



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 15 | Chayei Sarah | Sichah 4

## Untying the Knot

---

Translated by Rabbi Kivi Greenbaum

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

Content Editor: Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

© Copyright by Sichos In English 2022 ◦ 5783

A note on the translation: Rounded and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; curly brackets are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in curly brackets are those of the translator or editors and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Bolded words are italicized in the original text.

Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

**Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: [info@projectlikkuteisichos.org](mailto:info@projectlikkuteisichos.org)**

## 1.

### WHO WAS KETURAH?

On the verse,<sup>1</sup> “Avraham added, and he took a wife named Keturah,” Rashi explains: “Keturah — this is Hagar,<sup>2</sup> and she is called Keturah because her deeds were as beautiful as incense,<sup>3</sup> and because she tied her opening,<sup>4</sup> for she was not intimate with any man from the day she separated from Avraham.”<sup>5</sup>

We need to clarify:

- a) What is the proof from the **simple** reading of the verse that Keturah is Hagar? On the contrary, from the simple reading of the verse, “Avraham added, and he took a wife named...,” it implies that “And he took a wife” refers to a **new** wife, **besides** a previous one (as the Midrash asks:<sup>6</sup> “But it says, ‘Avraham added?’”).
  
- b) Since when giving his second reason, Rashi uses the conjunction “and” — “(and she was called Keturah because her deeds were as beautiful as incense,) **and** because she tied her opening...,” instead of saying, “another explanation”<sup>7</sup> (or something similar) — clearly, Rashi learns that these are [not two **separate** explanations (as they appear in the Midrash)<sup>8</sup> why she is called Keturah, but] two reasons behind one explanation. Meaning, the name “Keturah” alludes to both explanations jointly: It connotes incense (“her deeds were as beautiful as incense”), **and** it connotes tying (“she tied her opening...”).

---

<sup>1</sup> Bereishis 25:1.

<sup>2</sup> Berieishis Rabbah, ch. 61, sec. 4; Tanchuma, “Chayei Sarah,” sec. 8; Zohar, p. 133b.

<sup>3</sup> {Keturah is etymologically related to *ketores*, meaning, “incense.”}

<sup>4</sup> {Keturah is etymologically related to the Aramaic word *katar*, which means, “to tie.”}

<sup>5</sup> {After his wife Sarah was barren for many years, Avraham married her maidservant Hagar, and they had a child together, Yishmael. Sarah eventually became pregnant and gave birth to Yitzchak. Upon Sarah’s request, Avraham sent Hagar and Yishmael away. The Torah then tells us that Avraham married a woman named Keturah.}

<sup>6</sup> Berieishis Rabbah, ch. 61, sec. 4.

<sup>7</sup> {When bringing a second explanation, Rashi often says, “Another explanation is....” Here, he just says, “and.”}

<sup>8</sup> Tanchuma, “Chayei Sarah,” sec. 8; Berieishis Rabbah, ch. 61, sec. 4.

We need to clarify how Rashi derives that there were **two** reasons she was called “Keturah” according to the simple reading of the verse (as distinct from the Midrash, which says that these are two different explanations).

- c) The commentaries<sup>9</sup> ask: On the verse,<sup>10</sup> “And she {Hagar} went and she wandered,” Rashi says that “she reverted to {serving} the idols of her father's house.” If so, how can Rashi, commenting on our verse, say that “her deeds were as beautiful as incense”?

## 2.

### HOW COULD HAGAR SERVE IDOLS?

The explanation: Rashi is forced to say, “Keturah — this is Hagar,” because there is a problem (not with **this** specific verse, but) with the entire story of Avraham and Hagar.

Rashi had **previously**<sup>11</sup> explained that “Avraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women.” Now if Avraham could influence men outside {of his household}, he certainly could influence his household (including Yishmael, who<sup>12</sup> “had adopted wicked behavior,” but repented while Avraham was still alive).<sup>13</sup>

Hence, the question — how could Hagar have “reverted to {serving} the idols of her father's house,” and Avraham hadn’t inspired her to repent?

[We can’t say that it was because Hagar lived far away from Avraham (as we learned earlier<sup>14</sup> that Avraham banished her and Yishmael from his house), since already before the *Akeidah*,<sup>15</sup> Avraham’s banishment of “this maidservant

---

<sup>9</sup> *Baal Haturim, Chizkuni, Riva, Paneach Raza, Tur HaAruch, Gur Aryeh, Kli Yakar*, et al.

