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WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO THE FOUNDING SPONSORS OF HAMIZRACHI – THE LAMM FAMILY OF MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA



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ר' פנחס יהודה ב"ר יעקב דב הכהן וחיה ע"ה
WHOSE FIRST YAHRZEIT WAS ON YOM KIPPUR



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The Obsession with Land

I was not born into a religious family but grew up in a warm and traditional South African Jewish home. To the great credit of my dear parents, and through the influence of a young dynamic Rabbi, we began going to *shul* on Shabbat on a regular basis, which sparked the beginning of a spiritual transformation. I was 12 years old when this family odyssey towards more serious Torah observance began.

A good place to start studying Torah was from the very beginning, so I began with the book of Bereishit. As I began learning about Avraham, I was totally perplexed. The very first time G-d speaks to the very first Jew, He commands him to leave wherever he is and to journey to another land to fulfill his destiny. This baffled me. After all, was this really the most important thing for Avraham to do in order to begin his mission? What about studying Torah, keeping *mitzvot*, committing himself to total obedience to fulfill the will of G-d?

Incredibly, the more I studied the book of Bereishit, the more I realized that this original encounter between G-d and Avraham was not an exception but rather the rule. It seemed as if G-d had some type of obsession, so to speak, with this Land. It was clear that the new spiritual mission of Avraham and his children was somehow inextricably linked to this tract of land.

This conclusion is inescapable. As soon as Avraham arrives, G-d promises to give the Land to his children.¹ As he returns from Egypt after the famine, G-d commands him to walk around the Land, look in all directions and promises the whole Land

to him and his progeny once again.² G-d makes two distinct and dramatic covenants with him, promising that his children will return after Exile and that the Land will be an 'Eternal Inheritance' for them.³

G-d forbids Yitzchak from leaving the Land, despite famine, and he spends his entire life there. G-d promises the Land to him and his children.⁴

To escape his brother, Ya'akov has no choice but to leave the Land, but his whole life revolves around it. In his dream on departure, G-d assures him he will return and 20 years later commands him to do so.⁵ Upon his return, Ya'akov is promised the Land for him and his children.⁶ Then after being pushed into Exile once again, to reunite with his son Yosef in Egypt, Ya'akov asks Yosef to swear to bury him in the grave of his forefathers in the Land.⁷

The book of Bereishit ends counterintuitively with Yosef, despite his meteoric success in Egypt, making his family promise to bury him in the Land of his fathers. Remarkably, the last verse of the book conveys his death, embalming and placing him in a coffin. No burial is mentioned. The message is clear – he is waiting, no matter for how long, to return to the Land with the Children of Israel and to be buried there.

The singling out of a person, a family and a people for a unique mission is interlocked at every stage with the singling out of the Land. They are inseparable.

I also noticed that in the book of Bereishit, one city in the Land – Chevron

– stands out more than any other, in three distinct ways. First, it is the site of the first legally purchased part of the Land, the Cave of Machpelah, which Avraham acquires to bury Sarah. Second, despite our forefathers' many travels and sojournings, Chevron is the main area in the Land where all three of them lived.⁸ And third, it is where all three sets of our forefathers and mothers are buried.⁹

Therefore, Chevron – more than any other place – represents our founding fathers' and mothers' extraordinary connection to the Land.

As I was finishing high school, I made a further amazing discovery. One of the world's leading historians, Paul Johnson, had just published his monumental work, "A History of the Jews," in which he highlighted the very same reflections about the Land in general and Chevron in particular.

In his opening chapter, he emphasized the remarkable centrality of the Land from the dawn of Jewish history: "The election of Abraham and his descendants for a special role in G-d's providence, and the donation of the land, are inseparable in the Biblical presentation of history."¹⁰

Strikingly, Johnson traces the very beginning of Jewish history to Chevron itself: "The Jews are the most tenacious people in history. Chevron is there to prove it. It lies 20 miles south of Jerusalem, 3,000 feet up in the Judean Hills. There, in the Cave of Machpelah, are the Tombs of the Patriarchs. According to ancient tradition, one sepulcher, itself of great antiquity, contains the mortal remains

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of Abraham, founder of the Jewish religion and ancestor of the Jewish race. Paired with his tomb is that of his wife Sarah. Within the building are the twin tombs of his son Isaac and his wife Rebecca. Across the inner courtyard is another pair of tombs, of Abraham's grandson Jacob and his wife Leah... This is where the 4,000-year history of the Jews, in so far as it can be anchored in time and place, began."¹¹

He also pointed out what the city teaches about the nature of Jewish spiritual history: "Chevron is thus an example of Jewish obstinacy over 4,000 years. It also illustrates the curious ambivalence of the Jews towards the possession and occupation of land. No race has maintained over so long a period so emotional an attachment to a particular corner of the earth's surface... Chevron is the site of their first recorded acquisition of land. Chapter 23 of the Book of Genesis describes how Abraham, after the death of his wife Sarah, decided to purchase the Cave of Machpelah and the lands which surrounded it, as a burying-place for her and ultimately for himself. The passage is among the most important in the entire Bible, embodying one of the most ancient and tenaciously held Jewish traditions, evidently very dear and critical

to them. It is perhaps the first passage in the Bible which records an actual event, witnessed and described through a long chain of oral recitation and so preserving authentic details."¹²

Thus the Jewish people's connection to Chevron is a microcosm of our people's unparalleled relationship to the Land. The mainstay of Bereishit is the concurrent singling out of a particular people and a particular Land for a unique spiritual mission and the ineradicable connection between them.

Today we are privileged to be participating in and witnessing the miraculous return of our people to our Land. This remarkable reunion is a fulfillment of the promises made to our forebears in the book of Bereishit and is bringing us closer to fulfilling our historic destiny. At the same time, there are anti-Israel forces from without and within who wish to sever this link, with disastrous consequences. Without integrating the foundational principles of Jewish particularism as a people intertwined with the Land, any attempt to create either a religious or a humanistic Jewish identity betrays the essence of the Jewish mission.¹³

It is my hope and prayer that the great religious and universal values of

Judaism will always remain inherently connected to the inseparable foundational principles of Jewish peoplehood and nationhood – the Land and people at the heart of Bereishit. It is a privilege to be part of a breathtaking drama unfolding today; a phenomenon unrivaled in all of human history: the remarkable return of a people to its Land as designated by G-d at the very dawn of Creation.

1 Bereishit 12:7.

2 Ibid 13:14–17.

3 The Covenants of the Pieces in Chapter 15 and of Circumcision in Chapter 17.

4 Ibid 26:2–4.

5 Ibid 29:13 and 31:13.

6 Ibid 35:12.

7 Ibid 47:29–31.

8 Avraham settles – וַיֵּשֶׁב – in Chevron, connoting a permanent settlement as opposed to a previous place where he only pitched his tent (Bereishit 13:18). See Rashi's commentary (21:34), where he quotes Seder Olam regarding Avraham's sojourning in the Land and shows how Chevron is his and Sarah's primary dwelling place. Although Yitzchak spent many years in *Eretz Pelishtim* he also settled in Chevron (35:27). Upon returning to the Land from Lavan's house, Ya'akov moves from place to place eventually settling in Chevron as well (37:14).

9 Bereishit 49:31. Rachel was buried along the way to Efrat, Beit Lechem (35:19).

10 Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, published by George Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1987, p. 19. It is fascinating that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has mentioned that this work is arguably the most important work of Jewish history and should be in every Jewish home.

11 Ibid, page 3.

12 Ibid, pages 3–4.

13 It is also true that fixation on the people/Land without being tempered with religious, ethical and universalist values does the same and has the potential to create a coarse and destructive brand of nationalism. The Torah ideal, explains Rav Kook (*Orot HaTehiya* 18), is a blend of religious, universal and nationalist ideals that form a wholesome Jewish identity.



Rabbi Doron Perez is Executive Chairman of the Mizrahi World Movement.



The Chatter that Changes Lives

In the middle of *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, Avraham orders his trusted servant to journey and find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. While this servant is the central character of this part of the story, his name is not revealed in the Torah itself, and *Chazal* identify him as Eliezer. The Torah describes his story in great detail, as he sets out on his journey, holds a discussion with Hashem, witnesses the successful test, presents Rivka with gifts, blesses Hashem and returns with her to her home to finalize the arrangement (Bereishit 24:1-32).

As Eliezer arrives at Rivka's home, we then read the whole story and details of the test again as he retells the events to her family (Bereishit 24:33-49). This repetition significantly lengthens the *parasha*, without seeming to add anything new to the narrative.

Why does the Torah include Eliezer's retelling of the story when we have just read the entire narrative in great detail? Would the Torah not have delivered the same message by writing, "And the servant told them everything that occurred"?

Many of the Torah's fundamental *halachic* principles are taught almost incidentally, in great brevity, or with hints. Why does this servant's repetition of a story we have just read deserve such attention?

In explanation of this seeming lack of balance, Rabbi Acha taught in the Midrash:

"The chatter of the servants of the forefathers is better before Hashem than the Torah of their children (descendants), for Eliezer's passage is

repeated in the Torah, and many of the Torah's fundamentals were only taught with hints" (Bereishit Rabbah 60:8).

While we can understand the observation which led to this conclusion, what is the reasoning behind it?

669 | **Sometimes, the presentation of a living example influences and guides far more successfully than the formulation of direction through commandments.**

My *Rosh Yeshiva*, HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l, explained that the Torah has two ways of showing us how to behave. The first one is formulated as commandments, expressed through directions of how to behave and how not to. The second is expressed through people, whose deeds, behavior and lifestyles give us direction. Sometimes, the presentation of a living example influences and guides far more successfully than the formulation of direction through commandments.

Rabbi Acha's rule comes to teach us that the example of a living role model, who embodies and represents the letter and spirit of the Torah, can be a far more influential educational tool than learning the technical commandments and details alone. If this is true of the servants of our forefathers, how much more so is there to

learn from the examples set to us from our forefathers and foremothers themselves.

Whilst our educational systems place great focus on developing and delivering content, how much focus do they place on providing role models who personify Torah and Torah values? Far more than learning the do's and don'ts of Judaism, it is essential that our pupils (whether they be children, students or adults) have exposure to living examples who embody the Torah they teach.

If we consider the individuals who have made the greatest impact on our lives, while they may have held formal educational or leadership positions, the chances are that we were far more impacted by their general demeanor or behavior (when they were not intentionally aiming to impart a message), than their formal or frontal education.

Every individual is similarly capable of making a positive impact on others and whether we like it or not, we are all educators. Regardless of our individual level of observance, there will always be people who look up to us as representatives of Judaism, whether from inside or outside the faith.

In addition to paying attention to our technical performance of Torah, we must ensure that our "chatter," our everyday behavior and lifestyles, suitably reflect our positions as representatives of the Torah and ambassadors of Hashem.

Rabbi Danny Mirvis is the Senior Rabbi of Mizrachi Melbourne.



Serving Others

“And he said, ‘I am a servant of Avraham’” (Bereishit 24:34). As Avraham reaches the end of his life, he sets his servant the task of finding a wife for Yitzchak. After swearing he will not find him a wife from Canaan, but will travel to Avraham’s family as Avraham requested, Avraham’s servant set out on his journey. Upon noticing Rivka, the servant devises a well-side test which she passes with flying colors. He then follows her home and manages to close the deal with her family, after which he brings Rivka to become Yitzchak’s wife.

Our Sages tell us that the name of this “servant” who played such a key role in the continuity of the family and the entire Jewish people was Eliezer. Eliezer had one of the most important jobs in Jewish history, to guarantee the future of the house of Avraham and consequently *Am Yisrael*. How is it possible that such an important figure does not even have his name mentioned in this week’s *parasha*?

We can answer that it was precisely because of the importance of his mission that Eliezer’s name was concealed. Eliezer was not only the servant of Avraham but the servant of

the entire future Jewish nation. It was therefore important he put all personal considerations aside and concentrate solely on his Divine mission.

When we are involved in community work, it is important to remember it is not about the mention of our name but the important work we do for the good of the community and the Jewish people. We must try and put our egos and personal considerations aside and focus solely on what we can do for others.

Rabbi Shua Solomon is the Senior Rabbi of Mizrahi Bondi.





Mizrachi Melbourne

Australia's Leading Religious Zionist Organisation

SENIOR RABBI

After an extended term, during which we have experienced growth in daily minyanim, learning, activities and membership, Rabbi Danny Mirvis, our current Senior Rabbi, has decided to return to Israel with his family at the end of August 2021. Mizrachi Melbourne is seeking to appoint another exceptionally committed person to be its next Senior Rabbi, to build on these outstanding achievements.

Mizrachi Melbourne is centrally located in the heart of Australia's largest Jewish Community and is the city's preeminent Religious Zionist Organisation.

Mizrachi is dynamic and multifaceted. It embraces a range of active synagogues, daily minyanim, Leibler Yavneh College (Crèche - Year 12), the Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash and Midrasha, Kosher Australia, Emunah and a vibrant Bnei Akiva youth movement. It also has direct involvement in the Melbourne Eruv.

Mizrachi is now searching for an innovative, energetic and dedicated Senior Rabbi who, together with an active and engaged Rebbetzin, will build on our impressive communal track record and further strengthen Mizrachi's commitment to Torah learning, religious life and the State of Israel.

The successful candidate for this critical leadership position will be:

- a role model of religious observance and practice consistent with the Mizrachi ethos;
- an accomplished Torah scholar with broad secular knowledge and proven experience in deciding halachic questions;
- an outstanding leader with strong interpersonal skills;
- an effective teacher capable of engaging the community at all levels;
- able to drive communal growth with vision and imagination; and
- a passionate advocate for the State of Israel with a willingness to actively engage in communal religious and Zionist activities.

Please send your detailed cover letter and resumé outlining your qualifications and relevant professional experience to the Mizrachi President, Dr Danny Lamm AM, at danny@lamm.com.au





The Big Deal

Visiting Was A Big Deal

Ever Rosh Hashanah, pre-lock-down, we at Yeshivat Hakotel were blessed to receive permission to take our *talmidim* to *Ma'arat HaMachpelah* to *daven* on behalf of the Jewish people.

I have visited the *Ma'ara* many times, but this time was very different. There was an eerie silence as the place was almost completely empty. We were allowed inside in small groups, each for a short amount of time. We were of the few able to beseech our *avot* and *imahot* up close to *daven* for us on the night when *selichot* focus on asking *Hashem* to remember His covenant with them.

The Torah Makes A Big Deal

Do we really need 20 *pesukim*? Couldn't the Torah describe the purchase of *Ma'arat HaMachpelah* in two or three? Didn't Avraham have a simple request? Why were three rounds of conversation needed to close what one would think was a standard deal and why does the Torah include the whole discussion?

It Was A Big Deal

A careful reading reveals an underlying tension and disagreement about what Avraham ought to receive. *Bnei Chet* were willing to give Avraham a burial plot.¹ Avraham wanted more though. He sought an *achuzat kever* – a burial estate.² Many people had and would pass through the Land of Israel. Through his wife's (and eventually his own) death, Avraham wanted to cement his relationship with and right to the Land by burying in land he

owned after having legally purchased it.

Undeterred by the locals' attempt to minimize his request, Avraham asks Efron to sell him the *Ma'ara*.³ Though Efron offers him the land for free, Avraham insists on paying full price.⁴ He wants his ownership of the land to be clear, known and indisputable.

To reinforce the details of Avraham's accomplishments, the Torah methodically summarizes the story in three segments:

1. *Pesukim* 17–18: Avraham purchased the land (delineated in detail).
2. *Pasuk* 19: (Only) after the purchase, Avraham buried Sarah there.
3. *Pasuk* 20: (After and as a result of these two actions) the land became Avraham's *achuzat kever*.

