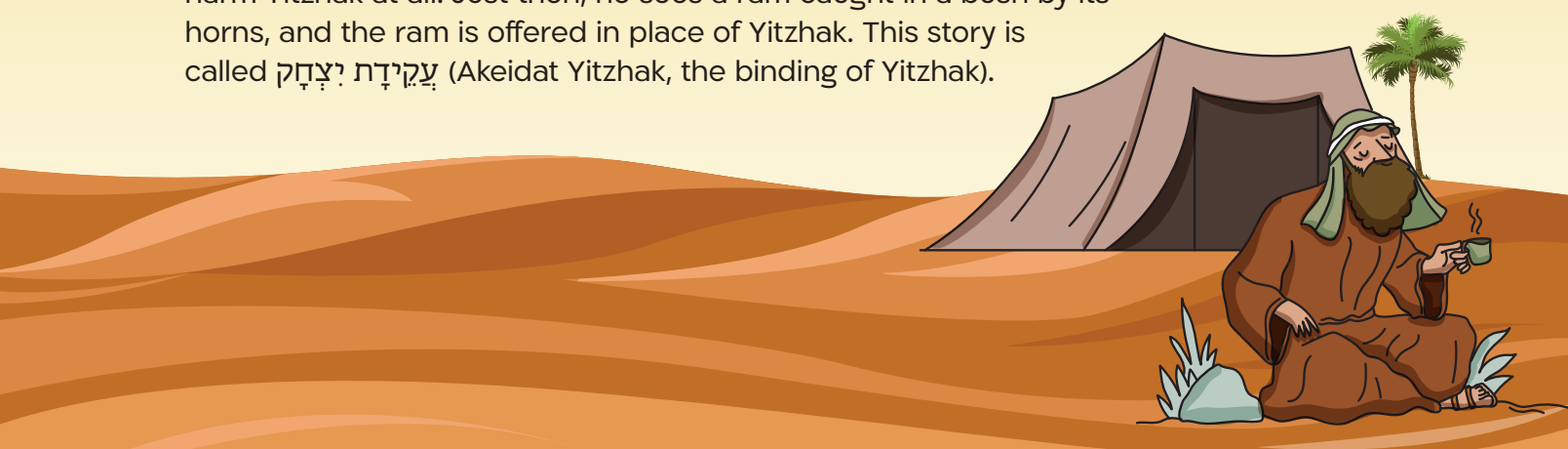
DeVaSh
Because learning Torah is sweet
פָּרָשַׁת וַיֵּרָא Vayera
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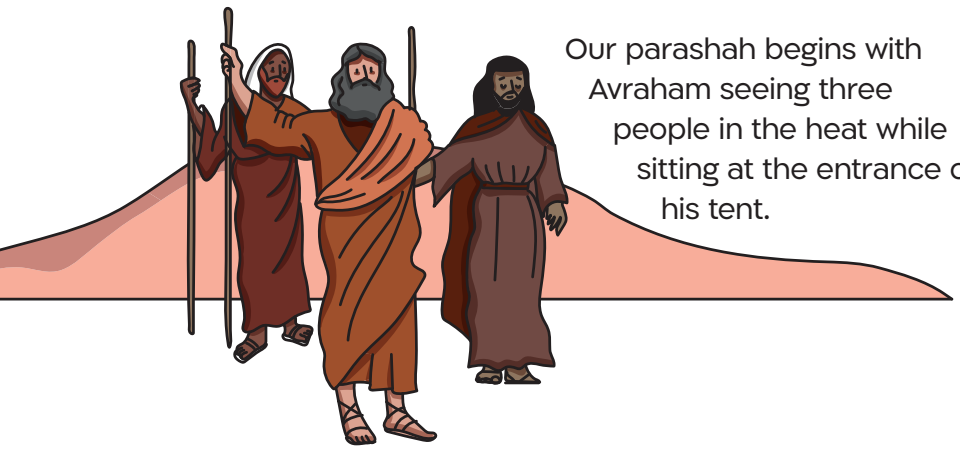


מָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- Avraham sits outside his tent on a very hot day, sees three figures in the distance, and runs out to invite them over for food and drinks.
- The guests are actually angels, and they tell Avraham and Sarah that Yitzhak will be born in the coming year.
- God tells Avraham that Sedom is going to be destroyed because of the people's horrible behavior there. Avraham pleads on Sedom's behalf, but there are not enough righteous people in the city to save it.
- Lot, his wife, and two of his daughters run away while Sedom is destroyed by fire from the sky, but his wife turns back to look and becomes a pillar of salt.
- Yitzhak is born when Sarah is 90 years old and Avraham is 100.
- Sarah sends Yishmael away with his mother, Hagar.
- God tests Avraham by commanding him to offer Yitzhak as a sacrifice. They travel for three days to the mountain God shows Avraham. An angel calls out to Avraham at the last second, telling Avraham not to harm Yitzhak at all. Just then, he sees a ram caught in a bush by its horns, and the ram is offered in place of Yitzhak. This story is called עֲקֵדַת יִצְחָק (Akeidat Yitzhak, the binding of Yitzhak).



מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash



Our parashah begins with Avraham seeing three people in the heat while sitting at the entrance of his tent.

There are often gaps in the Torah's telling of the story and there are also phrases that are curious and draw our attention. Midrash tries to fill in gaps in the story while also answering questions or resolving difficulties. You can think of midrash as where the text and an idea meet.

Genesis 18:2

He lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three **men** were standing beside him, and he saw and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and he bowed to the ground.

בראשית יח:ב

וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה **אֲנָשִׁים** נִצָּבִים עָלָיו וַיַּרְא וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה׃

However, at the beginning of the next chapter, when two of the men head to Sedom, the Torah no longer refers to the individuals as אֲנָשִׁים (anashim, men), but as מַלְאָכִים (malakhim, angels):

Genesis 19:1

The two **angels** arrived in Sedom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sedom, and Lot saw and arose toward them, and he bowed his face down to the ground.

בראשית יט:א

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי **הַמַּלְאָכִים** סְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־סְדֹם וַיַּרְא־לוֹט וַיָּקָם לִקְרָאתָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַפַּיִם אָרְצָה׃

What were they—angels or men? Why does the Torah call them two different things? This midrash notices the strange shift in language:



Bereishit Rabbah 50:2

Earlier, when the שְׁכִינָה (Shekhinah, Divine Presence) was above them, the Torah called them "men"; as soon as the Shekhinah departed from them, they appeared as angels.

Rabbi Tanhuma said Rabbi Levi said: To Avraham, whose spiritual strength was great, they looked like men; but to Lot, whose strength was feeble, they appeared as angels.

בראשית רבה נ:ב

אֶלָּא לְהַלָּן שֶׁהָיְתָה שְׁכִינָה עַל גַּבֵּיהֶן קְרָאָם אֲנָשִׁים, בֵּיוָן שֶׁנִּסְתַּלְּקָה שְׁכִינָה מֵעַל גַּבֵּיהֶן לָבְשׁוּ מַלְאָכוּת.

אָמַר רַבִּי תַּנְחוּמָא אָמַר רַבִּי לֵוִי אַבְרָהָם שֶׁהָיָה כֹּחוֹ יָפֶה נִדְמוּ לוֹ בִּדְמוּת אֲנָשִׁים, אֲבָל לוֹט עַל יְדֵי שֶׁהָיָה כֹּחוֹ רַע נִדְמוּ לוֹ בִּדְמוּת מַלְאָכִים.

According to this midrash, these characters were angels, not human beings. But the midrash teaches that the way they were seen or described was influenced by context—by what was going on around them. This plays out in two ways.

1

The first interpretation in the midrash teaches us about how people should be described. Apparently, when God was so present, it was only appropriate for the Torah to call the angels "men," not "angels." Perhaps this is because it is better to be more humble when God is around, and even an angel should not insist on being called an "angel" in that case. This can teach us not to think too highly of ourselves. That is called having humility.



- How does bragging make other people around us feel? Who is being disrespected when we brag?
- In what way is it okay to talk about our accomplishments?

