

## *Parashat Chayei Sara*

### Is the Burial of the Matriarchs and the Patriarchs mainly a Muslim Holy Site?

#### **"The Absence of Truth – a Sign of Redemption**

I know that you are concerned about how it feels to live in the heart of Israel at this time, as you are aware that we have lately experienced such a wave of violence. While the municipalities of Gush Etzion and other regions offer psychological help to those, who are very afraid, life here somehow goes on more or less in a normal fashion. Besides the fact that wild rabbits consumed B'erot's entire veggie garden, our midrasha is still flourishing and new students keep coming. I personally don't live with fear, but do take more precautions when travelling. Likewise, our students are more careful to use public transportation rather than hitchhiking. Since this week is *Parashat Chayei Sarah* in which the Torah makes super clear how the Machpelah cave in Chevron was purchased by Avraham, the first Jew, I decided to write my own unpolitical take on the political situation in Israel today. We live in a time when the media is constantly pouring twisted and misconceived information into the world. This is actually a sign that the Redemption is near as one of the symptoms of the footsteps of Mashiach is that "truth will be lacking" (*Babylonian Talmud, Sota 49b*). Recently UNESCO has approved a resolution recognized the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Chevron and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem as Muslim holy sites, despite that none of these places are mentioned in the Quran (<http://www.westernjournalism.com/analysis-heres-what-the-bible-says-about-the-muslim-claims-to-holy-sites-in-the-land-of-israel/>), whereas they have great significance in the Torah, Jewish history and tradition. (<https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/51910/unesco-declares-rachels-tomb-cave-of-patriarchs-muslim-holy-sites-jerusalem/#Evq9osXUIAB8bUoT.97>). UNESCO's resolution does not concur with the statements of the Bible, accepted by most world religions. Neither do they reflect the teachings of the Muslim Quran. It may perhaps be surprising to some people that the Quran recognizes the Land of Israel as the heritage of the Jews and explains that, before the Last Judgment, Jews will return to dwell there. This prophecy has already been fulfilled (Shaykh Prof. Abdul Hadi Palazzi). Among the many statements in the Quran about the right of the Jews to the land of Israel we find the following: "And thereafter We [Allah] said to the Children of Israel: 'Dwell securely in the Promised Land...'" (Quran 17:104). So why is it that many of those who follow the Quran today do everything they can to prevent Israel from dwelling "securely in the Promised Land?"

#### **Why Don't We Stand Up for Our Rights in Our Holy Sites?**

We may find a partial answer to this question in the Quran itself. The Quran warns Israel against the consequences of turning our back to the Holy Land: "And [remember] when Moses said to his people: 'O my people, call in remembrance the favour of God unto you, when he produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave to you what He had not given to any other among the peoples. O my people, enter the Holy Land which God has assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will ye be overthrown, to your own ruin'" (Quran 5:20-21). If we lack desire, courage and self-sacrifice for the holy sites in the Promised Land, we make ourselves vulnerable to "our own ruin." My husband told me that his study partner explained that the current wave of terrorism was elicited by Israel's inability to stand up for our rights to the Temple Mount. When the terrorists desecrated our holiest site with their consecutive rioting last month around Rosh Hashana time, Israel had the

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opportunity to institute as a natural consequence the restriction of their access to our holy Temple Mount. In fear of world opinion Israel restrained herself and continues to put up with the Wakf's abuse of their authority on the Temple mount. Although sovereignty of Judaism's holiest site – where the First and Second Temples once stood – was reclaimed by Israel during the 1967 War, it granted Jordan's Wakf authority over the Temple mount and entrusted it to oversee it in order to avert unrest. The recent Temple Mount riots clearly prove that the Wakf has forfeited this trust. Contrary to what UNESCO claims, it was Israel that took measures to defuse tensions at the site where Muslims enjoyed unlimited access until they indulged in violent riots and attacked Jews with stones and knives. To this day Jews are banned from praying on our holiest place. Many Jews including my own husband who have visited the Temple mount testify to how the Wakf search them for any prayer book, which they confiscate and even watch their lips to ensure they are not praying from their heart. Instead of standing up firmly for our right to pray on the holiest site in Judaism, we make ourselves weak and vulnerable to the terrorists when we continue to allow the Arabs to have authority over the Temple Mount in spite of their innumerable riots. This fear to go against world opinion and taking ruler-ship is perceived by the terrorist as a weakness that gives them the impetus to strengthen their violence against us.

**Sarah, Our Mother, Ensured Eternal Jewish Ownership to Chevron**

We women have the power to stop the terrorism and bring about world peace and redemption. Mustering up the courage to stand up for Israel and proclaiming the truth against all the false condemnations are redemptive acts that we women can take. I must admit that it even takes a bit of courage for me to write you this. I had to overcome my fear of any possible angry responses. We need to be willing to take risks when it comes to assuring the security of the Land of Israel. Way before the original conquest of Canaan in the times of Yehoshua, Sarah, our mother, understood deeply the importance of ensuring Jewish ownership to the holy sites in the Promised Land. This is why she chose to die at the right time in the right place, in order to ensure the holy city of Chevron as her burial place and an everlasting inheritance for her descendants.