<sup>10</sup> *Bereishis* 21:14.

<sup>11</sup> *Bereishis* 12:5.

<sup>12</sup> *Rashi on Bereishis* 21:11.

<sup>13</sup> *Rashi on Bereishis* 15:15.

<sup>14</sup> *Bereishis* 21:14.

<sup>15</sup> {“The Binding of Yitzchak.”}

and her son”<sup>16</sup> was already canceled. As **Rashi** comments on the verse,<sup>17</sup> “*His two lads — Yishmael and Eliezer*”<sup>18</sup> (and it makes sense that Hagar was with Yishmael.)]

To address this quandary, Rashi says, “Keturah — this is Hagar, and she is called Keturah...” It’s true {Avraham had influenced her to repent}. And by calling Hagar with the name “Keturah,” the verse is hinting to the fact that **now** “her deeds were as beautiful as incense,” because she had repented<sup>19</sup> from having “reverted to {serving} the idols of her father's house.”

With this in mind, we can appreciate the precision of Rashi’s wording, “Keturah — **this** is Hagar,” as opposed to, “*she*, אִתָּהּ, is Hagar,” like the phrasing in the verse,<sup>20</sup> “which, אִתָּהּ, is Chevron” (and similar verses):

“**She** is Hagar,” in third person {*lashon nistar*, lit., “wording that implies concealment”}, would have meant that here, nowhere in these verses, is Hagar spoken about; she is like one who is “hidden {*nistar*}.” By his wording, “**this** is Hagar,” Rashi implies that “Hagar” is, in fact, “present”: A novice student of Torah<sup>21</sup> would be left wondering what happened to Hagar. Why aren’t we told she repented? Therefore, Rashi uses nuanced wording: “**This** is Hagar.” We are referring to **the** Hagar — the one you were asking and speaking about until now.

---

<sup>16</sup> Bereishis 21:10.

<sup>17</sup> Bereishis 22:3.

<sup>18</sup> {Long after Avraham had sent Hagar and Yishmael from his house, we are told of *Akeidas Yitzchak*, “the binding of Yitzchak.” Scripture says that Avraham was accompanied by two lads. Rashi tells us they were “Yishmael and Eliezer,” so we see Yishmael had been allowed back into Avraham’s home.}

<sup>19</sup> *Baal Haturim, Chizkuni, Riva, Paneach Raza, Tur HaAruch, Gur Aryeh, Kli Yakar*, et al.

<sup>20</sup> Bereishis 23:2.

<sup>21</sup> “{*Ben chamesh lemikra*,” in the Hebrew original, meaning, “a five-year-old who has begun to learn Scripture.” This is a term borrowed from *Pirkei Avos*, ch. 5, mishnah 21, which teaches that the appropriate age for a child to study *Chumash* is at five. Rashi wrote his commentary on *Chumash* to solve problems that a 5-year-old would encounter in understanding the simple meaning of a verse.}

### 3.

#### HAGAR WAS INNOCENT

However, Rashi cannot be content with just this reason. It's true that now “her deeds were as beautiful as incense,” however, since there was a time when “she reverted to {serving} the idols of her fathers house,” Avraham, who was extremely chaste<sup>22</sup> would not have taken her back as “a wife,” if in the meantime she had partnered with another man.

[This point is evident, since the verse, “Avraham added...” is recorded specifically, right after the verse, “Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother....”<sup>23</sup> Both Sarah and Rivkah were extremely chaste.]<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, Rashi continues, “and because she tied her opening...” Meaning, the name “Keturah” also alludes to the fact that “she was not intimate with any man from the day she separated from Avraham.” Therefore, she was worthy of Avraham taking her.

### 4.

#### WHAT DOES “ADDED” MEAN?

In light of all the above — that the verse's use of the name “Keturah” indicates that Hagar repented (because of Avraham's influence) — we can explain several points in the verse according to their deeper meaning, which at first are unclear (at least on a deeper level):

a) Since {Rashi says} “Keturah — this is Hagar,” how do we make sense of the expression {in the verse}, “Avraham **added**...” (as the Midrash asked — see

---

<sup>22</sup> See Rashi on *Bereishis* 12:11.

<sup>23</sup> *Bereishis* 24:67.

<sup>24</sup> See Rashi on *Bereishis* 12:11 and on *Bereishis* 18:9 regarding Sarah; see *Bereishis* 24:16 and Rashi on *Bereishis* 24:65 regarding Rivkah.

