraham*

Isaac - *Yitzhak*

Jacob - *Yaakov*

4 Matriarchs - *Imahot* - אמהות

Sarah

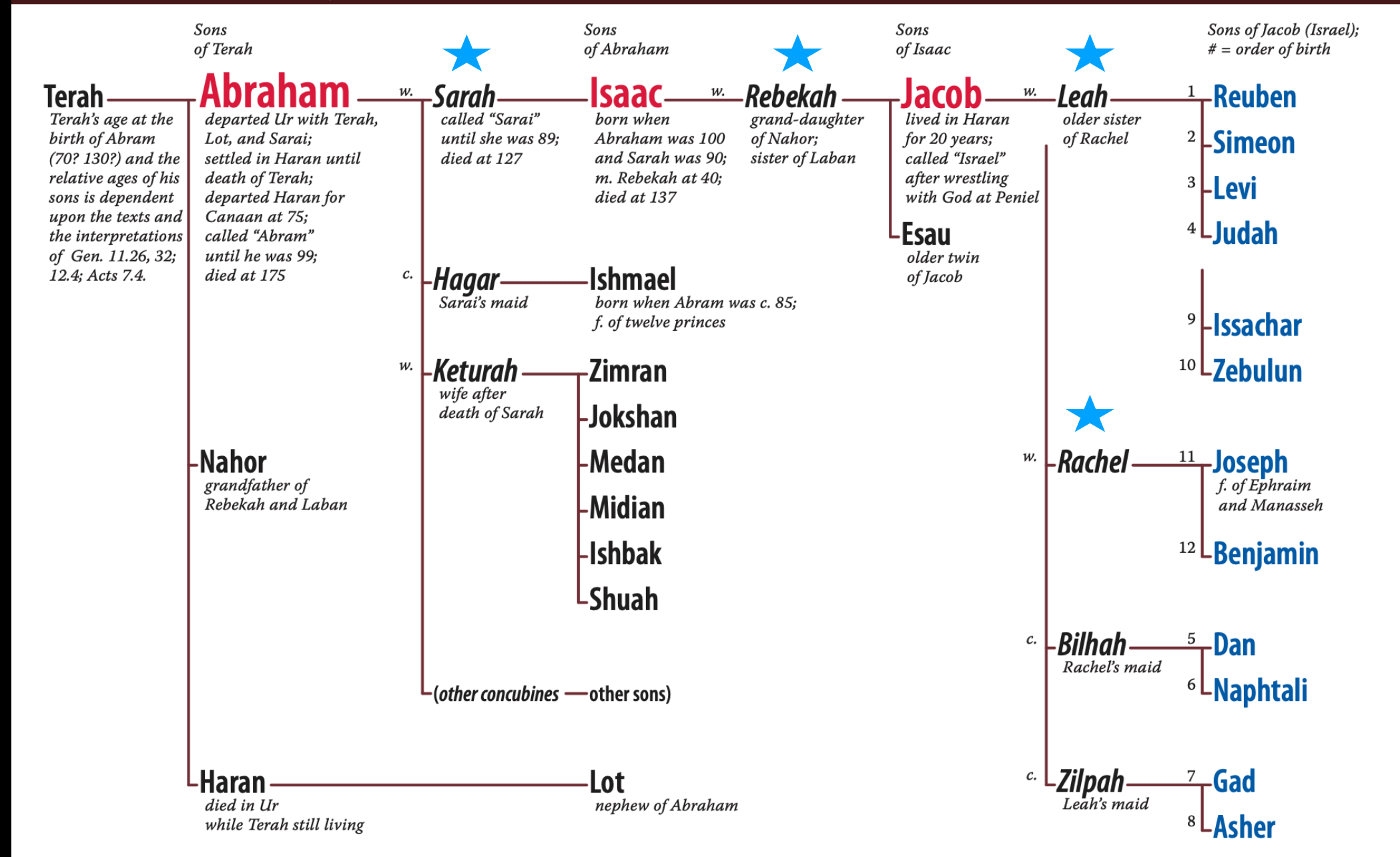
Rebecca (*Rivka*)

Rachel (*Ra-Chel*)

Leah

The Patriarchal Family Tree

Genesis 11-50



What made Abraham so Special? (Part 1)

אֶמֶת – Truth

- Midrash 1: Abram finds God for himself by exploring Nature when he is 3 years old.

גְּבוּרָה –
Strength / Courage

- Midrash 2: Abram has the courage to smash all his fathers idols and break away from the world of idol worship.

אֱמוּנָה –
Faith / Loyalty

- Midrash 3: Abram had complete faith in Hashem and refused to bow to the evil King Nimrod. As punishment, Nimrod throws Abram him into the fire. He is miraculously saved.

חֶסֶד –
Acts of Kindness

- Midrash 4: Abram and Sarai went all over doing acts of kindness (Chesed). They would slowly teach others to do the same, and about the One and only ruler of the Universe, thereby spreading Hashem's name in the world.

What made Abraham so Special? (Part 2)

זריזות –

Readiness / Enthusiasm

- At the age of 75, Abram listens to Hashem's command to leave everything he knows behind and follow him to an unknown land (Israel), where he will become a blessing for the entire world and have many children. From Abram we learn that there is a Mitzva to make *Aliyah* and live in Israel. **Abram does so immediately and with great love and excitement!** (Genesis 12:1)

צדק תרדוף –

Pursue Righteousness

- When Hashem tells Abram that he intends to destroy the evil cities of Sodom and Gemora, **Abraham argues with God** and says if there are even 10 righteous people in the city it would be unjust for "the Judge of all the Earth not to **do the right thing**" and punish the wicked with the righteous. (Genesis 18:25)

אוהב שלום –

Love Peace

- Abram painfully parts with his nephew Lot for the **sake of Peace**, so that their shepherds will no longer fight over their fields. Similarly Abraham **makes Peace covenants with his enemies** (like Abimelech) so there will be no more fights over their wells.

