

Once in a while, I will confess to wishing that I did have an hour to speak on Shabbos morning . There has been so much going on in recent weeks, in addition to all the other topics I have been saving up, that we are going to have to schedule another Shabbos Shuva drasha just to cover everything. I have no doubt that would be exceedingly popular.

One major thing that has occupied my thoughts, as it has occupied the minds of *klal yisrael*, has been the passing of two people who changed the face of the Jewish people in this generation. Rav Dovid Feinstein, *zt"l*, was the Rosh Yeshivah of Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim and one of the most important *poskim* in this country, someone who was the final address for the thorniest and most challenging questions. And Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, introduced a new philosophy, intellectual posture and Jewish pride into Jewish communities and Jews across the world. I do not want to speak about them at length today. But while, in some ways, Rav Feinstein and Rabbi Sacks could not have been more different, I would like to share a thought from the parshah that tells us much about both of them.

There is a story that Rabbi Sacks would tell often about a formative encounter he had as a young man with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. In the course of their first meeting, Rabbi Sacks, in the manner of British intellectuals, introduced a question by saying, "In the situation in which I find myself..." The Rebbe cut him off. "Nobody," he said, "finds themselves in a situation. You put yourself in a situation and if you want, you can put yourself in a different situation." I hope this is not heretical, and from what I know of Rabbi Sacks, he would have encouraged me not to be afraid to present a different perspective. But I would like to disagree with both of them. Because we find ourselves in situations all the time, situations that are not of our own making and that we would never have chosen. And it is how we rise to that occasion that makes all the difference.

It is so ubiquitous that we tend almost to gloss over it, but you cannot learn the *parshiyos* of the past few weeks without realizing what a central role Eretz Yisrael plays in our identity as Jews. But it is in this week's parshah that we learn about Chevron, which has its own unique and special place in our relationship with Eretz Yisrael. Even after he has been promised the Land and lived and traveled through all of it, Avraham has to do something new to deepen our connection to it - he makes a *kinyan*. To make a *kinyan* -- to buy something -- means to take your money, that money which you could use to do anything and buy anything, and to say that you have decided to use all this potential to accomplish one specific thing. And after being given all the Land in a general way, Avraham establishes Chevron as the place where it is all going to start. Chevron is the place of our *Avos* and *Imahos*. Each *shevet* in the Jewish people has its own strengths and its own destiny, and each one of us has a place in Eretz Yisrael where we are meant to leave our unique imprint. But we start in Chevron, with Avraham's acquisition; we start in a specific place with specific qualities and specific circumstances. And from there we build.

It is no accident that we learn specific laws of marriage from the way in which Avraham bought the *Me'aras Hamachpeilah*. Before we choose a marriage partner, we are full of ideas of the kind of person it will be and what we might accomplish when we are

married. But having chosen him or her, we must now begin to build a marriage and a home in a specific set of circumstances -- with our unique strengths and with the unique qualities that our spouse alone possesses, but without the qualities that we and our spouse do not possess. Having chosen our place, we find ourselves in a situation. And using our strengths, and the strengths of the person with whom Hashem has placed us, we build something magnificent that is uniquely our own.

Rav Dovid Feinstein *zt'l* was born into a situation. He was the son of Rav Moshe Feinstein, the *gadol hador*, and inherited all that comes with that patrimony. And he took his situation and filled a role that the Jewish people so desperately needed. He became both the heir to his father and a leader on his own. With exquisite humility, dedication and expertise, he filled the situation in which he found himself with the fullness of his spiritual capabilities.

Rabbi Sacks, I dare say, was also found in a situation. Being the Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth carries certain expectations that must have been onerous and, to his powerful intellect, somewhat tedious. But with his knowledge, his articulate communication and his intellectual confidence and pride, he saw the person that the Jewish people and the world needed him to be. To be sure, he consciously sought to expand what he could do and the extent to which he could make a difference. And he filled the calling of his situation to the fullest.

Most of us will not become *roshei yeshivah*, and none of us is going to be the chief rabbi of the United Kingdom. But all of us have our own strengths and all of us find ourselves in situations. And we achieve our own greatness when we take what we have been given, the *kinyanim* we have made and the *kinyanim* we have been handed, and find what Hashem wants us to accomplish.

There is an opinion that the tenth test of Avraham was not the *Akeidah*; it was the purchase of *Me'aras Hamachpeilah*. After all that Avraham had achieved and suffered through, he finds himself negotiating with a scoundrel like Efron for a plot of land that ought to be his anyway. But he does so calmly, fairly, with respect, to the point that he is seen by them as a *nesi elokim*, a prince of Hashem. In the situation in which he never expected to find himself, he rose to the occasion in the most magnificent way. We have lost two different kinds of princes. But it is our job to be princes in our own right.