The Deal's Significance

The Midrash⁵ teaches that others cannot accuse us of having stolen *Ma'arat HaMachpelah* (or *Har HaBaiyt* and *Kever Yosef*) because it is a precious site that our ancestors purchased. Sadly, many do dispute our rights to these places. Nevertheless, Avraham's purchase – and the subsequent burial of our ancestors there – should heighten our internal sense of our irrefutable right to 'the city of our ancestors.'

We Continue to Connect To Chevron Through Burial

In 1975, soon after the Jewish return to Chevron, little Avraham, Sarah

Nachshon's four-month-old son, died of AIDS. His mother decided to bury him in the ancient Jewish cemetery of Chevron. No Jews had been buried there since the 1929 pogroms and the Arabs had desecrated it. The government sent soldiers to stop her, but they could not hold her back as she carried her dead baby in her arms and marched to Chevron on foot.

As she buried her son, she said, "3,800 years ago, Avraham buried his wife Sarah in Chevron, thus beginning the Jewish settlement there. I now bury Avraham the son of Sarah, and this will be the beginning of the rebirth of this Jewish city."⁶

Looking Forward

My students and I were lucky to visit on the eve of the day we commemorate our ancestors' commitment to *avodat Hashem*. May our own commitment to *avodat Hashem* and to our ancestral homeland soon afford us the ability to once again visit Chevron and all of *Eretz Yisrael* without any limitation at all.

1 To emphasize their point, *Bnei Chet* mention *kevura* (burial), as opposed to *achuza* (estate) five times (Bereishit 23:6).

2 Ibid 23:4, 9.

3 Ibid 23:9.

4 Ibid 23:11–16.

5 Bereishit Rabbah 79:7.

6 Avraham Ben Sarah – Return to Hebron, Rabbi Noam Himmelstein, The Jewish Star January 17, 2013.

Rabbi Reuven Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrahi and Dean of the Yeshivat HaKotel Overseas Program.



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Sarah's Sacrifice

P*arashat Chayei Sarah* focuses on two detailed narratives – Avraham's purchase of a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and his mission – via his servant Eliezer – to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. The former is Avraham's initiative to secure the promise of Land (*Brit bein HaBetarim*), stated five times,¹ and the latter is Avraham's response to the promise of children (*Brit Mila*), also assured to Avraham five times.² Avraham does not wait for G-d to fulfill these promises but realizes G-d is waiting for him to facilitate their fulfillment. But why wait for Sarah's death and not purchase land or search for a wife for Yitzchak earlier?

The Torah teaches us – “And the life of Sarah was 100 and 20 and seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.”³ Avraham was not waiting for the death of Sarah. He was inspired by Sarah's life of active commitment to the aforementioned promises to continue her legacy.

At the climax/transition in the narratives of Avraham Avinu,⁴ the Torah tells us a story of Sarah Imeinu (Bereishit 16). This is the story that will determine who will be the “Mother” of the promised nation. Sarah has followed Avram from Ur Kasdim to Canaan, accompanying him as they both sacrificed their pasts for Divine promise.⁵ But 10 years have passed, a covenant of Land has been forged and promises of a child have yet to be fulfilled. Sarah does not wait around, passively anticipating their fulfillment. She is determined to play a role in the actualization of *Hashem's* word. So she forfeits her entire future and potential status of national matriarch, and gives her maidservant Hagar as

a full-fledged wife to Avram to beget the long-awaited promised progeny.⁶ She struggles with this change in status as Hagar conceives and belittles her, and stands by as Avraham names his first-born child “Yishmael” – for G-d had heard the oppressive cries of Hagar.

6699 | **Sarah's willingness to sacrifice her future status merits her to become Am Yisrael's first Matriarch.**

Immediately after this story, the Torah tells us of the *Brit Mila*, a covenant forged with Avraham and his descendants through the sign of circumcision. And Sarah is to be the mother of Yitzchak through whom the covenant will continue! Sarah's willingness to sacrifice her future status to actively catalyze the fulfillment of *Hashem's* promises, of Land and descendants, merits her to become *Am Yisrael's* first Matriarch.

The Netziv⁷ explains that although Avraham received direct messages of prophecies from *Hashem* commanding him to leave his father's home, and later to sacrifice his future hopes through the binding of Yitzchak, Sarah surmounts similar challenges through *ruach haKodesh* – Divine inspiration and pure faith in the ways of *Hashem*.⁸ She willingly undergoes her own “sacrifice” of a child before Avraham is told by *Hashem* to do so. This is Sarah Imeinu's legacy.

Upon her death, Avraham is inspired and determined to perpetuate Sarah's

life and legacy. Without any prophetic commands, he struggles with focused willpower to catalyze the fulfillment of *Hashem's* promises to secure Land and children for the future. Sarah understood that Divine promise is not a statement that G-d will act, but “an invitation from G-d to Avraham and his children that they should act,”⁹ with commitment and willingness to sacrifice, and G-d will help them. Sarah understood the challenge of fulfilling *Hashem's* covenant. She acted with faith, not passivity, overcoming overwhelming personal obstacles to secure the future of *Hashem's* nation. She inspired Avraham to get up and do the same. May her legacy provide us, her children, with the strength to persevere and act to secure the future of our Land and nation!

1 Bereishit 12:7, 13:14–17, 15:7, 15:18–21, 17:7–8.

2 Bereishit 12:2, 13:16, 15:5, 17:4–5, 22:17.

3 Bereishit 23:1.

4 Literally in the middle of the narratives, as highlighted through chiasmus in the Avraham stories.

5 See Radak 11:29-31.

6 See Ramban 16:2.

7 Netziv, HaEmek Davar, 23:1.

8 Bereishit Rabbah 41 – “Avraham left (Ur Kasdim) in promise, I (Sarah) left in faith.”

9 Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Land and Children,” *Covenant and Conversation (Genesis)*, p. 126.

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Everything Needs Chesed

P*arashat Chayei Sarah* is overflowing with acts of *chesed*:

- At the start of the *parasha*, Avraham buries Sarah.
- Ephron does *chesed* with Avraham by agreeing to give him the *Ma'ara* (even though Avraham insists on paying him handsomely).
- Eliezer does *chesed* for Avraham by going to look for a wife for Yitzchak.
- Rivka gives water to Eliezer and his camels (although he only asked for himself).
- Betuel and Lavan allow Rivka to marry Yitzchak.
- G-d does *chesed* for Avraham.
- At the end of the *parasha*, Yitzchak and Yishmael do *chesed* by burying Avraham.

This list reveals a surprising thing: a large proportion of the *chasadim* in the *parasha* are done for Avraham! The very epitome of *chesed* – חֶסֶד לְאֲבִרָהּ – is the person who needs it the most!

This shows us that everyone needs *chesed*, even Avraham Avinu, the “Man of *Chesed*.” The Midrash¹ (Bereishit Rabbah) says: “Everyone needs *chesed*. Even Avraham, for whom *chesed* exists in the world, needed *chesed*, as it says וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרָהּ, “and he did *chesed* with his master Avraham.”

Chesed is something we are all expected to do or give, but it is also something we all need to receive. That’s just the way G-d created the world. It might not always be easy to do *chesed* but it can be even harder to receive it!



We are not perfect and we are not G-d. Even if we are able to help many others, we will always need help from others. And in those cases, we must allow those others to help us, because true *chesed* allows for others to do *chesed* for you as well! It enables others to give and not just to receive.

And even if we don’t need to receive, we need to allow others to give.

The deeper mechanics is that when we allow others to give to us, we are creating a strong and meaningful connection between us, and when we all give and enable others to give, this

bond develops into a sense of unity throughout all sectors of our people.²

Today, one positive side effect of COVID-19 is the rise in opportunities to do *chesed*: helping people in quarantine, people who are sick and their families, the elderly, those at risk, people who have lost their jobs, etc. Many of these people have never been in a position of needing *chesed*. On the contrary, they may have even been on the side of the givers up to eight months ago.

We learn from Avraham though: even a person of *chesed* needs *chesed*.

Moreover, a person of *chesed* knows how to appreciate the *chesed* he or she receives, even when it may be the most natural thing in the world. A person of *chesed* knows how to express gratitude to all those givers around him: parents, spouse, colleagues, employees, teachers, students, etc.

All of the people that make up a person’s surroundings add something to that person’s life, and part of the enjoyment of that life is to notice that *chesed*, to acknowledge it and to express sincere gratitude to those who do it.

¹ Shown to me by my esteemed father-in-law, HaRav Blumenzweig.

² See Maharal, *Netiv HaTzedakah*, 6.

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The Perfect Partnership

Chayei Sarah is the *parasha* that concludes the story of Avraham and Sarah. It begins with Sarah's death and burial in *Ma'arat HaMachpelah*, and ends with Avraham's death and burial in the same place, at which the Torah emphasizes they are both buried "in *Ma'arat HaMachpelah*... the field that Avraham bought from the Bnei Chet, where Avraham and Sarah his wife are buried" (Bereishit 25:8-10).

6699 **The very first thing we hear about Avraham is his marriage to Sarah, and it soon becomes clear that their life path is a joint mission.**

It is no coincidence that the Torah reiterates their mutual burial, for, from the first moment they appear on the scene, the Torah treats them as a couple, almost as one unit. The very first thing we hear about Avraham is his marriage to Sarah (Bereishit 11: 29-30), and it soon becomes clear that their life path is a joint mission, with both of them setting out to fulfill the first of G-d's commands to Avraham: לך לך... אל הארץ, "Go for yourself to the Land which I will show you."

There are two aspects to this voyage to a yet unknown destination: following G-d's instructions and understanding what He wants, and a lot of personal initiative and independent thinking.

Even when Avraham does reach the Land, G-d does not tell him what to do

there. He chose Avraham and leaves Avraham to actualize that choice through meaningful living. Avraham understands his role is לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם ה', "to call in G-d's Name."

Sometimes, G-d explicitly commands us what to do, but sometimes our obligation is to work it out for ourselves. What does G-d want from me right now? And then, our recognition of G-d does not come from an external command, but from a deep, authentic and internal awareness. Avraham symbolizes the journey and the process, of constant self-searching for the will of G-d.

Sarah, initially, appears as a woman dedicated to her husband's 'life work,' and somewhat lives in his shadow while totally identifying with the cause and personifying self-sacrifice and devotion to it. Together with Avraham, she leaves everything and embarks on the trek to *Eretz Yisrael*. Together, they go down to Egypt and she complies with Avraham's plans – at great personal risk – to save himself from Pharaoh (Bereishit 12), and together, but at his bidding, she hosts their guests.

However, Sarah is not only a supportive wife but also an active, initiating character. After 10 years without a child, it is she who urges Avraham to marry Hagar. And after Yitzchak is born, it is she who demands that Avraham expel Yishmael, whom she discerns is ruining Yitzchak's education. Indeed, G-d is on her side, so to speak: כָּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלַי: שְׂרָה שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ, "Anything Sarah says to you, listen to her voice!"

In this sense, Sarah is not just an escort on Avraham's physical and

spiritual journey, but a full partner in his mission and in the creation of the House of Israel. This is also the impression we receive from the well-known midrash (Bereishit Rabbah, Lech Lecha, 39): "Avraham would convert the men and Sarah would convert the women."

Amongst other things, this partnership manifested itself in the words of Yishayahu who calls the people to "look to the rock from which you were hewn... look to Avraham your forefather and to Sarah who gave birth to you..." (Yishayahu 51:2).

Avraham and Sarah, our first mother and father, built the foundations of our nation – together, listening to the Divine command echoing in reality and guiding their mission to call in G-d's Name in the world. Together.

Avraham and Sarah are surrogate parents to all those many people, from all nations, whom they cared for during their lifetimes, and they are the couple that serves as an example for all subsequent Jewish families to continue their path of mutual service of G-d.

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GLOBAL MIZRACHI SUMMIT

Past, Present and Future

On Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5781, World Mizrahi held its Global Summit, which takes place every five years – an opportunity to reflect on the previous few years and to prepare for the future.

It featured a presentation on Mizrahi's programs by Rabbi Doron Perez and reports from Mizrahi branches from around the world, as well as contributions from Chief Rabbi David Lau, Minister for Diaspora Affairs Omer Yankelevitch, Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon and Sivan Rahav Meir.

One of the main focuses of the Summit was the vital work of World Mizrahi's new Yeshivot and Seminaries Department:

World Mizrahi now serves as a representative body to Masa, on behalf of the 65 Masa-accredited Torah schools. Within a short time, World

Mizrachi elicited tremendous results both as a lobby group of the yeshivot and seminaries to Masa, as well as functioning as a more effective way for Masa to interact with the many schools.

As a lobby group, World Mizrahi managed to ensure the replacement of significant money of intended Masa budget cuts, which would have adversely affected the Masa subsidy grant to our schools. In the process, World Mizrahi secured \$1,500,000 in matching funds for students, enabling hundreds of students in need of financial support to participate in their chosen programs. World Mizrahi now needed to assist the yeshivot and seminaries in raising the matching funds, and much more. World Mizrahi then launched its Emergency Campaign for Yeshivot and Seminaries on behalf of over 50

Torah institutions operating gap year programs in Israel, which raised collectively \$5 million for these institutions. This ensured funding not only to unlock the matching funding for Masa scholarships but to also assist yeshivot and seminaries themselves at this challenging Covid-19 time so that no deserving student be denied the amazing Gap Year in Israel.

Following the campaign, World Mizrahi launched a new department to continually serve and support yeshivot and seminaries in Israel, which cater to overseas students. World Mizrahi intends to continue this annual campaign and is fully committed to strengthening Torah learning in Israel and the immersive Gap Year experience, which is critical to the Mizrahi mission: nurturing a future generation of Jewish leaders and influencing the destiny of global Jewry.



View the Global Mizrachi Summit at www.mizrachi.org/summit

Rabbi Ari Rockoff joins RZA-Mizrachi

During the Summit, RZA-Mizrachi announced the appointment of Rabbi Ari Rockoff as the new Executive Vice-President.

Rabbi Rockoff is one of the country's most dynamic Jewish communal leaders and is recognized throughout the community for his work with many of the largest national Jewish institutions.

Rabbi Rockoff has over 20 years of experience in senior leadership positions across the Jewish community. Prior to joining the RZA-Mizrachi, he served as the founding director of leadership development and strategic partnerships at the Orthodox Union. He also spent more than a decade at Yeshiva University, where he was on the founding team of the Center for the Jewish Future.

Rabbi Rockoff is a graduate of Yeshiva University's Sy Syms School of



Business and received his rabbinical ordination from RIETS, a master's degree in education from the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration, and an MBA from Baruch's Zicklin School for Business, where his studies focused on organizational behavior.

Rabbi Rockoff resides in West Hempstead with his wife, Deborah, and their five children.

This is truly a time of great opportunity for RZA-Mizrachi.

Co-Presidents, Dr. Ernest Agatstein, Rabbi Leonard Matanky, and Martin Oliner, and Chairman of the Board, Seymour Shapiro, join us in wishing Rabbi Rockoff *hatzlacha* in his new position as we look forward to him joining RZA-Mizrachi and taking it forward to new heights.

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir



Three Contemporary Lessons

FROM

Chayei Sarah

Chayei Sarah is actually not about Sarah, but about Rivka. The message is clear: there is no “Chayei Sarah” without the continuity, without the “Chayei Rivka.” Avraham and Sarah will be a passing episode if there is no one to continue what they began.