2

The second interpretation in the midrash teaches that the characters actually seemed different—either like men or like angels—based on who was looking at them. Avraham was on a very high spiritual level, almost like an angel himself. To Avraham, these characters seemed just like himself, like equals. So, when they were near Avraham, the Torah describes them like Avraham saw them—as human beings, just like himself. But Lot was on a lower spiritual level. To him, these characters seemed very different from himself. So, when they were near Lot, the Torah describes them like Lot saw them—not as human beings like himself, but as angels.



- Sometimes, the way we see other people is impacted by our experiences and perspectives. Is it ever possible to really understand other people for who they are? How so? What kinds of things do we often assume about other people that might not really be true?

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Design by Jen Klor. Illustration by Elad Lifshitz.

פֵּרוּשִׁים • Commentary

When Hagar and her son, Yishmael, are sent away from the home of Avraham and Sarah, they wander in the hot desert for a long time, and their water runs out. Yishmael looks like he might die from thirst, and Hagar can't bear to watch, so she places Yishmael under a bush and bursts into tears. God immediately hears Yishmael's voice, and this is what happens:



Bereishit 21:17

God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the cry of the boy **where he is**."

בראשית כא:יז

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶת־קוֹל הַנַּעַר וַיִּקְרָא מַלְאַךְ אֱלֹקִים אֶל־הָגָר מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַה־לָּךְ הָגָר אַל־תִּירְאִי כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנַּעַר **בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם**:

What does the angel mean when he tells Hagar that God heard the cry of Yishmael בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם (ba-asher hu sham, where he is)? Here are two opinions on this question:

Ramban (13th century, Spain)

[God] informed [Hagar] that she will not need to go from there to a fountain or well, for in that very place he will quench his thirst immediately.

רמב"ן

הוֹדִיעַ אוֹתָהּ שֶׁלֹּא תִּצְטָרֵךְ לָלֶכֶת מִשָּׁם אֶל מַעְיָן וּבוֹר כִּי בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יִרְוֶה צָמְאוֹ מִיָּד



However, Rashi has a very different understanding (his reading is based on Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashanah 16b):

Rashi (11th century, France)

According to his actions now he will be judged, and not according to what he may do in the future. The angels had made claims against him, saying, "Master of the Universe, for him [Yishmael] whose descendants will in the future kill your children with thirst, will You provide a well?" God asked them, "What is he now, righteous or wicked?" They replied, "Righteous." God said to them, "According to his present deeds will I judge him."

רש"י

לְפִי מַעֲשִׂים שֶׁהוּא עוֹשֶׂה עַכְשָׁו הוּא נִדּוֹן, וְלֹא לְפִי מַה שֶּׁהוּא עָתִיד לַעֲשׂוֹת, לְפִי שֶׁהָיוּ מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת מְקַטְרְגִים וְאוֹמְרִים רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, מִי שֶׁעָתִיד זַרְעוֹ לְהָמִית בָּנֶיךָ בַּצָּמָא אַתָּה מַעֲלֶה לוֹ בְּאֵר, וְהוּא מְשִׁיבָם עַכְשָׁו מַה הוּא, צַדִּיק אוֹ רָשָׁע? אָמְרוּ לוֹ צַדִּיק, אָמַר לָהֶם לְפִי מַעֲשָׂיו שֶׁל עַכְשָׁו אֲנִי דָנוֹ

Rashi says "where he is" refers to who Yishmael is at that moment. The angels look into the future and see that Yishmael's future children would cause harm to the Jewish people. So, they say he should not be saved. However, God refuses to judge Yishmael harshly based on the future, and instead creates a well to save him because he is righteous "where he is"—in that moment in time.

- What do you think the Torah is emphasizing about Yishmael being "where he is" when God appears? Why is it important for the Torah to specify this detail?



הֲלָכָה • Halakhah



At the beginning of the parashah, Avraham is talking to God, but interrupts the conversation and runs off because he sees strangers he wants to invite as guests to his home. From Avraham's eagerness to welcome guests, we can learn about the importance of הַכְנָסַת אוֹרְחִים (hakhnasat orhim, welcoming guests).