Section 1 above)? {"Added" would imply someone new who he had not married previously!}

[Based on a simple reading of the verse, this does not pose a difficulty, because although "Keturah... is Hagar," for Avraham, however, it was a new **marriage**, so it makes sense to say that "He added..." Furthermore, since Hagar was a maidservant previously, and now Avraham took her as a "wife" [at least as a "concubine"<sup>25</sup> in a manner of "(wives are married with a marriage contract, and) concubines are married (albeit) without a marriage contract"],<sup>26</sup> therefore, "and he added" in the **taking of a wife**.<sup>27</sup>

However, the expression, "Avraham added..." is more precise and smoother according to this deeper explanation, as will be explained.]

b) Why are the beautiful deeds of Hagar hinted at by comparing them to incense specifically?

c) Why does the Torah hint to Hagar's repentance, specifically in the verse that speaks about Avraham taking her?

## 5.

CONVERTING BAD TO GOOD

The explanation:

Chassidus<sup>28</sup> explains the difference between the *avodah*<sup>29</sup> of Avraham before and after his circumcision. Before he was circumcised, he was called "Avram," meaning, "an **elevated** father, *av ram*" — he was exalted and removed from the world (high above all the nations<sup>30</sup>). His *avodah* was within

---

<sup>25</sup> Rashi on *Bereishis* 25:6.

<sup>26</sup> Rashi on *Bereishis* 25:6; explained at length in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, end of p. 231 ff., and fns.

<sup>27</sup> Chasam Sofer offers a similar explanation.

<sup>28</sup> *Torah Or*, beg. of "*Lech Lecha*."

<sup>29</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>30</sup> {Cf. *Tehillim* 113:4;} *Torah Or*, 12b.

the realm of holiness. After his circumcision, however, his name was changed to “Avraham,” meaning, “a father to a multitude of nations, *av hamon goyim*.”<sup>31</sup> He succeeded also with “the nations,” raising them to holiness.

**This *avodah*** was done through Sarah, who separated the “waste”<sup>32</sup> from the “nations” and elevated their good and holy sparks. (Therefore, she had said, “**send away** this maidservant and her son.”)<sup>33</sup>

The elevated state that Avraham had reached after Sarah’s passing comprised that which the verse says, “Avraham added, and he took a wife named Keturah.” He brought (Yishmael and) Hagar through repentance. That is, he also accomplished the refinement of the “waste” which Sarah had separated (“send away etc.”).

The explanation: Sarah’s achievement in refining “the nations” was only regarding *kelipas nogah*,<sup>34</sup> which has an admixture of good and bad. The way to refine it is by filtering out the waste and bad and then elevating the good that is mixed in. Since the “waste” has no (revealed) good, it must be **pushed** away (“send away...”).

However, the refinement of Yishmael and Hagar was not by elevating the intermingled good, because there was no (revealed) good in them. Rather, they were refined by **adding**, similar to the way **intentional sins** become like merits.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> *Bereishis* 17:4-5.

<sup>32</sup> {I.e., their un-G-dly elements.}

<sup>33</sup> *Or HaTorah*, “*Chayei Sarah*,” s.v., “Rabbi Banaah,” pp. 120b ff., 123a ff., 444b ff., 447b ff.

<sup>34</sup> {*Kelipah* translates literally as “a shell” or “a peel.” This term refers to anything that conceals, and thus opposes G-dliness, just as a shell or a peel conceals the fruit within. *Kelipah* is often used to refer to evil or impurity. *Kabbalah* delineates two distinct types of *kelipah*: *Kelipas nogah*, lit., “*kelipah* that is translucent,” and it can be illuminated; and the *shalosh kelipos hatmeios* — “three totally impure *kelipos*.” *Kelipas nogah* can be uplifted and refined, while conventionally, the only form of reformation or redemption for the three impure *kelipos* is their destruction. Yet through *teshuvah* motivated by great love, even the holy sparks invested in sins (which come from these *kelipos*) can be elevated and transformed to good. (See *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 7; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 67 and fns.; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 22 fn. 20; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 14, pp. 160-1, sec. 6.)}

<sup>35</sup> *Yoma* 86b.

## 6.

### ADDING IN ALL AREAS

This explains the three points mentioned above (in Section 4):

- a) The wording, “Avraham **added...**” {makes sense} because the concept of transforming “waste” (the three totally impure *kelipos*) into good is analogous to addition, as the Tzemach Tzedek<sup>36</sup> interprets the verse,<sup>37</sup> “May Hashem add {yosef} *another* son for me”: A process of “addition” is reflected by the transformation of *another* {someone who is not involved in holiness} into a “son” {someone who is holy}.