Here are three special lessons from our first *Abba* and *Ima* that we can continue to apply today

Facing Up to Assimilation

This may not be politically correct, but this is how the story of the post-Avraham and Sarah generation begins. First and foremost, Avraham demands that his children do not marry the children of another people. He is establishing something new here, and despite his

desire for friendship and cooperation with the peoples of the region, there are red lines, and this is what he says to Eliezer when he sends him on his mission to find a wife for Yitzchak:

“And I will make you swear by the L-rd, the G-d of heaven and the G-d of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Yitzchak.’ And the servant said to him, ‘What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came?’ Avraham answered him, “On no account must you take my son back there! The L-rd, the G-d of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from my native land, who promised

me on oath, saying, ‘I will assign this land to your offspring’ – He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there. And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there.”

On this point, there are no compromises. And nothing has changed since Avraham’s times. If anything, the situation is much worse. In my opinion, we are dealing too much with other issues and neglecting this issue, which should be *the* issue on the Jewish people’s agenda. In the United States, the sad reality for some time has been more than 60% intermarriage. We have seen this up close, and it is our responsibility to continue Avraham Avinu’s sacred mission.

Preserving Our Culture

Avraham and Sarah are establishing a new culture in the world: “Then the servant took 10 of his master’s camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor.”

Rashi tells us that “his master’s camels” were distinguished from other camels by being muzzled so they should not graze in other peoples’ fields.

This detail is mentioned again when the servant arrives at Rivka’s house: “So the man entered the house, and the camels were ungirded [he removed their muzzles - Rashi]. The camels were given straw and feed, and water was brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men with him.”

You may remember we have already encountered this very detail in *Parashat Lech Lecha*, when Avraham enters the stage of history. It is one of the first things we hear about him. Lot’s shepherds were wicked and grazed their animals in other fields, and because of this, Avraham’s shepherds rebuked them for this act of robbery (Rashi).

Lot chose to go to Sodom, and Avraham parted from him to build a society with a different culture. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe writes: This is Avraham Avinu’s innovation. Truth is not some abstract ideal, in thought only. Truth is expressed in the smallest deeds of man. Avraham Avinu renewed leadership in the world, how camels should walk, and when anyone saw a camel with his mouth muzzled, they said: This camel belongs to Avraham Avinu.

When building a Jewish home, these are its foundations. Put a muzzle over the mouth of your camel. And in today’s terms, that can refer to one’s car, one’s home, one’s cell phone. We have been building an alternative culture here for 4,000 years.

This is why it is clear to Eliezer that the first test of any intended bride for Yitzchak - who will continue the culture of Avraham and Sarah - is a test of kindness. This is the only way she will fit into this special family: “Let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your jar that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’ – let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Yitzchak. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.”

Today too, young men and women look for many character traits in their prospective dates. Eliezer reminds us the first attribute we should be looking for in a descendant of Avraham and Sarah – *chesed*. Generosity. Thinking of others. Good *midot*.

Connecting Heaven and Earth

None of this works without *emunah* and *tefillah*. Eliezer, Avraham’s servant, sets out and knows what he must do first: “And he said, ‘O L-rd, G-d of my master Avraham, grant me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with my master Avraham: Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your pitcher that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’ – let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your

servant Yitzchak. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.’ He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rivka, who was born to Betuel, the son of Milcah the wife of Avraham’s brother Nachor, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder.”

Rabbi Shabtai Sabato writes that Rivka left her house even before Eliezer began to pray! Even before he arranged his prayer, reality was moving in the way he wanted, so to speak.

Eliezer is not the only one to pray in this episode of course. Yitzchak, the *chatan*, also prayed. When Eliezer and Rivka and the whole caravan arrive, Yitzchak has just established *tefillat Mincha* and Rivka is impressed as she sees a person praying for the first time.

For sure we should be acting in a practical way, but let us pray to G-d before every step we take.

In Conclusion

We have discussed three elements that appear in Chayei Sarah – vehement opposition to assimilation and souls being detached from the Jewish people, a culture counterintuitive to the accepted world culture, a world rooted in self-sacrifice, *chesed* and generosity, and of course prayer, constantly linking our actions to G-d. May we continue in this path and, as her sons and daughters, be a worthy continuation of Chayei Sarah.

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir are popular Israeli media personalities and World Mizrahi’s Scholars-in-Residence.



One's Real Age

In *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, it says **וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְיָמָיו** “Avraham was now old, advanced in years.” What does this double language mean? Why does the Torah write both “old” and “advanced in years”?

A Rabbi once visited a town he had never been to before. The locals gave their honored guest a tour, taking him to see the *shul*, the school, the *mikveh* and even the kosher supermarket. And then they took him to the cemetery.

The Rabbi was shocked to see that all the *matzeivot*, gravestones, testified to children who had died young: Reuven, 12 years old. Shimon, 11 years old. Levi, 15 years old, and so on.

“Was there a plague here?” he asked. “A pogrom? Why did everybody here die so young?”

“No Rabbi,” the Mayor explained. “In this town, everybody keeps track of all the time they spend each day learning Torah and doing *mitzvot*. At the end of the day, we each count up those hours and write them down on a little pad. At the end of the week, we each tally up our total hours for the week, say 7–10 hours. At the end of the month, we do another tally – this could be 20 or 30 hours. And at the end of the year, we do the math. Same when anyone dies. We add up the total amount of time they spent learning Torah and doing *mitzvot*. For this person, it was 10 years, for that person 12. The ages on the *matzeivot* are their Torah ages, not their biological ones.”

A sobering message.

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְיָמָיו means not only was Avraham old in years, but he

filled all of his days with Torah and *mitzvot*. Not just one hour or two, but from dawn to dusk – *hachnasat orchim*, spreading G-d’s Name to the world, teaching people all about monotheism.

Avraham Avinu knew his purpose in life and devoted every waking moment to fulfilling it. He spent every day learning Torah and doing *mitzvot*, balancing *mitzvot* between man and G-d with *mitzvot* between man and man. He understood the value of time and defining one’s priorities in life.

The father of our nation set a high standard for us to emulate.

Excerpted from one of Rav Ovadia’s weekly parasha shiurim.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef zt"l was the Rishon LeTzion, the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, from 1973 to 1983, and author of the authoritative halachic work, *Yalkut Yosef*.





Kever Avot

וַיִּקַּם שָׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּמַכְפֵּלָה... לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי חַת... וְאַחֲרָי כֵּן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם אֶת־שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ... וַיִּקַּם הַשָּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזֹת קָבַר מֵאֵת בְּנֵי חַת.

And Efron's field, which was in Machpelah, was confirmed ... as Avraham's, as a purchase in the view of the children of Chet... And afterward, Avraham buried Sarah his wife... Thus, the field with its cave was confirmed as Avraham's as an estate for a burial site, from the children of Chet. (Bereishit 23:17-20).

Rav Soloveitchik questioned the repetition in these verses. Why do we need to be told twice that the land was confirmed as being owned by Avraham?

The Rav noted an apparent shift in the status of Avraham's possession of the field of Efron, from that of a שָׂדֵה מִקְנָה – a purchased field – to that of a שָׂדֵה אֲחֻזָּה – an ancestral field. Accordingly, he explained the sequence of verses as follows: at first, Avraham bought the field merely as a purchase of real estate. However, after he buried Sarah there, his relationship with the land was transformed; it was now an ancestral heritage for him, and he understood he would never leave that Land. Indeed, one is not permitted to sell his ancestral field unless he becomes impoverished, and even then, he should try not to sell all of it (Rashi, Vayikra 25:25).

That is why the phrase מֵאֵת בְּנֵי חַת is used in relation to the אֲחֻזַּת קָבַר, in contrast to לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי חַת. This denotes the complete removal of the land from the control of *bnei Chet* into the possession of Avraham, for whom it became a "land of destiny"

– the National Homeland of his descendants.

The Ramban (Bereishit 23:19), commenting on the many acts of kindness that G-d did for Avraham, highlights this point. First, despite the fact he was a stranger, Avraham was accorded great honor, thereby fulfilling in his lifetime the promise of וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׁמִי – "I will make your name great" (12:2). Furthermore, when his wife died, he merited that she was buried in "*nachalat Hashem*" – the heritage-land of G-d. The Ramban thus implies that the acquisition of *Ma'arat HaMachpelah*, specifically as a שָׂדֵה אֲחֻזָּה, represented the beginning of the fulfillment of G-d's promise to Avraham that Eretz Yisrael would be his *nachala*.

Rav Soloveitchik (*Divrei Hashkafah*, 1994 ed., pp. 37-38) recounted an incident he heard from Alain de Rothschild of Paris. In 1949, after the War of Independence, the family of the *Nadiv HaYadua* ("The Famous Benefactor"), Baron Edmond de Rothschild, began to make plans to re-inter his remains and those of his wife in *Eretz Yisrael*. When General Charles de Gaulle heard of the plans, he summoned James de Rothschild, the baron's son, and remarked to him, "I always thought the Rothschild family was completely loyal to France. Now, I want to ask you, what is true loyalty?" De Gaulle answered his own question: "A true Frenchman is one who was educated in French schools, who fights for France in times of war, who contributes to French society. And a good Frenchman is also one who lives, dies and is buried in France. I cannot

understand how a good Frenchman can be buried in another land!"

Although he was not that observant of *mitzvot*, Baron Rothschild felt he should be buried in *Eretz Yisrael*, recognizing it as our National Homeland. Ya'akov told his children and his grandchildren, as did Yosef, that he wanted to be buried in *Eretz Yisrael* since he wanted everyone to keep in mind our strong connection to Eretz Yisrael. Nechemiah, upon being questioned by King Artachshasta over his downcast appearance, responded in a similar vein: מְדוּעַ לֹא־רָעוּ פָּנַי אֲשֶׁר הָעִיר: – "Why should my face not be downcast when the city of my ancestors' graves is in ruin?" (Nechemiah 2:3).

People have a deep attachment to the place of *kever avot*, and Jews are similarly drawn to *Eretz Yisrael*, where our *Avot* and *Imahot* are buried. This relationship began in our *parsha* through the burial of *Sarah Imeinu*.¹

Adapted from Rav Schachter on the *Parsha II*.

¹ See *MiPninei HaRav*, 2001 ed., pp. 274-275.

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The Secrets of Machpelah

“Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron, in the land of Canaan, and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and bewail her” (Bereishit 23:2).

Despite the fact that the Torah portion informs us of Sarah’s death, the name of the portion means the *life* of Sarah. From this, our Rabbis learn (Kohelet Rabbah 9:5) that *Tzaddikim*, the righteous, are considered “alive” even after their deaths. It is also fascinating to note that Avraham had no burial place prepared for Sarah, indicating that he never expected his wife, or any other family member, to die at so young an age, or perhaps it suggests that he already knew exactly where he was going to bury her.

Actually, Chevron was Avraham and Sarah’s first permanent home in the land of Canaan. They lived there for some 25 years, relocating to Be’er Sheva only after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the incestuous behavior of Lot and his daughters. In Be’er Sheva, Avraham proclaimed G-d’s teachings and (Bereishit 21:33), maintained an *Eshel*, which the Midrash interprets to mean a food pantry or an inn for wayfarers. Even when living elsewhere, Avraham apparently visited Be’er Sheva frequently.

We now find that Avraham and Sarah have moved back to Chevron and have been living there for approximately 12 years. Why did they return to Chevron?

The Midrash states that Abraham and Sarah had longed to be buried where Adam and Eve had been laid to rest. However, no one knew the exact

location of that site. On the day Avraham was informed by the angel that Sarah would give birth to Yitzchak, he went out to his herd to select animals to prepare a feast for his guests. According to the Midrash, one of the calves ran away into a cave. When Avraham followed the calf, he found Adam and Eve resting on their beds and a spiritual light of incredible brilliance burning above them. The entire scene was enveloped in incense-like fragrance. This place was the Cave of Machpelah, in the field of Efron, the Hittite.

As residents of Be’er Sheva, Avraham and Sarah were concerned the Hittites would not allow them to purchase the burial plot in Chevron. So when Sarah was 115 years old, Sarah and Avraham moved back to Chevron, to establish permanent residency there, enabling them to purchase the plot.

Rashi states (Bereishit 23:2) that the city of Chevron was also known as Kiryat-Arba, which means the village of four, because of the four couples who were eventually buried there: Adam and Eve, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka and Ya’akov and Leah. Rashi further states (Bereishit 23:9) the burial place was also known as “*Ma’arat HaMachpelah*,” the Cave of *Machpelah*, meaning the double cave, because it consisted of a “*bayit*,” a lower floor with an upper floor on top. An alternative explanation cited by Rashi explains the cave was “doubled,” with only married couples buried there.

The Ramban cites the Midrash in Bereishit Rabbah 55:10, which claims the origin of the name *Machpelah*

may stem from the fact the Almighty is said to have folded the very tall corpse of Adam in half, so it could fit into the cave. Even though the cave was always known as *Machpelah*, the local Hittite people were unaware of the name’s significance, or that there were graves in the cave. That may also be the reason why the local people refer to the entire area as *Machpelah*, whereas Avraham refers only to the cave as *Machpelah*.

The Rashbam claims the entire valley was known by the name *Machpelah*, which included the field and the cave. Wilhelm Gesenius (1786-1842, German Hebrew grammarian), maintains the name is of Ethiopian origin, and means a portion or district.

According to the Zohar, both Avraham and Yitzchak recognized the special nature of the *Machpelah* cave. The Zohar submits that when Avraham first entered the cave, he came upon the entrance to the Garden of Eden. The cave was filled with fragrant smells and a piercing light shone out of the cave. Similarly, when Yitzchak blessed his son Ya’akov, thinking it was Esav, saying “Behold the fragrance of my son is as the fragrance of a field, which G-d has blessed,” he too was referring to the fragrance of the Garden of Eden and to the primordial light of creation emanating from *Machpelah*.

Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald is Director of NJOP and Rabbi of the Beginners Service at Lincoln Square Synagogue.



The Politics of Spiritual Leadership

Our matriarch Sarah's name, שָׂרָה (literally a female officer), hints she was far more than an excellent wife and mother. She was a leader in her own right. The other name attributed to her, יְסָקָה (see Bereishit 11:29 with Rashi), may also be connected to the word נְסִיכָה (princess). However, let us focus on a different type of position of power, as seen in the *haftarah* of Chayei Sarah.

While we are familiar with the title *kohen*, we might not be aware of its implication of authority. Indeed, the verse that says “the sons of David were *kohanim*” (Shmuel II:8:18) refers to positions of power, as they were not descendants of Aharon.

Actually, the *kohanim* in the Beit HaMikdash had authority, all the more so the *Kohen Gadol*, who was in charge of a huge operation in the Temple. While this included great spiritual responsibility, it also included control over a tremendous budget, which was independent of the king's control and had a built-in system for raising funds. The *Kohen Gadol* was also in charge of a limited judicial system, known as *beit din shel kohanim* (see Mishna Ketubot 1:5). At times, this system led to severe corruption, such as at the time of the sons of Eli or of the bribe-paying candidates for the job during Second Temple times.

In our *haftarah*, we are witness to a power struggle of a different kind between two prominent *kohanim*.