Bereishit 18:1-2

God appeared to him by the oaks of Mamrei, and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent when the day was hot. He lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing beside him, and he saw and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and he bowed to the ground.

בראשית יח:א-ב

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה׳ בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא
וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם
הַיּוֹם: וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה
שְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים נִצָּבִים עָלָיו
וַיַּרְא וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתָם מִפֶּתַח
הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה:

Avraham welcomes the guests inside, allows them to wash off from their travels, and, together with Sarah, serves them a large meal, standing by them like a waiter to provide for their needs. The Talmud learns a number of important aspects of hakhnasat orhim from Avraham's behavior.

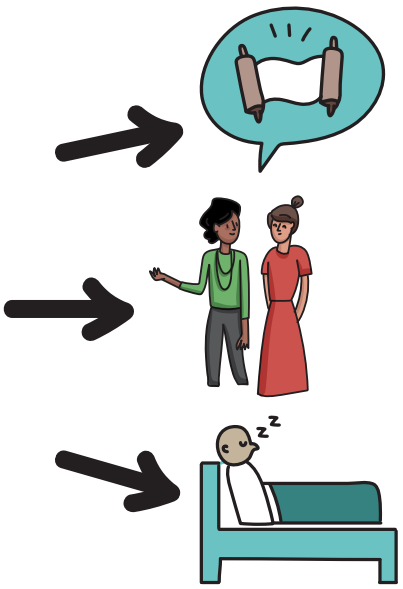
- Bava Metzia 87a: "Say a little, and do a lot." Avraham first tells the guests he will serve them "a loaf of bread" (Bereishit 18:5), but ends up serving them a full meal with lots of delicious food (Bereishit 18:7). From this, we learn to go above and beyond—to do kind things for people even without talking about it.
- Shabbat 127a: From the way Avraham rushes to greet the guests even after God appeared to him, Rabbi Yehudah says we can see how hakhnasat orhim is even greater than welcoming God's presence.

Why do you think hakhnasat orhim is treated as such an important mitzvah?

Making our Guests Comfortable

The mitzvah of hakhnasat orhim is not just about inviting guests into our home—it's also about how we treat them while they're there to ensure they feel truly welcome.

- Sefer Hasidim (312) says that you should not ask a guest to share a dvar Torah unless you're certain that the guest will be comfortable doing so.
- The Rambam (Hilkhot Avel, 14:2) writes that escorting guests after a meal is the most important aspect of hakhnasat orhim.
- True hospitality is not only about providing a meal, but also about welcoming guests who need a place to sleep (Rema, Orah Hayyim 333:1).





מָה זֶה • What's Going On Here?

Why a pillar of salt? Before Lot and his family ran away from the destruction of Sedom, the angels warned them not to look back. But Lot's wife did turn back to look—so she turned into a pillar of salt (Bereishit 19:26)! Why, of all things, was she turned into salt?

Without other details in the Torah to understand this, two midrashim assume that she must have done something wrong to have deserved such a terrible end. Also, we know that the people of Sedom were not welcoming to the angels who came to Lot as guests. So, these midrashim offer the following explanations:

1. She did not want to allow her guests to have salt in their food, even though it would have made it taste much better and it wouldn't have cost very much (Bereishit Rabbah 50:4).



2. She went around to her neighbors asking for salt for her guests, knowing that guests were not allowed in Sedom and she was endangering them by asking (Bereishit Rabbah 51:5).





רֶגַע שֶׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Bereishit 18:16

The men set out from there and **looked down** toward Sedom, Avraham walking with them to see them off.