(Genesis 13:8, 21:27)

What made Abraham so Special? (Part 3)

שְׁלוֹם בֵּית –
Peace in the Home

- Midrash: Wherever they journeyed, **Abraham would pitch Sarah's tent for the women first and only then his own.** Both tents would have openings on all 4 sides for guests. Sarah's tent was a place of miracles. In Sarah's tent the Shabbat Candles would stay lit all week long. Her tent always radiated with the scent of fresh Challah breads. The Rabbis teach us that the **Shabbat candles that Jewish women light every week following Sarah's example - bring peace and love into our own homes.**
- Since Sarah could not have children for so many years, she tells Abram to try and have a child with her maidservant, Hagar. Though it was upsetting, for the sake of **peace in the home Abraham listened to Sarah** and ends up conceiving a child, Ishmael, with Hagar. Years later when Sarah is blessed with her own child, Isaac, she sees that Ishmael is a very bad influence on him. **Abraham then listens Sarah's voice again** (despite not liking the idea), when she tells him to banish Hagar and his first born son Ishmael from their house.

(Genesis 16:2, 21:12)

What made Abraham so Special? (Part 4)

– כֹּחַ Strength

- At the age of 99, Abram follows Hashem's instruction to circumcise himself and his household- ie have a *Brit Milah*. This took enormous strength. As a reward Hashem adds a letter of his own name ה (H - from Hashem) to Abram and Sarai's names and they become Abraham and Sarah. (Genesis 17:11)

– הַכְנָסַת אֹרְחִים Hospitality

- When Abraham (while still recovering from his Brit Milah) saw 3 men passing by his tent, he ran out in the heat of the day to invite them over for a meal. He and Sarah ran to provide them food and water, and also accompanied them on their way out. These 3 men turned out to be angels, and they blessed Abraham & Sarah that they will finally have a child of their own in the following year and Sarah laughs (source of the hebrew name Yitzhak - Isaac). (Genesis 18:2)

What made Abraham so Special? (Part 5)

- Abraham was the first to pray. He was the first to call Hashem אֱלֹהִים ie. the Master of all. **The Rabbis teach us that Abraham instituted the Morning prayer service *Shacharit*.**

תְּפִלָּה – Prayer

He woke up early to pray on behalf of Lot and the cities of Sodom and Gemora. He prays for Abimelech and his people to be able to conceive children when they were unable (even when he and Sarah themselves could not conceive). The Rabbis teach us from Abraham's prayers that when a person is lacking something, his prayers have a much better chance of being successful when he includes in his prayers others who are similarly in need.

(Genesis 12:8, 18:16, 19:27, 20:17)

What made Abraham so Special? (Part 6)

- In the final of 10 tests Abraham underwent, Hashem commands Abraham to raise up his beloved son Isaac as an offering. Though beyond human comprehension **Abraham doesn't hesitate to fulfill God's command**. He wakes up early in the morning and takes Isaac and 2 servants on a journey to the site of what will one day be the Temple, ie. the *Beit HaMikdash*. As he prepares to slaughter his son as a sacrifice, an angel quickly stops him! Because he proved his **selflessness and absolute submission to Hashem's will**, the angel tells Abraham that God now knows for sure that Abraham is truly his beloved friend and that through this very son Isaac he will receive all the blessings of children, Jewish destiny, and the land of Israel he promised. Abraham sees a Ram caught in some bushes by its horn nearby, and sacrifices the Ram to God (in place of his son) then returns home with Isaac.

(Genesis 22:1)

- This monumental test is known as "The Binding of Isaac - *Akeidat Yitzhak*" - עקדת יצחק and we read this **portion at Shul on Rosh Hashana**. The Ram's horn is the source for a Shofar. When we read this portion and blow the shofar we recall the incredible faith that Abraham and Isaac showed in that moment, the deep cry that they must have each felt through the challenge, and the kindness God showed in providing a Ram to be offered in Isaac's place. On Rosh Hashana we pray that the merit Abraham earned for us (his descendants) in this final test, should protect us from the punishments our sins really deserve. **We pray that just like Abraham was able to overcome his fatherly mercy for his child to act strictly in fulfilling God's will, so too should God overcome the severity of his strict justice and instead turn to his virtues of mercy and kindness in judging us for a good year.**

אֱמוּנָה –
Faith / Loyalty

אַהֲבָה –
Love

רַחֲמִים –
Mercy

דִּין –
Justice

יִרְאַת ה' –
Fear of God

עֲנוּה –
Humility

What made Abraham so Special? (Part 7)

Honesty in Business

- Sarah lived 127 beautiful years. Upon her passing, Abraham sets out to purchase a burial plot for her in the city of Hebron in a field that contained a double cave named "*Ma'arat HaMachpela*." Abraham is totally **upright in his business dealings** and insists on paying the full amount (a considerable sum) for the field. He thereby finally secures the first Jewish purchase of land in the Promised Land and set the stage for his descendants to inherit the entire land of Israel.

(Genesis 23:1)

Ensuring Jewish Continuity

- After Sarah's death, **Abraham recognizes it is time to find a wife for his son Isaac**. He instructs his servant Eliezer to go back to his Parents homeland and find a righteous woman **from amongst his people and not the idol-worshipping non-Jews of the land**. Eliezer returns with a wonderful, kind, beautiful cousin Rebecca who he realizes is the perfect match for Isaac as she reminds him of Sarah and Abraham. Rebecca is a doer and does wonderful acts of chesed. See Parshat Chayei Sarah for the stories of Rebecca providing water for Eliezer and his camels...

(Genesis 24:4)