Toward the end of David's reign, it was clear to most citizens that his successor would be Adoniya, his wife Chagit's oldest son. Nevertheless,



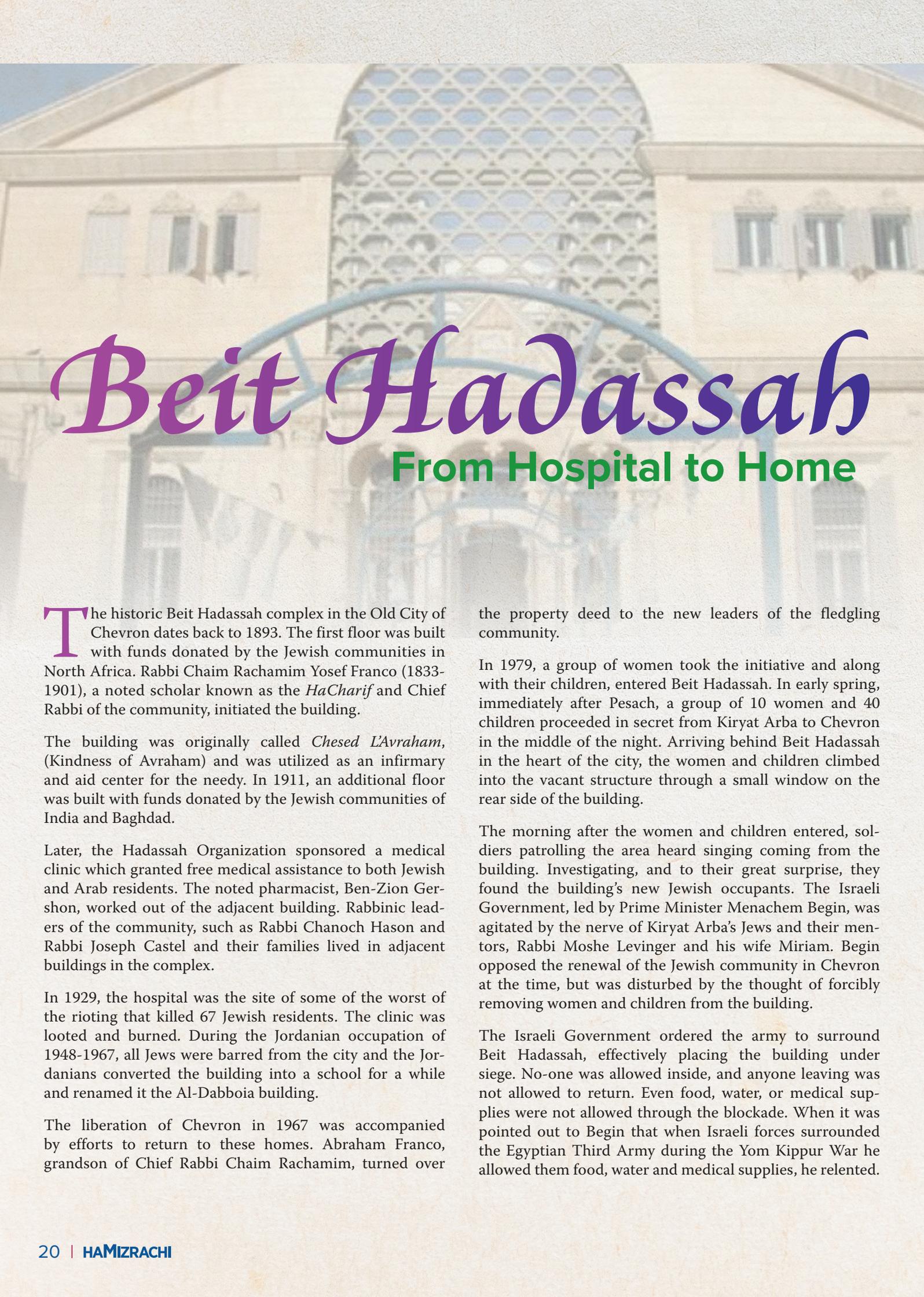
Batsheva held David to his promise that her son Shlomo would ascend to the crown. Two *Kohanim Gedolim* who shared the post arose on the two sides of this dispute. Tzadok, who represented the house of Aharon's son Elazar, stood behind Shlomo, whereas Evyatar, who represented the house of Itamar, threw his support behind Adoniya. At the end of the process, Evyatar and his family were banished to their village of Anatot and removed from prominence (Melachim I:2:26), and Tzadok became the sole leader of the tribe.

Why was Tzadok's involvement in the dispute deemed proper while Evyatar's was not? What was wrong with supporting Adoniya? From these verses, perhaps we can learn when it is right for religious leaders to get involved in political debate. Adoniya is described as approaching Evyatar, who agreed to support him (ibid. 7). Adoniya should have acted with humility and waited for David to decide who would succeed him,

after consultation with the prophet. Evyatar's involvement in this political maneuvering is an example of an improper attempt to decide matters and perhaps also an attempt to ensure his position of power under the new regime. Tzadok, in contrast, did not take a stand but brought the matter to David to decide, only after which did he add his blessing to the decision.

The prophets, while also holy people like the *kohanim*, did have a role that made it appropriate for them to become involved in political matters. After all, their job was not to determine halachic policy for the generations but to educate the people as to what to do in the present, which might include “political” steps.

Rabbi Yosef Carmel was born in Jerusalem in 1953. He is the Rabbinical Dean of the Eretz Hemdah Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies in Jerusalem.



Beit Hadassah

From Hospital to Home

The historic Beit Hadassah complex in the Old City of Chevron dates back to 1893. The first floor was built with funds donated by the Jewish communities in North Africa. Rabbi Chaim Rachamim Yosef Franco (1833-1901), a noted scholar known as the *HaCharif* and Chief Rabbi of the community, initiated the building.

The building was originally called *Chesed LAvraham*, (Kindness of Avraham) and was utilized as an infirmary and aid center for the needy. In 1911, an additional floor was built with funds donated by the Jewish communities of India and Baghdad.

Later, the Hadassah Organization sponsored a medical clinic which granted free medical assistance to both Jewish and Arab residents. The noted pharmacist, Ben-Zion Gershon, worked out of the adjacent building. Rabbinic leaders of the community, such as Rabbi Chanoch Hason and Rabbi Joseph Castel and their families lived in adjacent buildings in the complex.

In 1929, the hospital was the site of some of the worst of the rioting that killed 67 Jewish residents. The clinic was looted and burned. During the Jordanian occupation of 1948-1967, all Jews were barred from the city and the Jordanians converted the building into a school for a while and renamed it the Al-Dabboia building.

The liberation of Chevron in 1967 was accompanied by efforts to return to these homes. Abraham Franco, grandson of Chief Rabbi Chaim Rachamim, turned over

the property deed to the new leaders of the fledgling community.

In 1979, a group of women took the initiative and along with their children, entered Beit Hadassah. In early spring, immediately after Pesach, a group of 10 women and 40 children proceeded in secret from Kiryat Arba to Chevron in the middle of the night. Arriving behind Beit Hadassah in the heart of the city, the women and children climbed into the vacant structure through a small window on the rear side of the building.

The morning after the women and children entered, soldiers patrolling the area heard singing coming from the building. Investigating, and to their great surprise, they found the building's new Jewish occupants. The Israeli Government, led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, was agitated by the nerve of Kiryat Arba's Jews and their mentors, Rabbi Moshe Levinger and his wife Miriam. Begin opposed the renewal of the Jewish community in Chevron at the time, but was disturbed by the thought of forcibly removing women and children from the building.

The Israeli Government ordered the army to surround Beit Hadassah, effectively placing the building under siege. No-one was allowed inside, and anyone leaving was not allowed to return. Even food, water, or medical supplies were not allowed through the blockade. When it was pointed out to Begin that when Israeli forces surrounded the Egyptian Third Army during the Yom Kippur War he allowed them food, water and medical supplies, he relented.

The government subsequently gave its blessing to the reestablishment of a permanent Jewish civilian presence in Chevron. Prime Minister Menachem Begin stated at the time, "Chevron is also [part of] Israel. I will not allow for any place Israel to be 'Judenrein.'" The pioneering women were eventually joined by their husbands.

In July 2020, Mrs. Levinger penned a partial memoir of those days:

"A truck was organized to come to Kiryat Arba at three o'clock in the morning to transport us to Beit Hadassah. Yeshiva students from Nir Yeshiva joined to help. We parked in the street behind Beit Hadassah, we all climbed into the courtyard by ladder and entered the building. We gave cookies and oranges to the children and put them to sleep on mattresses on the floor. That was the beginning. Our conditions were terrible. No running water or electricity. We had only chemical toilets and lots of dirt, dust and mold.

I reminded myself of the original chalutzim [Zionist pioneers] in the 1900's and realized we were much better off than them. We slept on mattresses on the floor and the women from Kiryat Arba helped with basic needs, including food and laundry. The army realized after many days that we were not planning on leaving, regardless of our conditions.

Binyamin Ben Eliezer, Commander of Yehuda and Shomron, came and surrounded Beit Hadassah with barbed wire. He warned us that if anyone left, they would not be

allowed back in. Supplies were delivered twice a week. Soldiers were placed on the second floor to guard us. They had bathrooms, electricity and running water. We took electricity from them for a small fridge. We had kerosene lamps, water in jerrycans, and baby bathtubs for washing dishes. Our days were spent preparing meals and occupying the children."

It was a singular honor to have G-d declare that the women were right. There were elements in the army, police and Knesset members who campaigned against us. But I was secure in the knowledge that the Jews settled Israel 4,000 years ago, in obedience to G-d's command."

In 1980, Beit Hadassah, along with the Hason and Castel family homes, was rebuilt.

Ultimately, zoning approval was obtained, which served as a basis for the renewal of the community. During this period, Beit Hadassah and other historic buildings were renovated. They were redesigned by the noted architect David Cassuto and re-inaugurated on January 20, 1986. Cassuto also helped plan and rebuild other historic synagogues throughout Israel.

In 1999, the foundation for the Beit HaShisha building was laid as a tribute to the early pioneers of the reestablished community.

Today, about 30 Jewish families live in Beit Hadassah, which is a thriving residential complex with a playground, synagogue and a museum and visitor's center on the ground floor.



Remembering Rabbanit Miriam Levinger

Born in 1937 in the USA, Miriam Beinhorn Levinger immigrated to Israel in 1956. After graduating from college, Miriam attended Shaare Zedek Nursing School. In 1959, she married Rabbi Moshe Levinger, a student of the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva and one of the prominent students of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. Rabbi Levinger served as the Rabbi of Kibbutz Lavi and later the Rabbi of Moshav Nechalim.

In 1968, just after the Six-Day War, Rabbi Moshe and Miriam brought their little children along with other participants to settle in the Park Hotel in Chevron. In doing so, Rabbi Levinger initiated the resettling of the City of our Forefathers. After three



years of residence under military government and another eight years in Kiryat Arba, a group of women and children led by Rabbanit Levinger sacrificed their personal comfort to live in the abandoned Hadassah building in Chevron. This opened the way for Jewish settlement in Chevron.

Since then, other neighborhoods have been established, leaning on the resolve and spirit of Rabbi and Rabbanit Levinger, who dedicated their lives to expanding settlement in Chevron and throughout Israel.

Rabbanit Levinger passed away this year on Motzei Yom Kippur. She was 83 years old and is survived by 11 children and 50 grandchildren, most of whom live in Judea and Samaria. Her husband passed away in 2015.



The Widower's Predicament

Widowhood is mentioned dozens of times in the Torah as a situation of vulnerability, exposure, lacking protection. The widow is often mentioned together with the orphan and the convert – those whom it is forbidden to exploit; those for whom society should take responsibility for their wellbeing.

But what of the widower's personal experience? What is happening in his internal world?

Megillat Eicha expresses the enormity of the fragmentation and the mourning and depicts a metaphoric widow, *Am Yisrael*, mourning over the loss of Jerusalem. The 'widow's' experience is described in detail with great sensitivity.

We hear the details of Avraham's involvement in his wife's burial. We hear him coming to eulogize Sarah and weep over her.

Who is this woman we have lost? Who is this woman, this righteous individual who shared his life mission with him, amidst the traumatic transitions from Ur Casdim to Haran and Canaan? This woman was a greater prophetess than he was, but a full partner as they wandered from place to place, spreading the 'gospel' of monotheism. She endangered herself for Avraham, and her beauty, her wisdom, her righteousness and noble soul were never tarnished.

As Avraham eulogizes her, the sobbing wells up deep from within, becoming stronger and stronger – perhaps even lasting for days – as the void becomes more and more visceral and he internalizes his terrible loss.

We hear Ya'akov's heart-wrenching expression "And when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me" (Bereishit 48:7). He says this years later, at the end of his life. We still feel the great chasm, the sorrow and the loss. In the words of the Midrash:

"... a woman only dies to her husband, and a husband only dies to his wife."

The *Midrash* connects these words to a description of another experience of widowhood, that of Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, upon her husband Elimelech's passing.

And Rabbi Yochanan says (in that same *midrash*): "Ya'akov Avinu said: Rachel's death was harder for me than all the troubles I had."

"A woman only dies to her husband." Someone who has not experienced the loss of a spouse cannot understand this. Perhaps one can identify external sadness and vulnerability, but the loss itself, the death, the enormity of the void and its accompanying silence... only the widow or the widower can fully experience.

Yet despite his pain, Avraham marries other women, has more children and lives for almost another 40 years after Sarah's death.

It is almost impossible to express this dissonance in words. Suffering the most painful of losses in death and then demonstrating the ability to come back to life, to rebuild, to find meaning in and zest for life, and often choosing to marry again. To love and to flourish.

The difficulty in writing about widowhood – and not only carrying on after a spouse's death but instilling

meaning and joy into life – reflects the mystery of widowhood itself.

How does one hold these two opposites together?

The *Midrash* in Bava Batra depicts Avraham and Sarah's graves. Avraham lies in Sarah's bosom and Sarah is contemplating Avraham's head. A possible interpretation could be that a man says to himself: I have shared the main chapter of my life with my great partner – we shared years of work, faith and children, and in the *midrash* you will write about me, perhaps I will reappear with the wife of my youth... but as long as G-d chooses to give me life and more days upon this earth, I will live them to the full. I'll take an active role, contribute to society and, *b'ezrat Hashem*, I will love life and be content with my life and the life of my family and those around me.

Maybe it is precisely the person who has experienced a great love in his life who will want to restart and love again. And maybe it is precisely a couple who have had a beautiful, successful marriage who will wish themselves or their spouse a good and full life as far as possible, and when the conditions are right, even to marry again. Because with all of its challenges and heartbreak, they realize life is a gift to be enjoyed, a mission to fulfill wholeheartedly.

Rabbanit Rachelle Fraenkel teaches Torah at midrashot in Israel.



Our Beloved Mother

The sweet aroma of freshly-baked *challah* is no longer in the air...

The candles which once illuminated ever so brightly have been extinguished...

And the Heavenly cloud, which provided shelter and protection, has disappeared.

Sarah's soul has been recalled to heaven.

As the Midrash relates, it was at this time that Avraham praised Sarah with the beautiful words of *Eishet Chayil*, recognizing her dedication as a woman of valor to G-d and her family.

However, it seems odd. Why would Avraham only now extol Sarah's unique qualities? Why only after she passed away did he take special note of the blessings in her dough, candles and clouds?

A person can only appreciate the full scope of his wife's or mother's deeds after her lifetime. Her true greatness can be seen from the legacy she leaves behind.

Sarah never completely left her tent. After her passing, when Yitzchak brought his new wife, Rivka, into Sarah's tent, the illuminating candles, fresh *challah* and Divine cloud returned. While Rivka would now step into the role of the primary Matriarch of *Klal Yisrael*, the life and lessons Sarah left behind would forever continue to inspire and warm the hearts of her beloved children.

Even amidst the darkness, Sarah saw light. Even when life was painful and

troublesome, she saw G-d's salvation.

And it is that unique perspective in life she has bequeathed to us all. We all possess the inner conviction to recognize the good and see that G-d is carrying us along. For Sarah herself, she was barren for 90 years, abducted by Pharaoh and Avimelech, and died at the shock of hearing about the near-death experience of her son, Yitzchak. Yet what does the Torah tell us?

"And the years of Sarah were 100 years, 20 years and seven years, the years of Sarah's life" (Bereishit 23:1). Rashi explains that the redundancy of the word "years" after each period of life teaches that these years shared similar qualities. When Sarah was 100 years old, she was as sinless as she was at age 20, comparable to an individual under 20 years of age who is not subject to Heavenly retribution. And when she was 20, she was as charming and beautiful as a seven-year-old.