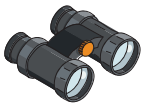
בראשית יח:טז

וַיָּקֻמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים
וַיַּשְׁקִפוּ עַל־פְּנֵי סְדֹם
וְאַבְרָהָם הֹלֵךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְּחָם׃

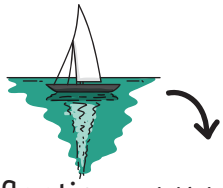


לְהַשְׁקִיף (שׁ.ר.ש)

To observe or overlook



Binoculars = מִשְׁקֶפֶת



Reflection = הִשְׁתַּקְפוּת



Glasses = מִשְׁקָפַיִם



Transparent, see-through = שָׁקוּף

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דַּקָּה שֶׁל דִּיּוּן • One-Minute Debate



How to play:

Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!

For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.

Debate: Avraham offered his guests bread and water, but then served them a big meal with meat and cakes. It's always better to say less and do more.

Agree!

- Don't over-promise. It gives people false hope, and sets them up to be disappointed if you can't follow through.

Disagree!

- If I knew I was going to have a big meal, I would want to save room in my stomach.
- Dream big! Sometimes, we have to set big expectations to push ourselves to do more than we thought we could.

בּוֹאוּ נְדַבֵּר עַל זֶה • Tell Me More About This!

The Bereishit Rabbah text in this week's Midrash section (p. 2) includes a quotation in the name of two rabbis, Rabbi Tanhuma and Rabbi Levi. What's going on here? Who said this—Rabbi Tanhuma or Rabbi Levi?

It was very important to our rabbis to accurately remember who said what, בְּשֵׁם אוֹמְרוֹ (be-sheim omro, in the name of the one who said it). So, it was actually both Rabbi Tanhuma and Rabbi Levi, because Rabbi Tanhuma is reporting that Rabbi Levi taught him this midrash. Sometimes, you might find a chain of five or more names, meaning that each one reported that they learned the tradition from the one before!

It turns out that people are much better at remembering what we learned than remembering where we learned it, so it takes extra effort to make sure we say things be-sheim omro.

- Can you think of something that you learned but you don't remember where you learned it? Does it matter?
- Why might it be important to remember where you learned something?

שְׁאֵלוֹת הַשָּׁבוּעַ • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. The answers to the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.

Good luck!

1. How does God change what Sarah had said when reporting it to Avraham?

2. Avraham argues that if there are enough righteous people in Sedom, the whole city should be saved. What is the minimum number of righteous people Avraham asks for?



3. There is an unusual, rare note in this parashah called שַׁלְשֶׁלֶת (shalshelet). It looks like this: ֚ On what word does it appear?

4. What curse did the household of Avimelekh suffer because he kidnapped Sarah?

5. What weapon is used to describe how far away Hagar sends her son?

6. What is the name of the general of Avimelekh, the king of the Plishtim?

7. What is Rivkah's relationship to Yitzhak?

8. This parashah explains how two cities got their names. What are they?

9. How many words total does Yitzhak speak in this parashah?

10. Aside from Sarah's laughter, the parashah describes two other people as מְצַחֵק (metzahek, laughing/ making fun). Who are they?

* Look for the answers on page 12!