The “addition” happened in two respects: (a) In the world — an addition and innovation was introduced into creation, because from the perspective of creation, intentional sins cannot be transformed into merits; and (b) in Avraham — “**Avraham** {was} **added** {to}...,” because transforming the three totally impure *kelipos* can be accomplished only through the power of His Essence, since from the perspective of Hashem’s Essence (in the words of the Midrash),<sup>38</sup> “I don’t know which one He desires — these actions (the actions of the wicked)...<sup>39</sup> {or the actions of the righteous}.” This is the case because, at this level, intentional sins make no difference; the ability to transform even these into merits comes from there.

This is the {deeper, mystical} interpretation of the phrase, “Avraham **added...**” By Avraham adding {incorporating within himself} a higher power and spiritual level that derived from Essence, he could refine Hagar (and Yishmael).

---

<sup>36</sup> *Or HaTorah*, “Vayetzei.”

<sup>37</sup> *Bereishis* 30:24.

<sup>38</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah*, end of sec. 2.

<sup>39</sup> The reason for the speculation that the Essence of Hashem might **desire** the actions of the wicked — not just be indifferent to it, for before Him “darkness and light are the same” — is based on the Baal Shem Tov’s teaching, (*Baal Shem Tov Al Hatorah, parshas Bereishis*, sec. 41 ff.) because of the advantage that *teshuvah* {which follows transgressions} has over the deeds of the righteous. Through *teshuvah*, intentional sins are transformed into merits.



- b) “Her deeds were as beautiful as **incense** (*ketores*),” specifically, because the eleven spices of the *ketores*, as known,<sup>40</sup> transformed the eleven crowns of impurity<sup>41</sup> into holiness.
- c) The purpose of “taking a wife” is to<sup>42</sup> “be fruitful and multiply,”<sup>43</sup> and giving birth is all about adding and bringing something new into the world. This helps to explain why the repentance of Hagar, which represents the idea of adding (as mentioned), is specifically alluded to in the context of “Avraham added, **and he took a wife...**,” and the purpose of {marriage} is (as the *parshah* continues), “**She gave birth for him...**”<sup>44</sup>

## 7.

### THE TALMUDIC NARRATIVE

In connection to this verse, there is narrative in the Talmud<sup>45</sup> which, off-hand, seems bizarre:

The sons of Rabbi Tarfon’s sister were sitting (*silently* — Rashi) before Rabbi Tarfon. He began and said (*to encourage them to speak* — Rashi): {Scripture says:} *And Avraham* took another wife named *Yochani*. (*Rabbi Tarfon picked a random name in order to prompt a response* {from his nephews} — Rashi.) They said to Rabbi Tarfon: It says, “*Keturah*” {and not *Yochani*}. Rabbi Tarfon called them “the children of *Keturah*.”

The following needs clarification:

---

<sup>40</sup> *Torah Or*, end of “*Toldos*.”

<sup>41</sup> {Chassidus explains that opposite the ten *sefiros* (Divine attributes) in the realm of holiness, there are ten *sefiros* on the side of impurity. However, on the side of impurity, they are enumerated as *eleven* “crowns,” because their source of vitality, which remains separate from them, is considered an additional crown. In contrast, the vitality of the holy *sefiros* is united with their source of vitality; therefore, it is not counted separately.}

<sup>42</sup> *Bereishis* 1:28

<sup>43</sup> See Rosh on *Kesuvos*, ch. 1, par. 12.

<sup>44</sup> {*Bereishis* 25:2.}

<sup>45</sup> *Zevachim* 62b.

- a) Why does the Gemara tell this story at all? Since we have a rule<sup>46</sup> that “Scripture does not speak disparagingly about even an impure animal,” why speak negatively about the nephews of Rabbi Tarfon unless a lesson is being taught?<sup>47</sup> What is the lesson here?
- b) Other methods could also induce someone to speak rather than doing so by misquoting a verse!
- c) How could he have used, for this purpose, a verse in the **Torah**?
- d) Why did Rabbi Tarfon pick the name **Yochani**? Seemingly, it would have been more appropriate to pick the name **Hagar**. [Although this also would have been a departure from the wording of the verse, at least it would have been factually correct, according to most opinions. And even according to those who disagree,<sup>48</sup> they also agree {that in a Torah argument} both opinions are words of the living G-d. (Therefore, Beis Hillel was permitted to quote the words of Beis Shamai before offering their own.)]<sup>49</sup> Making this change in the wording of the verse surely would have been enough to encourage them to speak up.