We find a further comparison between the numbers 100 and 20, adding further meaning and dimension to the balance of Sarah's life. The 100th *perek* of Tehillim describes the joy one is to experience when serving G-d. "Serve G-d with gladness, come before Him with joyous song..." The 20th *perek* depicts the opposite set of circumstances, a life of challenge and difficulty: "May G-d answer you on the day of distress... may He send help and support you..."

As *Chazal* state, the final repetitive phrase of the verse – "the years of Sarah's life" – teaches that all the days of Sarah's life were equally good in her eyes. For Sarah, both the joyful and

sad experiences were embraced and understood to be coming from G-d. Whatever she was going through, she maintained the same positive and optimistic outlook. Because she knew all along that G-d was supporting her and serving as her source of comfort and strength.

After I sadly lost my own child a"h, I was reminded it was appropriate to recite the verse, "G-d has given and G-d has taken away; may the name of G-d be blessed" (Iyov 1:21). The Ben Ish Chai explains that we often only understand how much G-d gives us after G-d takes it away. It is then we value what precious gift we had and how much we ought to have appreciated it.

And so I named my next son Natan, meaning "give." I learned to understand that everything we have in life is a beautiful gift from G-d. Whether times are good or challenging, G-d is there to lend us support.

That is the eternal lesson Sarah has left us. Appreciate every year of life and every step along the way. And when we do so, we will surely be following in the ways of our dear mother, for whom every day and every moment of life was full of G-d's goodness.

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi is a popular Israeli teacher, speaker and writer.

Sleepy Sermon

Once, when Rabbi Akiva was teaching his students, they appeared to be lethargic, almost dozing. Rabbi Akiva aroused his students by referring to *Parshat Chayei Sarah*, which begins by relating that Sarah lived “100 years and 20 years and 7 years.” He then said that Queen Esther merited ruling over 127 lands of the Persian Empire because of her ancestress Sarah. Aside from the bloodline, what other connection can we establish that would explain why Esther merited such greatness?

First, we must understand that these students were not ordinary students prone to boredom. Among them were the great Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda – giants whose work enabled Judaism to continue after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, says Rabbi Druck in *Dorash Mordechai*. However, that was exactly the point. Rabbi Akiva lived during a period of destruction and devastation for the Jewish people. There was work to do.

Both Sarah and Esther were founders of a new nation, Sarah at the point of our inception, and Esther at our rebirth from imminent annihilation. Despite these challenges and responsibilities, each maintained their *temimut*, their wholeness and purity, at every stage of their lives.

Rabbi Menachem Zion Sacks, a Holocaust survivor, adds another dimension to our discussion by citing a complementary source from Shir Hashirim Rabbah. Here too, a great Rabbi’s students needed to be roused from their lethargy.

Rabbi Yehuda told his students that in Egypt, one woman gave birth to 600,000 children at once. Who was this woman? Yocheved, who gave birth to Moshe Rabbeinu. Because of his role in saving the Jewish nation, Moshe is equivalent to the 600,000 people who left Egypt under his leadership.

Both Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yehuda were dealing with the sense of despondency and hopelessness of their generation after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. By citing these models – Sarah, Moshe and Esther, they were trying to inspire hope in their disciples and rally them to rebuild, to fire up their brothers and bring the assimilated Jews back to Torah. That was their mission, and that is what they accomplished, as did our great post-Holocaust Rabbis of the previous generation.

Rashi says the Torah adds “these were the years of Sarah” to tell us that all her years were equally good. Why were they all equal and good? Rabbi Sacks explains that in spite of her very difficult challenges, (even being imprisoned in a foreign king’s palace), Sarah never lost hope to do good. Similarly, Esther also went through challenges and trials, even being in a foreign king’s palace (albeit as queen), but she always remained as steadfast in her faith as she had been as a ward in Mordechai’s home. Rabbi Akiva could easily have given up, but by citing the examples of Esther and Sarah, he bolstered his own faith and spurred his disciples to action.

While Queen Esther ruled over 127 lands, Rabbi Alpert maintains that the

connection between Esther and Sarah is stronger than external sovereignty, for Sarah, as her name suggests, also ruled. (שרה means a female officer or minister.) Both maintained mastery over themselves and over their faith, in whatever circumstances they found themselves. They always believed they were where G-d wanted them to be at the moment and that G-d was with them.

The righteous ones are *temimim*, whole, complete, with integrity to their entire being. G-d knows this integrity as it is intertwined with time. Time is itself a product of G-d’s creation, and just as each of us is recreated each day, so is time. Therefore, each moment is unique and must be used appropriately. Each moment needs to be integrated into one’s life toward fulfilling one’s spiritual potential. Otherwise, one is killing time rather than letting it live on to eternity. Both Sarah and Queen Esther used their time fully, whether “creating souls” in Charan or maintaining Jewish identity during a time when G-d hid His face from us.

This was Rabbi Akiva’s message to his disciples. Just as Sarah Imeinu affected so many lives in her generation, so can you affect lives in this generation. Wake up from your lethargic despondency and make your time count.

Mrs. Shira Smiles is a sought-after international lecturer, a popular seminary teacher, and an experienced curriculum developer.



Burial in the Double Cave

According to tradition, Sarah was not the first person to be buried in *Ma'arat HaMachpelah* in Chevron. Already buried there were Adam and Eve. Subsequently three more couples joined them: Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Ya'akov and Leah.

Why was this burial cave called "*Machpelah*"? *Machpelah* means "doubled." The Sages (Eruvin 53a) explained that it is a double cave, containing two rooms or two floors. The Talmud tells of one scholar who risked entering the cave. He found the *Avot* (the Patriarchs and Matriarchs) in one room, and Adam and Eve in the second.

What is the significance of *Ma'arat HaMachpelah* having two rooms? And what is the function of burial in general?

There are two paths of spiritual growth and enlightenment, each with its own advantages. The first path utilizes our natural faculties of reasoning and analysis. When functioning properly, our powers of intellect can achieve wonderful results. They enable us to acquire precious character traits, and serve G-d through an inner awareness.

However, the mind is bound and influenced by the body. When the body is swept away by cravings for physical pleasures, the mind also loses its direction. These physical desires can distort our perceptions and warp our reasoning, and we are left without guidance to enlightened living.

Therefore, G-d created a second means for spiritual progress: the Torah. The Torah is independent of the physical body, unaffected

by its proclivities and desires. It is an immutable guide to the path of integrity and holiness. Certainly the powers of the human mind can never provide for the same level of sanctity as can be attained through the G-d-given instructions of the Torah and its *mitzvot*.

Yet, the path of the human intellect retains a special advantage. The observance of *mitzvot*, while very lofty, has no direct influence on the body itself. The body is still attracted to physical desires, and remains at odds with the Torah's spiritual goals.

Optimally, the two methods should be combined. If our performance of *mitzvot* can awaken our hearts and inspire our minds, a harmony is established between our physical actions and our inner awareness. Since our mental faculties are part of our basic nature, when the mind connects with the Torah, the physical side also becomes integrated with the precepts. This refinement of the body could not have occurred without combining the Torah with our natural powers of intellect and reason.

After the sin of Adam, death was decreed upon humanity. This was not an arbitrary punishment. The purpose of death is to separate body and soul, enabling both to be repaired and refined. The soul, unburdened with the body's physical desires, is mended and refined in the World of Souls.

The body also requires spiritual correction. It too was formed in G-d's image and has tremendous spiritual power when it complements the holiness of the soul. While the soul is corrected in the World of Souls, the

body is repaired through burial, as it returns to its original elements.

What does this have to do with *Ma'arat HaMachpelah*? Burial in the double cave is a metaphor for the two methods by which the body is refined and elevated.

The first method, utilizing human intelligence and reason, is exemplified by Adam and Eve. The first man and woman were created with the highest level of pristine talents and powers. With their robust mental faculties, they embodied the use of native intellect and reasoning for spiritual advancement.

On the other hand, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were the origin of the Jewish people, paving the way for the Torah's revelation at Sinai. They represent the second spiritual guide, that of the Torah.

The double burial cave of *Machpelah* combined these two paths. One room contained Adam and Eve, the pinnacle of natural intellectual capability. The second room hosted the *Avot*, the progenitors of the Torah. The name of the city, Chevron, comes from the word *chibur* ("connection"), hinting at the fusion of both paths to elevate the Jew.

Adapted from Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 53-55. Originally adapted from Midbar Shur.

Rabbi Chanan Morrison is the author of several books on Rav Kook's writings.



The Old Jewish Cemetery of Chevron

While Chevron is most famous for being home to *Ma'arat HaMachpelah*, many people also take the opportunity to visit the Old Jewish cemetery when they find themselves in this holy city. Located up the hill from the Avraham Avinu neighborhood and below the ancient Tel Rumeida, the Chevron cemetery is the eternal resting place of a number of lesser-known Jewish heroes.

Jewish doctor and geographer, Yitzchak HaCohen ben Moshe, better known by his pen name, Ishtori Haparchi, made note of the cemetery as early as 1322. Famous Rabbis, including the *Reishit Chochma* – Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas, the *Sdei Chemed* – Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk and Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi, were buried in the cemetery. There are also four *kivrei achim*, mass graves, where 59 victims of the 1929 riots were laid to rest.

When Jews began to return to the area following the Six-Day War, their request to reopen the cemetery for burial was denied. That changed in 1975, when Sarah Nachshon, determined to bury her child in the city where his namesake was buried, carried the body of her infant son, Avraham Yedidya, past the soldiers and blockades. After his funeral, the ancient cemetery began to undergo restoration under the leadership of Professor Ben Zion Tavger, a refuse-nik who made *aliyah* to Chevron, and the local residents were allowed to resume use of the cemetery, which continues to today. This past Tishrei, activist and Chevron community leader, Rabbanit Miriam Levinger, was laid to rest there.

Like the pilgrimage that takes place on the Shabbat of *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, albeit on a smaller scale, hundreds of people flock to the ancient Chevron cemetery every winter to pay tribute to a modern matriarch. Even on a quiet day, it is easy to find the grave of Rabbanit Menucha Rochel Slonim in the Chabad portion of the cemetery (a section located around the corner from the main cemetery entrance).



Born in Russia in 1798, a daughter of the second Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Dov Ber Schneerson, Menucha Rochel entered the world on the same day her holy grandfather, the Ba'al HaTanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, was released from prison. Sentenced for treason for his efforts to financially support the Jewish community in Chevron (which was in the Ottoman Empire at the time, and therefore sending money there was a crime against Russia), the Alter Rebbe had spent many weeks in jail, finally being released on the 19th of Kislev. She was named Menucha in hopes that she would continue to provide comfort to others just as the day of her birth had provided comfort to her family and her grandfather's followers.

When her father became Rebbe, he continued to follow his father's lead in supporting the Jews of Chevron by sending emissaries from Lubavitch to strengthen and build the Jewish community. It has been almost 30 years since the first families were sent, when Menucha Rochel was able to emigrate to Chevron, at the age of 47, with her husband, Rabbi Ya'akov Kuli Slonim.

Regarded as a matriarch of the Chabad dynasty, Menucha Rochel earned her reputation as a holy and wise woman, quickly making herself an irreplaceable part of the community. Community members and strangers alike sought out her advice, comfort and blessings. Brides would visit her before their weddings, asking for her advice and blessing. People suffering from both physical and spiritual ailments sought her counsel. Like Sarah Imeinu, for whom Chevron is an eternal resting place, Rabbanit Menucha Rochel's home in Chevron was open to all who came to seek her comfort. And like Sarah, when Menucha passed away on the 24th of Shevat, 1888, at the age of 90, Chevron became her final resting place. Every year on that day, hundreds of people come to pay tribute to a woman who not only helped maintain Chevron's continuity but who, in so many ways, also upheld what it means to be a mother of the Jewish people.

Rivi Frankel is a tour guide in Israel working with individuals and groups from all backgrounds, and particularly with children and teens.

The Chevron Lockdown of 1840

From 1831 to 1918, in addition to malaria, tuberculosis, smallpox and dysentery, the Land of Israel suffered from repeated cholera epidemics with high mortality rates. The Ottoman Government imposed quarantine as the major measure but people repeatedly broke it while trying to escape from affected areas, particularly in walled cities. In the mid-1840s, during an outbreak originating in Egypt and affecting other Mediterranean countries, a quarantine center was created in Chevron. Special living quarters were built just outside the city to house those who were contagious.

The quarantine was referenced by Charles de Pardieu, a French count, who wrote of his experiences in his 1851 book "Excursion en Orient: l'Egypte, le Mont Sinäi, l'Arabie, la Palestine, la Syrie, le Liban." In it, he describes being confined to the living quarters in October 1849. There were walls, and separate units manned by Turkish soldiers to make sure potentially contaminated people were kept socially distant from one another. De Pardieu describes Chevron as a city in the valley with about 5,000 residents, both Arabs and Jews, with grey, block-like houses surmounted with domes set in the middle of roofs that doubled as balconies.

Such buildings can still be seen today.

He described the Tomb of the Patriarchs and the Tomb of the Matriarchs, the giant complex built by King Herod the Great to house the Cave of Machpelah, as "a medieval church" surrounded by walls and accompanied by minarets. "This church, converted into a mosque, contains, it is said, the tombs of the six characters of Genesis... The Turks, who have great veneration for the Patriarchs, do not let the Christians enter. They have, because of these traditions, given Chevron the name of *El-Khalil* (the friend, Abraham the friend of G-d). It was also in Chevron that David was crowned king of Israel."

He continues, "this city is now renowned for its glassworks. They make a lot of vases, ornaments, and glass bracelets..."

Such is true today, where modern Chevron produces and exports glass, shoes and other items. De Pardieu also complained that the Turkish soldiers were "brutes" and kept him and his entourage for longer than expected: "...to our amazement, the director of the quarantine said... our detention had to be 12 days. We do not go out until November. How is it 12 days?... the health guards had told

us seven days. The health guards had been mistaken, the quarantine time was indeed seven days the previous month, but the government decided to raise it to 12 days..."

The quarantined quarters in Chevron were also referenced by L. M. Cubley in her book "The Hills and Plains of Palestine," published in London in 1860. The author and artist visited the Land of Israel in 1853 and created several paintings and drawings of the scenes she witnessed, including that of the quarantine buildings in Chevron. "We then crossed the bazaar to the wall of the castle (*Kalha*), above which is the wall of the mosque *Haram Sharif*, that encloses the cave of Machpelah," she states. "Here I took the sketch looking over the mosque on the part of the town, Lower Pool, and *Jebel Kubbe Janib*, on which the quarantine buildings are situated... We then went by the Turkish burial ground to the quarantine buildings, outside of which the Pasha was encamped with his troops. After calling on the Pasha and quarantine doctor, the latter joined us in our ride to *Ayin Jedidi*, the supposed well of Abraham, and near which it is probable he lived, as it is on the hill opposite the mosque, which, there is little doubt, is on the site of the Cave of Machpelah." ■



ZIONISM RENEWED:

Mizrachi at the

World Zionist Congress

An interview with **Rabbi Doron Perez**,
Executive Chairman of World Mizrahi

Q: What is the World Zionist Congress?

A: Every five years, the World Zionist Organization (WZO) holds an international assembly of Jews – the World Zionist Congress (WZC). The 38th World Zionist Congress took place last month on October 20–22, 2020, with 524 delegates: 199 from Israel (38%), 152 from the United States (29%), and

173 from other countries (33%). Representation was determined by elections held in early 2020. Worldwide, Mizrahi won 60 seats at the Congress, 27 of which were from the United States, as part of Mizrahi's Orthodox Israel Coalition (OIC), making it the second largest delegation.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the World Zionist Organization

decided to hold all Congress sessions and deliberations online by means of a global virtual platform.