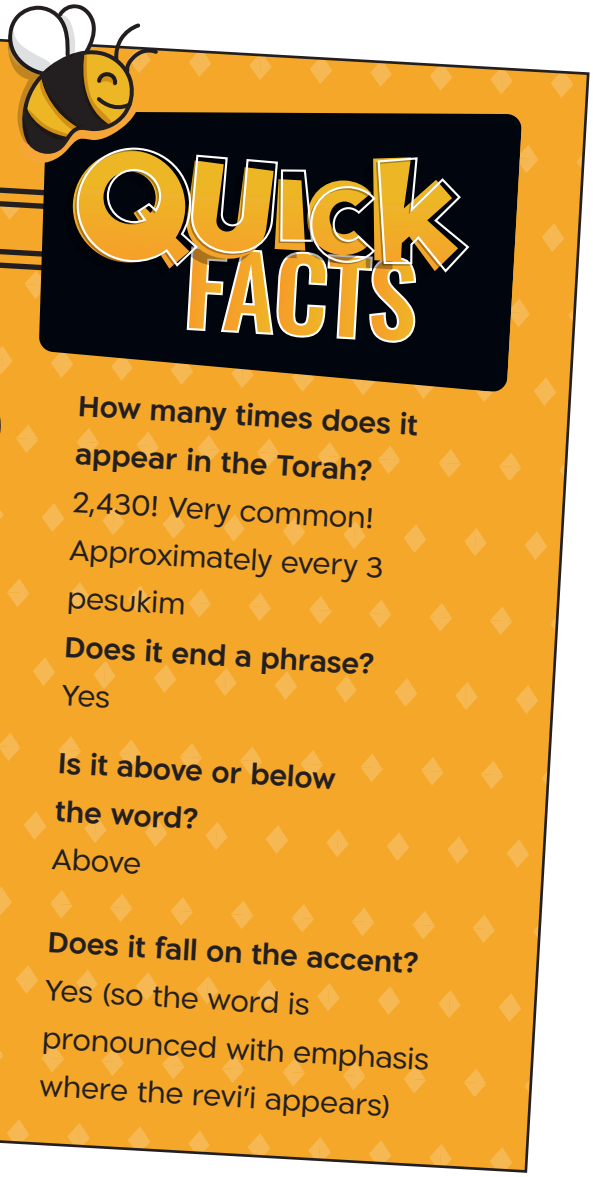


טַעֲמֵי הַמִּקְרָא • Torah Trop



רְבִיעִי Revi'i

This week's note is revi'i, which looks like a diamond. The name revi'i means fourth, which makes sense, because the diamond has four sides. It makes a dropping sound, almost like you are drilling a musical hole. This is another pretty common note—you are guaranteed to hear it lots of times every week. Revi'i is kind of an intense note—you can't go straight from it to the middle or the end of a verse. Sometimes, it actually kicks off a whole bunch of other fancy notes right after it. Here is the first case of a revi'i in this week's parashah:



Bereishit 18:2

He saw

בראשית יח:ב



וַיַּ֥רְא



Revi'i appears on top of the word, not the bottom like the two previous notes we've seen, so look for it there!



מִי הָיוּ חֲכָמֵינוּ • Who Were Our Sages?

Ramban (רַמְבָּ"ן) is short for "**Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman**" (רַבִּי מֹשֶׁה בֶּן נַחְמָן), also known as **Nahmanides** (which means, "son of Nahman," in Greek). He was a rabbi, doctor, and philosopher who lived in 13th century Girona (in northern Spain or Catalan). He wrote loads of Jewish books, including commentaries on the Talmud and the Torah. His work on the Torah is probably his most famous, where he focuses on פְּשָׁט (pshat, the straightforward meaning) as well as hidden and mystical meanings.

You can get a sense for his personality just based on the title of one of his books, מִלְחֶמֶת ה' (Milhemet Hashem, God's War). An earlier rabbi from his town, Rabbi Zerahyah HaLevi, wrote a book criticizing the work of Rabbi Yitzhak Alfasi (also known as the Rif). Ramban rose to his defence, fighting an analytical "war" on the Rif's—and God's—behalf.

Towards the end of his life, Girona became a much less safe place for Jews and, after defending his community against anti-Semitism, the Ramban had to leave. He ended up in Eretz Yisrael, where he strengthened the Jewish community in Yerushalayim and lived the last years of his life.



Shabbat Shalom!

~ שבת שלום ~

Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Sarah said, וַאדֹנִי זָקֵן (va-adoni zakein, my husband is old), but God reports that she said, וַאֲנִי זָקַנְתִּי (va-ani zakanti, I am old), when God discusses it with Avraham
2. Ten
3. וַיִּתְמַהְמָהּ (va-yitmahmah, he delayed)
4. They couldn't give birth
5. A bow-and-arrow: כִּמְטַחֲוִי קֶשֶׁת (kimtahavei keshet, as far as you would shoot an arrow)
6. Pikhol
7. She is the daughter of Betuel, who is the son of Nahor, who is the brother of Avraham, who is the father of Yitzhak; they are first cousins once removed
8. Tzo'ar and Be'er Sheva
9. Seven: אֲבִי הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה (father, here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?)
10. Lot (described that way by his sons-in-law); Yishmael (seen this way by Sarah)



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