## 8.

### TEACHING CAN BE LIKE GIVING BIRTH

We can clarify this by first quoting our Sages who said,<sup>50</sup> “Anyone who teaches Torah to the son of his fellow is considered by Scripture as if **he had fathered him**.” This is because by teaching him Torah, his student becomes a “new being,” and therefore, it is “as if he had fathered him.”

---

<sup>46</sup> *Bava Basra* 123a.

<sup>47</sup> In which case, it must speak clearly — as explained in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 281; vol. 10, p. 26 ff.

<sup>48</sup> “Our Rabbis” in *Tanchuma*, “*Chayei Sarah*,” sec. 8; *Yalkut Shimoni*, “*Iyov*,” remez 904, et al.

<sup>49</sup> *Eruvin* 13b.

<sup>50</sup> *Sanhedrin* 19b, quoted by *Rashi* on *Bamidbar* 3:1.

A simple reading of the teaching, “**Anyone** who teaches Torah to the son of his fellow...” implies that this statement holds true even if the “son of his fellow” already knows some Torah. However, it’s understood that the statement applies **primarily** to someone who, until now, was not capable of learning Torah. Therefore, the teacher brings about a **new existence** in the “son of his friend.” (However, if the student had previously learnt Torah, the teacher is then only **adding** to the student’s previous knowledge and prior existence.)

Now we can understand variation in Rashi’s diction in his commentary on the verse,<sup>51</sup> “*And these are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe* — they are called the offspring of Moshe because he taught them Torah. This teaches us that whoever teaches {Torah to the son of his fellow} is considered by Scripture **as if** he had fathered him.” {On the words of the verse} “**On the day that Hashem spoke** with Moshe,” {Rashi comments:} “**They became his offspring...**” Meaning, regarding “the sons of Aharon,” Rashi uses the expression “**they became his offspring**” (they are not only considered “as if” {they were his offspring}). However, “Anyone who teaches...” is only “considered by Scripture **as if** he had fathered him.”

The reason for this: “On the day that Hashem spoke...,” “the children of Aharon” **began** to learn Torah from Moshe (“what he had learned **from the mouth of the Almighty**”)<sup>52</sup> such that the lives of Aharon’s children were transformed. Therefore, they became the “offspring” of Moshe (and not “as if” {his offspring}). However, “**anyone** who teaches...” which includes all teachers, is not necessarily considered more than “**as if** he had fathered him.”

---

<sup>51</sup> Bamidbar 3:1.

<sup>52</sup> Rashi on Bamidbar 3:1.

## 9.

### A SIMILAR STORY

This also explains the above narrative. Rabbi Tarfon saw his nephews were not suited for learning (and understanding) Torah. Since they were related,<sup>53</sup> he wanted to make it possible for them to understand Torah — (which is like) **fathering them.**

To that end, he cited a similar idea found in Torah (a lesson for them): “Avraham added, and he took another wife...” — the purpose {of marriage is to have children} (as it continues in the next verse): “**She gave birth** for him....”

Likewise, Rabbi Tarfon did an action — “He opened {his discourse} and said, etc,” to empower his nephews “(in order) that they should speak” words of Torah — that would be deemed as if **he had fathered them.**

## 10.

### THE NAME YOCHANI

Now we can understand why Rabbi Tarfon said, “whose name was *Yochani*.” The Gemara states in tractate *Sotah*<sup>54</sup> that a “neighborly widow” is among those who “erode the world,” “for example, Yochani, the daughter of Rativi.” Rashi explains:

She was a widow who was a witch. When it came time for women to give birth, she would use witchcraft to close their wombs. As soon as these women felt excruciating pain, she would tell them, “I will pray for you, and perhaps my prayers will be answered.” She would then go home, halt her witchcraft, and the baby would be born....

Meaning, she wanted people to think that the birth happened miraculously because of her prayers.

---

<sup>53</sup> See *Bava Basra* 110a.

<sup>54</sup> *Sotah* 22a.