Q: What is decided at the WZC?

A: Since Theodore Herzl's first Zionist Congress in 1897, the WZC has continued to meet regularly. Upon the establishment of the State of Israel, the WZC became "The Parliament of the Jewish



Rabbi Perez signing the unity agreement at the WZO in the very room that served as David Ben-Gurion's office during his tenure as Chairman of the Jewish Agency.

People” and gave voice to world Jewry in decisions affecting Israeli society and the Israel-Diaspora relationship. This year, a wall-to-wall unity agreement was decided on regarding the appointment of the major portfolios and positions of influence within the National Institutions – the WZO, Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (KKL), Keren HaYesod and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Q: What is a wall-to-wall unity agreement? Why was this important to Mizrachi?

A: The unity of the Jewish people is a primary value at Mizrachi. In the negotiations, there were many different parties pushing for a more extreme stance either to the Right or to the Left.

We saw our role as to not only secure significant leadership positions for ourselves, which we did, but also to act as a bridge ensuring a wall-to-wall agreement in the spirit of the round table nature of these institutions. Mizrachi representatives consistently advocated for a fair deal which should give everyone power and influence based on their relative strength as is the custom in these institutions.

Our negotiating team played a pivotal role in the signing of the agreement in ensuring that ultimately there would be one large table around which all can sit to build the Zionist Movement together going forward.

Q: What key positions did Mizrachi secure?

A: This is the first time since the advent of the Zionist Movement that a Torah-observant Jew – Mizrachi’s Avraham Duvdevani (Duvdev) – has been appointed to head the influential KKL. After we head the KKL for two years, Mizrachi will lead for three years the Rural Development Department of the World Zionist Organization, which, like KKL, works to develop Israel’s periphery in the Negev and Galilee, a goal that is the key to the future of a country that is overly populated in its center and underpopulated in its periphery.

Mizrachi will also head the Education Department of the WZO, which deals with *shlichim* and, in particular, educational *shlichim* to schools around the world, reflecting a commitment to education that has been the focus of religious Zionists for centuries. This position will be held by Gael Grunewald who will also act as the Deputy Chairman of the WZO.

Mizrachi also received the Department for Religious Affairs for the Diaspora, which will be headed by Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman, for the next eight months, followed by Roi Abecassis, who is also deeply committed to these Jewish educational values.

Q: How did Mizrachi succeed in obtaining these positions?

A: This historic milestone happened not because of any backroom deals in Jerusalem but through the strong unified Religious Zionist delegation from Mizrachi branches worldwide, the Mizrachi-driven OIC in the US, and the Religious Zionist parties in Israel, totaling around 80 delegates. This made Mizrachi one of the largest and most influential delegations in the WZC and hence succeeded in obtaining these positions.

Q: How will Mizrachi use these key positions to advance its goals?

A: Mizrachi plans to use their greater influence to benefit the State of Israel

and *Klal Yisrael* – all branches, sectors and streams. Mizrachi will continue to be the bridge builders, facilitating friendship and collegiality among Jews around the world. At such a divisive time for the Jewish people in the US, Israel and around the world, this has never been more important.

Q: What are your take-away impressions of the WZC?

A: This was indeed historic. We at Mizrachi herald this moment of unity and look forward to working with all parties for a better future for the Jewish people, Israel and the Zionist Movement. We are equally humbled at the successes of Mizrachi at the World Zionist Congress in securing influential positions to further the ongoing impact of *Torat Eretz Yisrael* in Israel and around the world. A heartfelt thanks to all our many passionate professionals, lay leaders, ambassadors, volunteers, delegates and voters, who all worked together to secure this incredible result of building on our common fate and furthering the impact of our collective destiny.



Mizrachi’s representatives in the National Institutions: (clockwise from top left) Avraham Duvdevani, Gael Grunewald, Roi Abecassis and Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman

I, along with Chairman of the Board, Mr. Harvey Blitz and all at Mizrachi, wish Avraham Duvdevani, Gael Grunewald, Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman and Roi Abecassis much success in their new and important positions. ■



DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN LIGHT OF CHEVRON

MA'ASEH AVOT SIMAN LEBANIM

Photo courtesy of the Jewish Community of Hebron

This Shabbat we read about the first “Jewish Real Estate Agent,” Avraham Avinu, purchasing the Cave of *Machpelah*. The Torah goes into great detail, describing the title, deed and negotiations surrounding the purchase of the Double Cave. The commentaries are puzzled by Avraham’s insistence to bury Sarah Imeinu specifically in this cave when there were so many available burial caves elsewhere in Chevron.

The Zohar HaKadosh and the Midrash teach us that on the third day after his circumcision, Avraham Avinu was in emotional distress over being unable to invite guests. When the three angels came to visit him, Avraham personally went to prepare a great feast. The Zohar teaches us that the calf Avraham had been planning to serve to the angels ran away toward the area of the *Ma’ara*. While in pursuit of the calf, Avraham felt a great light and a beautiful fragrance emanating from the cave where Adam and Eve were buried. At that point, he desired the cave as a burial

place for himself and his wife, Sarah. In Hebrew, the word *HaBakar*, the calf, is made up of the same letters as *HaKever*, the grave.

Although Efron the Hittite had owned this cave for so many years, he was unable to sense anything unique or special about it. All Efron saw was a dark, dingy cave and so he was willing to give it away for free. Avraham Avinu, the true owner, was able to sense the “entrance to paradise” and the fragrance and spiritual light emanating from within.

At the age of three, my son Yedidya was diagnosed with autism. He could not communicate with words and made no eye contact. Despite endless efforts and therapy to facilitate him to communicate, he was still lost in his own world.

One day, Yedidya joined me on a tour of Chevron and the *Ma’ara*. He climbed through the bars of the locked symbolic memorial of

Avraham Avinu. This area is believed to be directly above the Double Cave. Suddenly, a big commotion ensued when the Israeli Police realized he was in the restricted area. They shouted at me to take him out. Immediately. However, Yedidya was in a trance, sitting on the floor, smiling and completely at ease. Then for the first time in his life, Yedidya spoke.

In a clear, strong voice, he proclaimed “אור פה.” He excitedly repeated these words “אור פה” – a light here, “אור גדול” – a great light here. As he was pointing below in the direction of the Double Cave, he continued to speak, proclaiming “אבא בית, אמא בית, פה פה” – the House of my Father, the House of my Mother, right here.

3,800 years later, my son Yedidya amazingly sensed the great spiritual light emanating from the Cave of *Machpelah*.

Rabbi Simcha Hochbaum is Director of Tourism at The Hebron Fund.



Just like our matriarch Sarah introduced us to candle lighting, The Hebron Fund is providing YOU with a beautiful copy of the *bracha* and *Yehi Ratzon* which you can fold into a table-tent and place by your Shabbat candles. In this way we hope that you will stay connected to Hebron. Download and print copies, and read more *divrei Torah* about Chayei Sarah, at hebronfund.org.

Rabbi Daniel Rosenstein
Executive Director, The Hebron Fund



NOAH'S ARK, CHEVRON AND THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

When the floodwaters came upon the earth, nothing remained alive except Noah and those with him in the Ark. They were protected because of G-d's mercy – “for Noah found favor in His eyes.” Noah's Ark has therefore come to symbolize a safe haven in a volatile world. But the physical Ark is lost to mankind and nor was it meant to be an object of pilgrimage.

Like Noah's Ark, Chevron's Tomb of the *Avot* and *Imahot* (Forefathers and Mothers) is a haven from the vicissitudes of a turbulent world. Yet unlike the Ark, the “*Machpelah*” is a physical place to visit – one which imbues its visitors with a sense of permanency and stability in the tumultuous universe and our fleeting existence. That is because the values of the *Avot* and *Imahot* are anchors in a world of constantly changing attitudes and values. G-d's promise to the *Avot* is a recurring and foundational theme in the Torah and is a bond that can never be abrogated.

This eternal imprint is the power behind the sense of peace and stability at the *Machpelah*.

Moreover, the *Machpelah* building itself has a feeling of permanency. Unlike other structures from the period, the monumental Herodian building that sits atop the tombs has never been destroyed. It has been added to and altered but the basic structure remains the same.

The Herodian edifice of the Tomb of the *Avot* and *Imahot* is the world's oldest standing structure that has continuously served its original purpose – a place to pay homage to the founders

of ethical monotheism and the first family of the Jewish nation.

Compare that to the most sacred site to the Jewish people – the Temple Mount – which was sacked by the Romans, a small part of which – the Western Wall – continues to be an epicenter of pilgrimage for Jews and gentiles around the world.



Yet the permanency of the *Machpelah* stands in contrast to the political and social reality that has swirled around it. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the site has been under the dominion of the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Mamluks, Turks, British and the Jordanians. Nevertheless, Jews and followers of Avraham have flocked to the site at different times and under varied conditions and always found comfort and unbounded strength.

Like Noah's Ark, the *Machpelah* also carries the theme of family. “Two by two,” male and female, did the animals come into and out of the ark. So too, the *Machpelah* is a place of couples – Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Ya'akov and Leah, who came together as a family to give birth to a nation.

The family bond, the bonds of love, and tribal values also give the Tomb its vitality and sense of eternal stability.

And speaking of tumultuous – the world today seems to be experiencing some kind of flood-like cataclysm. From divisive elections, riots and antisemitism in the US, to combative Israeli politics and of course the Coronavirus.

Yet, with all the *balagan* (mess or chaos), one light is shining bright – the nascent diplomatic relations between Israel and regional Arab states including the UAE, Bahrain and others. These are beautifully called the “Abraham Accords” – a name that recalls the father of the children of Israel and the children of Yishmael. It was in Chevron that Yitzchak and Yishmael came together to bury and honor their shared father Avraham – and it was then that Yishmael, the father of the Arabs, repented.

Chevron, the City of Avraham, and the Tomb of Avraham within it, should be viewed as a meeting place for all those who love Avraham and walk in his path of worshiping the One G-d. Soon, G-d willing, the House of Israel, the House of Saud, and all of the children of Avraham, physical and spiritual, will come together in Chevron to find common ground and to move forward in peace and prosperity.

But until that time, *Am Yisrael* will continue to stand strong to protect the Tomb of the *Avot* and *Imahot*, which like Noah's Ark, protects us throughout time.

Rabbi Yishai Fleisher is the International Spokesman for the Jewish Community of Hebron.



BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

In *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, Avraham sends his servant to his 'hometown' of Charan in search of a wife for his son Yitzchak. To guarantee that Eliezer will faithfully fulfill that mission, Avraham makes his servant take an oath in the Name of: "*Hashem*, the G-d of the Heavens, and the G-d of the Earth."

However, two verses later, when Avraham must allay Eliezer's fear that the wife he finds may prefer to stay in Charan, he promises his servant that: "*Hashem*, the G-d of the Heavens, who had taken him [Avraham] from his homeland..." will send an 'angel' to assist him.

The classical commentators are troubled by two problems. First of all, Avraham's description of G-d as "*Hashem*, the G-d of the Heavens and the G-d of the Earth" seems to imply there may be multiple gods, i.e. one of the heavens and one of the earth! Why couldn't Avraham simply have stated "*Hashem*, the G-d of 'heaven and earth'"?

Secondly, why does Avraham 'shorten' his second description of G-d to simply "the G-d of the Heavens," without mentioning 'the earth' at all?

Heavens 'and' Earth

Radak offers a philosophical explanation, claiming that Avraham is worried that his servant – even though he believes in 'the G-d of the heavens' – may not believe G-d's Providence extends over mundane matters 'down on earth' as well. Therefore, Avraham emphasizes this point in his opening statement, that He is not only the G-d overseeing what happens in the

Heavens, but He also oversees what happens on earth. However, when Avraham later explains to Eliezer how G-d had earlier spoken to him, it is sufficient for Avraham to mention only 'the G-d of the Heavens.'

Seforno explains that Avraham must impress upon his servant the severity of this oath. To assure his servant will keep it, he reminds him that G-d controls not only the matters of the 'earth' – and hence his fate in 'this world' – but also the matters of 'heaven,' which implies his fate in the world to come. By this statement, Avraham warns his servant that should he break this oath, he could expect not only punishment in this world but also in the world to come!

Ibn Ezra relates to the fact that Avraham is sending his servant on a mission to find a wife. Even though finding a spouse may appear to Eliezer as a mundane event taking place on 'earth,' Avraham must convince Eliezer that this marriage has been decided upon in the 'heavens.'

Finally, Ramban offers a very 'Zionistic' explanation. Unlike the other commentators who understand *aretz* as referring to the 'earth,' i.e. to events taking place down here on earth, Ramban understands *aretz* as referring to the Land of Israel. Therefore, because his servant is now leaving *Eretz Yisrael*, Avraham adds specifically the phrase *Elokei haAretz* to the standard phrase of *Elokei haShamayim*.

One might also suggest that by using these two phrases to describe G-d, Avraham may be alluding to the opening line of *Sefer Bereishit*, and hence

to a thematic connection between the purpose of Creation and G-d's involvement in the process of *Am Yisrael* becoming a Nation to serve Him.

Elokei HaShamayim

Rashi differentiates between Man's perception of G-d before Avraham was chosen and Man's perception of G-d now. Back when G-d first commanded Avraham to leave his homeland, no one on earth had yet recognized G-d. Hence His Kingdom was only in Heaven, as reflected in 24:7. But now, when Avraham sends Eliezer on his mission (see 24:3), he had already begun to proclaim G-d's Name to the public, hence *Hashem* can now be referred to as both *Elokei haShamayim* and *Elokei haAretz*.

Just as our forefathers referred to G-d in different ways based on the context of their relationship with Him, we also refer to G-d in many different ways in the 19 blessings of the daily *Amidah* – reflecting His various attributes in our relationship with Him. Next time you *daven*, take note!

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Our Role Today

Avraham and Sarah or Yitzchak and Rivka?

Death is not only tragic for those intimately affected. It also always poses problems of succession and reorganization of the family, company or institution. Avraham and Sarah, the founders of the Jewish nation, pass from the scene in this week's *parasha*. They are succeeded by Yitzchak and Rivka and in fact, the majority of the *parasha* concerns itself with how Yitzchak marries Rivka and how they establish their new home together.

In personality, temperament and action, Yitzchak and Rivka differ markedly from Avraham and Sarah. Whereas Avraham and Sarah devoted themselves to reaching as many outsiders as they could and were actively engaged in spreading the idea of monotheism in the surrounding society, Yitzchak and Rivka seem to take a more conservative approach. They attempted to consolidate what their forebears accomplished and to build a family nation rather than trying to attract more strangers to their cause.

As we will see in next week's *parasha*, Yitzchak and Rivka's struggle is an internal family one. How best to raise Eisav and Ya'akov and guarantee the continuity of Avraham and Sarah's ideas and beliefs through their

biological offspring. Eventually, it is only through Ya'akov that Avraham and Sarah continue and become the blessing G-d promised they would be. The world struggle that engaged Avraham and Sarah becomes a struggle within Avraham and Sarah's family itself.

It becomes abundantly clear that the Jewish people's main struggle will be to consolidate itself and thus influence the world by osmosis, so to speak. The time of Avraham and Sarah has passed and new times require different responses to the challenges of being a blessing to all of humankind.

There are those in the Jewish world who are committed to "fixing the world" at the expense of Jewish traditional life and Torah law. Yet the simple truth is that for the Jewish people to be effective in influencing the general society for good, we must be a strong and committed people. In Shir HaShirim, King Solomon warns us that "I have watched the vineyards of others but I have neglected guarding my own vineyard."

The attempted destruction and delegitimization of the Jewish people or the State of Israel – G-d forbid – in

order to further fuzzy, do-good, universal humanistic ideas, is a self-destructive viewpoint of the purpose of Judaism.

Without Jews, there is no Judaism.

Without Judaism, there is no true moral conscience left in the world.

Therefore, it seems evident to me that the primary imperative of Jews today is to strengthen and support Jewish family life, Torah education and the State of Israel.

We are in the generations of Yitzchak and Rivka and therefore we have to husband our resources and build ourselves first. As yet, we have not made good the population losses of the Holocaust 75 years ago! If the Jewish people will be strong and numerous, the age of Avraham and Sarah will reemerge. The tasks of the consolidation of Jewish life – as represented by the lives of Yitzchak and Rivka – should be the hallmark of our generation as well.

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Negotiations and Acquisitions

Sarah has died and Avraham has a carefully planned agenda for the funeral arrangements. He approaches the local clan and asks to purchase a particular parcel of land owned by a man named Ephron. Ephron offers to give Avraham the plot of land as a gift, free of charge, yet Avraham insists on paying for it. Eventually, a price is set; the sum is apparently exorbitant, especially considering the opening “price” offered by the seller.

While some Jews take pride in their business savvy, Avraham’s negotiation skills seem to have been sorely lacking. He overpays for something he could have procured for free. To make matters even worse, Avraham had been promised this entire land as his inheritance. Why did he insist on paying for something that G-d Himself would eventually deliver to him on a silver platter?

Avraham had not forgotten that this Land would eventually belong to him; in fact, G-d’s promise was precisely the reason Avraham behaved so strangely in this negotiation. Part and parcel of G-d’s promise that Avraham would inherit the Land of Israel was a “price” to be paid: “Know with certainty that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs and they will be enslaved and oppressed, for 400 years” (Bereishit 15:13).

The standard translation of this verse presents us with a much-debated problem. The Jews were not enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. However, if the verse is read while taking into account the cantillation symbols that serve

as punctuation of the Hebrew text, a very different parsing emerges: “Know with certainty that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs for 400 years. (At times,) they will be enslaved and oppressed.” This nuanced reading of the text is not always conveyed correctly in translation, but the gist of the verse is that the 400 years describes the duration of time in which they would be strangers or foreigners, devoid of sovereignty. The verse describes a period of time in which Avraham’s descendants would be a political minority in the Land that would eventually belong to them, and not a period of 400 years of oppression and enslavement.

Avraham had a very clear understanding of the promise G-d had made to him; in fact, he made reference to it in his negotiations with the locals: “I am a stranger (or foreigner) and a resident among you,” he said. “Allot for me a burial place among you so that I can bury my dead” (Bereishit 23:4). Avraham understood his political situation and acknowledged his current position as less-than-equal among the lords of the land. He echoed G-d’s use of the word *ger* to describe his status as an outsider among the locals, indicating that despite his absolute conviction that this Land would eventually belong to his descendants, he and his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren would continue to be “strangers” for 400 years – first in Canaan, then in the house of Lavan, and finally in Egypt. The local Canaanite population will continue to control politics, commerce and the military until the full price for the Land of Israel is paid and G-d’s promise comes to fruition.

And so, Avraham insists on paying for the burial plot. He insists on burying Sarah specifically in that spot because he cherishes the Land. He appreciates its significance and holiness, and he wants to be a part of it. He wants to make an acquisition, to establish a foothold, in this very unique place. He knows he will continue to be a stranger in the eyes of the surrounding population, but he also knows that this acquisition is the down payment on the Land. This is the beginning of ownership of the Land of Israel, which will last forever. Sarah’s burial was, figuratively and literally, the act that planted the roots of the Jewish people – and Avraham would not allow this act to be based on the on-again-off-again largesse of the local Canaanite population.

Ephron must have thought he had hoodwinked Avraham, taking from him 400 silver shekels for a burial plot, but Avraham was sure he had made a wonderful deal. For a mere 400 coins of silver, he had made the first acquisition in the Land of Israel, placing a down payment on the Land that would be inherited by his descendants 400 years later.

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Roses and Thorns

While our *parasha* is named for Sarah – a fitting final tribute to her remarkable life – we are now introduced to the next heroine, Rivka. Her uniqueness and role in Jewish history and her personality type – which is an eternal, integral part of our national DNA – is hard to decipher. Who was she? What special characteristics did she have that affect us all to this day?

We might be tempted to say that Rivka was simply a ‘replacement’ for Sarah, as the *pasuk* tells us that Yitzchak was “comforted for his mother” when he married Rivka. There is precious little interaction in the text between husband and wife; Rivka even consults Shem when she experiences difficulty with her pregnancy, rather than Yitzchak, who is certainly the greater prophet.

Perhaps a clue to Rivka’s uniqueness is found in the way *Chazal* characterize her, calling her a “rose among the thorns,” alluding to the *pasuk* in Shir HaShirim 2:2. At first glance, this would seem to mean that Rivka was a stunning thing of beauty surrounded by “thorns,” (i.e. her idolatrous family), just as Israel is also a handsome nation surrounded by problematic neighbors.

But hold on a second. While we may not like thorns, and certainly don’t appreciate being pricked by them, they actually serve to protect the rose! So how, exactly, was Rivka protected by her family, and how are we, today, “protected” by our own “thorny” neighbors? The simple explanation is that we, like Rivka, look good in comparison to what is around us and thus the thorniness of others works in our favor, evoking G-d’s

love for His people. But I suggest it goes much deeper than that.

Yitzchak was a pure soul, innocent, unassuming, a mass of concentrated *Kedusha*. He closed his eyes to the world at large and was content to stand off to the side and pray on his own. He had no real street smarts to aid him in dealing with others (in particular, with his own son Esav). Yitzchak, more often than not, merely mimicked the actions of his father, going where he had gone, digging the same wells, even using the exact same names for those wells his father had previously chosen.

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While we may not like thorns, and certainly don’t appreciate being pricked by them, they actually serve to protect the rose.

Perhaps this is why next week’s *parasha* begins, almost redundantly: “These are the generations of Yitzchak the son of Avraham; Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak.” The one was a copy of the other, in more than just physical appearance.

Rivka was different. She was confident and independent. Growing up in the same house with con-artist Lavan, she had seen it all. She could not be fooled by outward appearances; she could spot a fake or phony a mile away. And she knew how to expertly play the game to win.

She recognized Ya’akov’s inherent spiritual goodness and was adept in protecting him, securing his future by arranging for him to receive the *bechora* (birthright). Her tough upbringing, including her determination to forcefully speak up when necessary – as she did vis-a-vis her family when Eliezer visited – served her, and ultimately all of us, in good stead.

In a similar fashion, the nations of the world actually serve to “protect” us. They provide the point-counterpoint that justifies our existence, in a sense. We are meant to reflect the light of G-d as we emulate His ways and positively influence and refine the moral behavior of those around us, bringing a sense of splendor to them, just as every thorn bush takes its glory from the rose within.

At the same time, like Rivka, when the occasion calls for it we have to be tough, resilient and ‘thorny’ in our stubborn determination to protect ourselves and guard our unique way of life. To be holy, but also hard-nosed. If we succeed in doing that, our future will indeed be rosy.

Rabbi Stewart Weiss is director of the Jewish Outreach Center of Ra’anana.

The TOMBS of CHEVRON

While Chevron is most well known for the Tomb of the Patriarchs – *Ma'arat HaMachpelah*, there are believed to be three other tombs located in the city, those of Yishai and Ruth, Otniel ben Knaz and Avner ben Ner.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kamenitz, considered the first hotelier in the Land of Israel, wrote in his 1839 book *Sefer Korot HaItim*:

“Here I write of the graves of the righteous to which I paid my respects. Chevron... described above is the character and order of behavior of those coming to pray at the Cave of HaMachpelah. I went there, between the stores, over the grave of Avner ben Ner and was required to pay a Yishmaeli – the grave was in his courtyard – to allow me to enter. Outside of the city I went to the grave of Otniel ben Kenaz and, next to him, are laid to rest nine students in niches in the wall of a shelter standing in a vineyard. I gave 20 pares to the owner of the vineyard. Also in the vineyard was a shelter with two graves: one of Yishai, father of David, and one of Ruth, the Moabite. I gave the vineyard owner 20 pares.”

TOMB OF Yishai and Ruth

The tomb of Yishai and Ruth is an ancient structure located within the ruin of *Deir Al Arba'een* in the Tel Rumeida section of Chevron.

A small synagogue in the room adjacent to the tomb receives visitors throughout the year, especially on Shavuot when *Megillat Rut* is read. The roof provides a panoramic view of the Old City.

Rabbinic tradition describes Jesse as one of four righteous men who died free of sin and one of 10 who entered the Garden of Eden during their lifetimes.

This could be an allusion to Yishai's burial in Chevron as the *Ma'arat HaMachpelah* is described as an entrance to the Garden of Eden.



TOMB OF Otniel ben Knaz

About 200 meters west of Beit Hadassah, at the top of a rocky incline, is a burial cave. A five-minute walk from the intersection known today as Police-man's Square, is a multi-chambered burial cave, corresponding to how the Mishna, in Bava Batra 101, describes the traditional burial practices of the Jewish people in that time period.

Throughout the generations, it has been revered as the tomb of Otniel Ben Knaz, brother (kinsman) of Calev and the first judge of Israel. Otniel was considered a heroic leader who brought the Jewish people back to their roots after the death of Joshua.

The site has been mentioned by many travelers over the generations.

TOMB OF Avner ben Ner

In Shmuel II 3:32, the burial of Avner ben Ner is described: "And they buried Avner in Chevron, and the king raised his voice and wept on Avner's grave, and all the people wept."

According to a medieval Jewish tradition, he was buried near *Ma'arat HaMachpelah*. Avner ben Ner was King Shaul's cousin and commander-in-chief. After Shaul died in battle, Avner appointed his son, Ishboshet, as king, leading to rival factions being created.

The head of Shaul's son, Ishboshet, was said to be buried by Avner's grave, as described in Shmuel II 4:12: "And David commanded the young men, and they slew them... and hanged them up beside the pool in Chevron. But the head of Ishboshet they took and buried in the grave of Avner in Chevron."



Avoiding Hurtful Labels

The Vilna Gaon says that the best criticism – the only valid rebuke – is focused on future improvement. We should not dwell on what happened in the past, but be clear what kind of behavior we would like to see in the future. That’s a positive message. “Yesterday you may have done something wrong. Here’s what I would like to see from you tomorrow.”

When disciplining your child, try to frame the discussion in terms of consequences as opposed to punishments. Framing the consequences as logical outcomes of improper behavior makes for less resentment on your child’s part. It will also, in all likelihood, result in long-term improvement.

A consequence can loosely be defined as an outcome of one’s poor behavior. There is a direct correlation between the misdeed and its consequence. Your child can learn positive, long-term lessons about avoiding these types of consequences in the future by exhibiting self-control and avoiding the behavior that resulted in the consequence.

A consequence of a child leaving a messy room would be to have him or her clean it up during a time he or she would rather be out with friends. A punishment would be not allowing the child to go to the park later in the day after the room has been cleaned. The punishment in this case has nothing to do with the misdeed.

Obviously, punishments are in order when misdeeds are done, and there are many types of poor behavior that cannot be presented as consequences. But creatively thinking in

terms of outcomes and consequences will hopefully enable your child to grow from the unpleasant experience of being on the receiving end of your rebuke.

Several years ago, I was invited by the owner of a summer camp to conduct a staff-development lecture with his counselors. I addressed several topics – among them the subject of constructive criticism. I began by asking for a volunteer willing to describe the last time he criticized a camper.

It was quiet for a few moments. Then a very charming young man raised his hand. “I admonished one of my campers today in front of the whole bunk,” he proudly stated. I asked him to describe what happened.

“Well, I caught him going through my things in my cubby. He was reading a private letter of mine. And... you know... I told him what he had to hear.”

Before he launched into any further details, I immediately told him that unless he was an angel, I was quite confident he had not handled this situation well. I explained to him that he was simply too close to the situation. The offense was not something he’d observed being done to someone else – it had been perpetrated against him personally. And he didn’t have time to carefully formulate a response.

Sure enough, his response had been, “You’re a thief, and I’m never going to trust you again,” in the presence of the entire bunk. Moreover, he informed the child, “I’m going to tell your teacher about this.”

I was quiet for a moment. Then I asked him, “Can you think of a

time when an adult-figure in your life called you a less-than-flattering name? What was the label the person gave you? What do you think that person was trying to convey to you? And finally, how effective was his criticism?”

The young man related how he had been admonished for his (admittedly) inappropriate dress on a school day, and how a member of the faculty used a label with negative connotations when delivering the criticism. Of course, he shared with his peers that the rebuke was ineffective, and upon reflection, he mentioned he was clearly resentful about having been given an insulting label.

I suggested to the camp counselor that instead of calling the boy a thief, another way to handle the incident would have been to say to him – privately, without humiliating him in front of his peers – “You’re a nice kid, and I’m very disappointed that a boy like you would invade my privacy and take something belonging to me.”

When giving criticism to our children, it is important to offer them an opportunity to make amends, to right the wrong. It is important to tell our children what they did wrong, but it is equally important to tell them how they may make it right.

Rabbi Yakov Horowitz is the Founding Dean of Yeshiva Darchei Noam and the Director of Bright Beginnings. The entire Bright Beginnings innovative Beginner Gemara and Chumash books are now available on Amazon at <https://amzn.to/3hpKdqC>.

Rabbi Moshe Berliner



Leaving and Leveraging

Immediately after man's creation, the Torah proclaims the fundamental rule for a successful marriage: על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואמו וידבק באשתו – “so a man should leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife.”

The focus of one's identity moves from being the child of one's parent to being a person in his own right. He must “leave” his childhood identity and emerge as an independent adult, ready to join another in the sanctity of marriage.

This leaving is fundamentally a psychological/emotional process. There are times however when a person must physically leave their family in order to establish their own identity. We see for example that leaving their home before or after marriage is a repeated motif of the *Avot* and *Imahot*. One might suggest that Yitzchak too becomes ready to marry only after undergoing the transforming experience of the *Akeida*. Through that experience he emerges as a new individual with a new independent identity. He is then ready to marry Rivka.

Rivka teaches us an additional meaning of “leaving” one's parent's home. Rivka and Yitzchak disagree concerning which of their children should inherit the Abrahamic tradition. The Malbim explains that Yitzchak foresaw a future successful union between Esav representing this world and Ya'akov representing *olam haba*. His model was Zevulun and Yissachar. Therefore, he felt that Esav should receive the blessing for success in this world.

Rivka grew up in the house of Lavan. She understood that Esav would never accept Ya'akov's ownership of *olam haba*. He would fight to control both worlds. Had time allowed, the Malbim explains, Rivka would have spoken with her husband, but Yitzchak acted unexpectedly without consulting her. He asked Esav to prepare a meal for him in order to bless him. Rivka had no time for discussions. She had to act. In this situation, fraught with danger to the future of *Am Yisrael*, she turned to her experience growing up in the house of Lavan. She knew how to act with subterfuge in order to ensure that what was vital would come to fruition. She acted outside the usual acceptable rules of openness and understanding to ensure that G-d's Will would succeed. Yitzchak's response, when he became aware of the subterfuge, showed that he accepted that Rivka's actions, carried out by their son Ya'akov, were correct.

Rav Kook teaches us that all *middot* are intrinsically good. In addition, all experiences, even the most difficult, contain the potential to enrich us to serve our desire to fulfill G-d's will. Our *middot* and our experiences serve as the basis of our actions. We must always act carefully, only after deep consideration of the consequences of our behavior. But both our natural *middot*, as well as the lessons we have learned from our experience growing up in our parents' home, can be used to enrich our lives and deepen our wisdom in the ways we express G-d's Will.