This, perhaps, is why she was called “Yochani”: The name “Yochani,” יוֹחַנִי, alludes to the idea of a miracle, as understood from what the Gemara says in *Berachos*:<sup>55</sup> “If someone sees Huna, הוּנָא, in a dream, a miracle, נִס, will happen for him... Yochanan, יוֹחָנָן — many miracles will happen for him.” The wording “Yochani” also has a special connection to the idea of birthing children (in addition to the story in *Sotah*), as it says,<sup>56</sup> “**The children** whom God has graciously given (*chanan*) your servant.”

Therefore, Rabbi Tarfon said, “her name was Yochani,” because he needed to accomplish a feat of (as if) he had fathered them (by teaching them Torah), which does not follow the natural course of nature.

This also explains the rest of the story, when the nephews replied, “It says Keturah,” and Rabbi Tarfon called them “children of Keturah”: {Rabbi Tarfon had answered:} If “it says Keturah” [a word which means **tying** (closing of the womb) — the opposite of “Yochani,” which facilitates birth, as mentioned], he would not have been able to achieve a “birth” in Torah study (to open their minds to understand Torah), and they would have remained “children of **Keturah**” (tied) — with plugged up minds and unable to comprehend Torah.

## 11.

### AVRAHAM’S GROWTH MEANT RENEWAL FOR ALL

Earlier (in Sections 5 and 6 above), we explained the verse “Avraham added...,” according to the “wine of Torah” in Rashi’s commentary, to mean that since Avraham needed to augment and innovate (father) by transforming the three totally impure *kelipos* into holiness, it was first necessary that “Avraham **added**...” Meaning, he needed to increment and elevate the level of Avraham himself. Now we can also explain — in a **deeper** dimension — the reason Rabbi Tarfon also quoted the beginning of the verse, “Avraham added.”

---

<sup>55</sup> *Sotah* 57a.

<sup>56</sup> *Bereishis* 33:5.

[Seemingly, it would have sufficed for Rabbi Tarfon to have said, “He took a wife named Yochani” (and they would have known which verse he meant, because this is the only verse which uses the words, “he took a wife named...”):

In order for Rabbi Tarfon to fulfill the adage of “[teaching] Torah to the son of his fellow,” which for his nephews would have entailed their rebirth and **renewal**, he first needed to add to **his own** level. With this power, he could trigger the rebirth and renewal of his nephews.

He brought a proof for this from an analogous incident described in a Torah verse: “Avraham added...” (and through this), “he took a wife...” The **addition** to the level of Avraham enabled him to take a wife (the purpose of which is, as the next verse continues, “she gave birth for him”) — the idea of birth and renewal, as discussed.

## 12.

FROM THE HIGHEST TO THE LOWEST

Another explanation (why Rabbi Tarfon called them “the children of Keturah”): Rambam<sup>57</sup> rules that “the children of Keturah, descendants of Avraham... must be circumcised.” This means that by Avraham adding, “and he took a wife named Keturah,” which (as discussed above in Section 6), is the idea of renewal beyond the continuum of creation, Avraham accomplished that Keturah would have children who would require circumcision. The word circumcision (מילה) is an **acronym** of the words: “Who will go up to heaven for us? — מי יעלה לנו השמימה”<sup>58</sup> (the **last** letters of each word spell the name of Hashem — *Havayah*).<sup>59</sup> Circumcision is more sublime than the level of Torah and the name of *Havayah*.<sup>60</sup> This means it is loftier than the continuum of

---

<sup>57</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 10, par. 8.

<sup>58</sup> *Devarim* 30:12.

<sup>59</sup> {The four-letter, ineffable name of Hashem.}

<sup>60</sup> *Torah Or*, end of *parshas Lech Lecha*. {It says regarding Torah, “It is not in heaven,” and the name *Havayah* represents the process of Torah being drawn down into this world. However, regarding circumcision, it says, “Who will go up to **heaven** for us?” — a higher level. Therefore, circumcision is spelled by the first letters of the words in the verse, while the name *Havayah* is spelled by the last letters of the words.}

creation (and this comes through *teshuvah*: “And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your hearts”).<sup>61</sup>

This is the {deeper} meaning of what the Talmud says: “He called them, ‘the children of Keturah.’” Rabbi Tarfon called them, and drew<sup>62</sup> into them, the experience of “birth” in Torah learning, doing so by circumventing the continuum of creation. This resembled the effect that Avraham had on the “children of Keturah.”

— Based on a talk delivered on *Shabbos Parshas Chayei Sarah*, 5737 (1976)

---

<sup>61</sup> *Eikev* 10:16

<sup>62</sup> See *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” end of ch. 37.