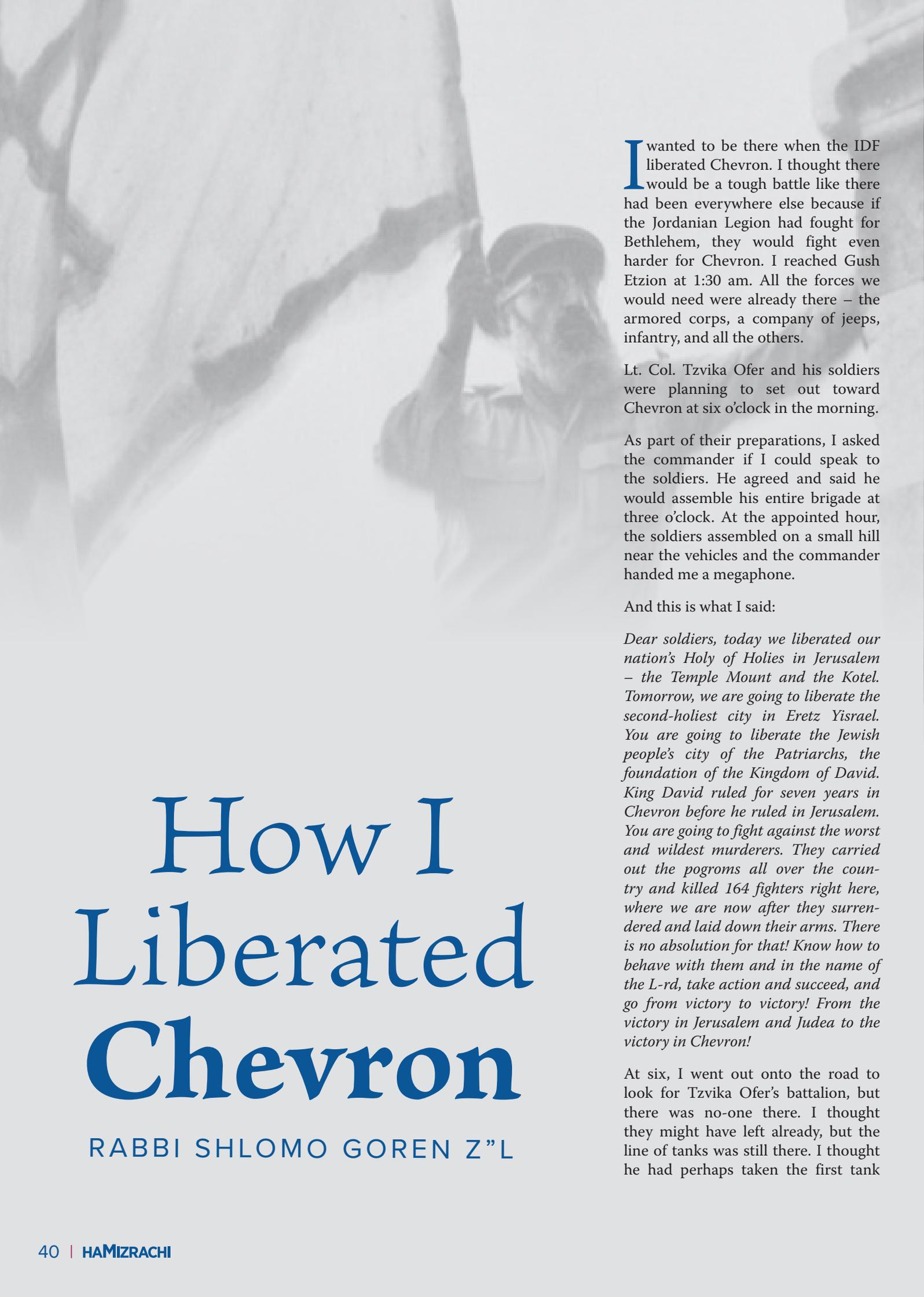
Most of us have been blessed by parents who did all they could to enrich our lives, to teach us to

walk in the ways of G-d, to develop our potential to bring out the fundamental good that G-d implanted in our souls. It is there inside us. Our responsibility is to use all we have inherited from them in ways that help us achieve what is important.

Rivka, growing up in the house of Lavan, learned about subterfuge. While deception is a totally unacceptable basis for normative human interactions, in the unique situation in which Rivka found herself, even subterfuge became the vital vehicle through which G-d's Will was achieved.

Marriage entails a fundamental “leaving” of our parents. This leaving has two elements. The first is the need to ground one's identity in oneself, not in our family of origin. The second element which we learn from Rivka is that all we inherit from our parents, even those negative elements – which must be expressed only in a unique situation and in the most vigilant way – can be used to further G-d's Will in the world.

Rabbi Moshe Berliner is an author, M.S.W. and therapist specializing in family and marriage. His book “To Build and to Bond: Living Well in a Jewish Marriage” is published by Mizrahi Press.



How I Liberated Chevron

RABBI SHLOMO GOREN Z" L

I wanted to be there when the IDF liberated Chevron. I thought there would be a tough battle like there had been everywhere else because if the Jordanian Legion had fought for Bethlehem, they would fight even harder for Chevron. I reached Gush Etzion at 1:30 am. All the forces we would need were already there – the armored corps, a company of jeeps, infantry, and all the others.

Lt. Col. Tzvika Ofer and his soldiers were planning to set out toward Chevron at six o'clock in the morning.

As part of their preparations, I asked the commander if I could speak to the soldiers. He agreed and said he would assemble his entire brigade at three o'clock. At the appointed hour, the soldiers assembled on a small hill near the vehicles and the commander handed me a megaphone.

And this is what I said:

Dear soldiers, today we liberated our nation's Holy of Holies in Jerusalem – the Temple Mount and the Kotel. Tomorrow, we are going to liberate the second-holiest city in Eretz Yisrael. You are going to liberate the Jewish people's city of the Patriarchs, the foundation of the Kingdom of David. King David ruled for seven years in Chevron before he ruled in Jerusalem. You are going to fight against the worst and wildest murderers. They carried out the pogroms all over the country and killed 164 fighters right here, where we are now after they surrendered and laid down their arms. There is no absolution for that! Know how to behave with them and in the name of the L-rd, take action and succeed, and go from victory to victory! From the victory in Jerusalem and Judea to the victory in Chevron!

At six, I went out onto the road to look for Tzvika Ofer's battalion, but there was no-one there. I thought they might have left already, but the line of tanks was still there. I thought he had perhaps taken the first tank

and driven to Chevron to get there first.

I told my driver to advance toward Chevron, regardless of what the battalion was doing. We were two vehicles, the one I was in and the escorting Military Rabbinate jeep. On the way, we passed the battalion's reconnaissance company.

Suddenly, my driver said, "Rabbi, we're the first ones here. There are no soldiers ahead of us. The entire brigade is behind us. We could get stuck in Chevron alone, and who knows what they'll do to us."

"Drive on," I told him.

When we drew closer to Chevron, I saw white flags waving over all the houses along the way. There would be no battles here I thought. There wasn't a single Jordanian flag, so there was nothing to fear. We were entering Chevron as victors, without having fired a single shot.

"There's a Jordanian flag flying from the third floor of one of the houses," my driver said as we drove past Halhul. "They might fire on us."

"Take the Uzi and cover me," I said. "I'm going up there to take down the flag."

My driver said they might kill me, so he would go.

"You're still young," I told him. "You still have to build a home and a family. I've already lived my life. I'll go up, and whatever happens, happens."

One of the drivers accompanied me to the second floor, and from there I went up to the third floor. I reached the flag and took it down.

"*Salaam Alaikum*," I said to the tenants. I took the flag and they didn't say a word.

We advanced toward Chevron, and when we entered the city we saw all the houses along the main road

festooned with white sheets hanging from the balconies. The Chevron Municipality and the military forces had decided on a self-imposed curfew and ordered that no-one leave their homes. I wanted to inform them that the IDF had already conquered Chevron, even though the IDF force was only me and the jeep at this stage.

In the center of town was a podium where a policeman usually stood to direct the traffic. I climbed onto the podium and fired a magazine of bullets into the air, to notify the residents that the Israel Defense Forces had captured Chevron.

My declared goal had been to be the first to reach the Cave of the Patriarchs. I saw an Arab boy at one of the windows. "Where is the grave of Avraham Avinu?" I shouted up to him, but he said he was afraid to come down because of the curfew. He wouldn't be able to get back home. I promised him my driver would bring him back, and the boy agreed to show us.

We reached the Cave and began to climb the stairs toward the gates at the top of the two staircases. I climbed to the top of the staircase on the north side, where everyone prayed, and saw the gate was locked.

"*Ifta el-bab!*" I shouted in Arabic. "Open the gates!"

I heard voices inside.

"*Mefish maftuah*," they said. "We don't have a key."

If they don't have a key, I thought to myself, how did they get inside? I began firing bullets at the gates, but they didn't budge. To this day you can see the holes I made, which the Arabs call "Rabbi Goren's holes." For three hours, we tried to break down the gates, until I heard the sound of a tank approaching. That was the first Israeli tank to enter Chevron, and it was adorned with an improvised flag – a

sheet on which someone had drawn a blue Magen David.

When the tank arrived, I saw the soldiers had a crowbar. My driver and I put the bar into the gate and worked it off its hinges until the gate fell to the ground and we could enter the Cave of the Patriarchs.

We saw two Arabs inside, trembling like a lulav, and one of them was holding the keys to the gate – even though they had told me they didn't have any keys. My driver went over to him, took the keys, and we went into the Cave of the Patriarchs, where I blew the *shofar*.

I took the *sefer Torah* I had brought with me and read the portion of Chayei Sara, which relates how Avraham bought the Cave of the Patriarchs from the sons of Chet. It was still early in the morning and we were able to *daven Shacharit* there, the first Jews to daven freely in the Cave of Machpelah in 19 years.

Rabbi Shlomo Goren z"l (1917–1994) served as the first head of the IDF's Military Rabbinate and was later elected Chief Rabbi of Israel. He was awarded the Israel Prize in Rabbinical Literature. He participated in the liberation of the Old City of Jerusalem in the Six-Day War and one day later, he 'liberated' Chevron.



The Pendulum of Human Nature

Russian journalist and writer, Vasily Grossman, entered Berlin in 1945 with the forces that subdued Nazi Germany. At the Berlin Zoo, he found hundreds of mutilated animal corpses. At the gorilla's cage, Grossman talked to the old caretaker. Grossman asked him if the gorilla was wild. "No," replied the old man. "She just roars loudly. Humans are wild." At that time, it was difficult to doubt it.¹

Rousseau claimed that human beings are essentially good. It is culture that spoils them. Nevertheless, the opposite seems true as well – human nature is fundamentally evil and it is only culture that subdues that evil and restrains it.

When Avraham feels his days are numbered, he calls to his faithful servant and has him swear in the name of G-d: "that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell" (Bereishit 24:3). What's so bad about Canaanite girls? (The Radak mentions that Noach cursed his grandson Canaan.) Do they have some sort of eternal, metaphysical, evil gene in their DNA?

This explanation is a little problematic, as Avraham seems to recognize the possibility that Yitzchak may indeed have no other option but to marry a Canaanite woman. Avraham declares that if Eliezer does not find a woman in Charan willing to come with him to the land of Canaan: "you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there" (Ibid, 8). The Ramban explains that even in such a situation, when no woman would agree to leave Charan

for Canaan, Yitzchak must not marry a Canaanite woman. On the other hand, Rashi explains that if the servant does not find a woman worthy of Yitzchak in Charan, he will marry a woman from the noble daughters of Canaan, Avraham's allies. Hence, the prohibition on marrying a Canaanite woman is relative and not absolute.

If so, the question remains: what is so bad about Canaanite girls? It is possible that the emphasis is not on their nature and character but on the Canaanite culture. As Bnei Yisrael were about to enter the Land, G-d repeatedly warned them not to imitate the evil deeds of the people of Canaan. The Canaanite culture was corrupt and degenerate, cultivating the lowest aspects of human nature, such that it would be imperative to find a wife for Yitzchak from another place.

6699 | **Avraham already knew then how much local culture can influence a person's behavior and life.**

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch also explains that precisely because of his location in the land of Canaan, Avraham was afraid of the influence of a Canaanite woman in his home. A wife from far away would become assimilated into the culture of Avraham's household, but if she came from nearby, close to home, she would serve as an agent of local culture.

Avraham already knew then how much local culture can influence a person's behavior and life.

Human nature is a mixture of good and evil, desires and dreams, light and darkness. The culture that surrounds us and the education we receive will largely determine how we develop. Of course we have free choice, and one can overcome one's environment. Avraham himself, the son of pagans, is a case in point.

Sometimes we hear of the romantic myth of the 'noble savage': pristine man, uncorrupted by civilization, is surely good and fundamentally honest. We know the truth. It is impossible, said Karl Popper, to return to the harmonious state of nature: "If we turn back, then we must go the whole way – we must return to the beasts."²

David HaMelech captured this tension perfectly: "What is man that You should remember him, and the son of mortal man that You should care about him? Yet You have made him slightly less than angels, and crowned him with soul and splendor" (Tehillim 8:5–6).

We have seen the depths and the heights human beings can reach.

The choice is ours.

1 The Fall of Berlin.

2 The Open Society and Its Enemies.

Rabbi Chaim Navon is a renowned author and educator.

HaMizrachi

Family Page

Chayei Sarah Quiz and Wordsearch

Answer the questions and then find the answers in the wordsearch cave

What is the name of the city where Sarah is buried?

Who was Sarah's only son?

From whom did Avraham purchase Ma'arat HaMachpelah?

How many shekels did Avraham pay for Ma'arat HaMachpelah?

What were the shekels made of?

Who is buried in Ma'arat HaMachpelah (eight names)?

Whose head is buried in Ma'arat HaMachpelah?

What is another name for Chevron?

U L E E J D K V S Y B T S S Y
Y H V N Y A A K O V C X K I H
J M A D A N O C M T F S T G X
O L K E L O N F U L C Z F R U
Y H T H W R S G E I C N C O N
D A I Y B V L A Q H C H M E S
G R D D B E H U A S A E H N E
L A I P E H L K J V D Z H O U
O S J V D C C D A M A M Z R A
V R N F K S S O A X A D L F V
K E A B R A T A Y R I K O E R
S V D E R D N U H R U O F S A
M L H N I K T Z W S E S A V H
X I W I R W B R Y U X G I P A
M S R Q S P Y E I S Y V T Z M





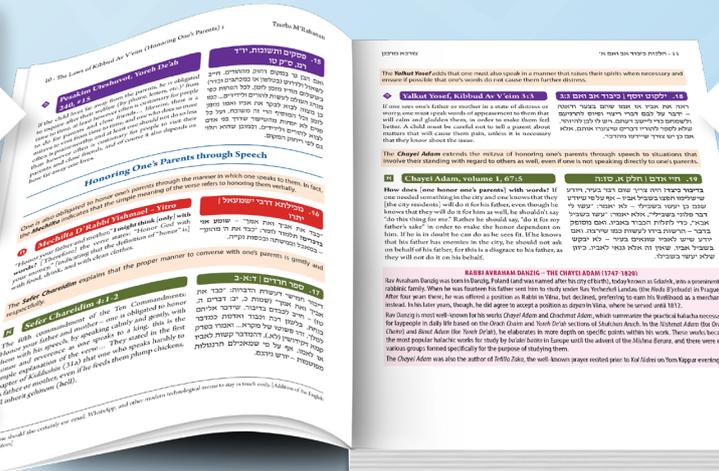
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