ספר בראשית פרק כג

(ב) וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבֵּעַ הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹא אַבְרָהָם לְסַפֵּד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבַכְתָּהּ:

“Sarah died in Kiriath Arba, now Chevron, in the Land of Canaan, and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and bewail her” (*Bereishit* 23:2).

Where did Abraham come from, and why wasn't he with Sarah in Chevron at her final moments? According to Rashi, Avraham had settled temporarily in Be'ersheva following the binding of Yitzchak. Ramban explains that both Avraham and Sarah lived in Be'ersheva, but Sarah had returned to Chevron on her own. It is possible that Sarah was motivated by the desire to leave the land of the Philistines, where there were many idol worshippers, for the holiness of the Land of Israel (*Otzar Rishonim*, 376). “...This is to explain that this righteous one [Sarah] died in *Eretz Yisrael* and was buried there, for the Chitites are from the families of Canaan (*Ramban, Bereishit* 19:19). In her love of the holy sites of Israel, Sarah relocated to Chevron, when she instinctively knew that she was about to die. She desired that Avraham would purchase the Machpelah as an eternal burial place for her offspring – the Jewish people. As a support for Sarah's inherent connection with the holy land of Chevron we find a verse in the *Eishet Chayil*,

ספר משלי פרק לא (טז) זָמְמָה שָׂדֵה וַתִּקְחָהּ:

“She envisioned a field and took it” (*Mishley* 31:16).

The Midrash explains this verse to refer to Sarah who envisioned the field of Machpeleh, which she took for a burial place (*Midrash Tanchuma, Chayei Sarah* chapter 4). The Machpelah cave is indeed called the field of Machpelah 10 times in our Torah portion. I believe that this implies that Avraham purchased much more than a burial cave for his wife Sarah. He purchased an entire field – a substantial piece of land, which in the future would become one of the major holy cities for Sarah's descendants. "From then on the field became the inheritance as a burial place for him and his descendants. This section is mentioned to inform us of the value of the land of Israel beyond all the lands for the live and the dead, and moreover to establish the word of Hashem to Avraham to become his inheritance" (*Ibn Ezra, Bereishit 23:19*).

### Purchasing the Field of the Machpelah in Chevron

There are several redundancies in the Torah description of Avraham's purchase of "the field of the Machpelah cave," which clearly come to emphasize that there should be no doubt that Avraham has rightfully purchased the field of the Machpelah in Chevron and paid its full price in the presence of the people of the land. I have underlined some of the redundancies in this excerpt. If you read the entire chapter in the Torah, you will find even more redundancies.

#### בראשית כ"ג

(י) וַעֲפְרוֹן יָשָׁב בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי חֵת וַיַּעַן עֲפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי חֵת לְכָל בְּאֵי שֵׁעַר עִירוֹ לֵאמֹר:  
 (יא) לֹא אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעְנִי הַשְּׂדֵה נָתַתִּי לָךְ וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ לָךְ נְתַתִּיהָ לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי עַמִּי נְתַתִּיהָ לָךְ קִבֵּר מֵתְךָ:  
 (יב) וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי עַם הָאָרֶץ: (יג) וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל עֲפְרוֹן בְּאָזְנֵי עַם הָאָרֶץ לֵאמֹר אִם אַתָּה לֹא שְׁמַעְנִי נְתַתִּי  
 כֶּסֶף הַשְּׂדֵה קַח מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת מֵתִי שָׁמָּה: (יד) וַיַּעַן עֲפְרוֹן אֶת אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ: (טו) אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעְנִי אֲרָץ אַרְבַּע  
 מֵאֹת שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף בִּינִי וּבִינְךָ מָה הוּא וְאֵת מֵתְךָ קִבֵּר: (טז) וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם אֶל עֲפְרוֹן וַיִּשְׁקַל אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרוֹן אֶת  
 הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי חֵת אַרְבַּע מֵאֹת שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף עֵבֶר לְסֹחַר: (יז) וַיִּקֶּם שְׂדֵה עֲפְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר בַּמְּכַפְלָה אֲשֶׁר  
 לִפְנֵי מִמְרָא הַשְּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ וְכָל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בַּשְּׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל גְּבֻלוֹ סָבִיב: (יח) לְאַבְרָהָם לְמַקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי  
 חֵת בְּכָל בְּאֵי שֵׁעַר עִירוֹ: (יט) וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן קִבֵּר אַבְרָהָם אֶת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל מְעַרַת שְׂדֵה הַמְּכַפְלָה עַל פְּנֵי מִמְרָא הוּא  
 חֶבְרוֹן בְּאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן: (כ) וַיִּקֶּם הַשְּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזֵת קִבְרָ מֵאֵת בְּנֵי חֵת:

"...Ephron the son of Hittite answered Avraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of his town saying, 'No my lord, hear me, I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.'

Then Avraham bowed down before the people of the land, and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land saying, 'If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.' hear me; I will give the price of the field; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.' Ephron answered Abraham, 'My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead,' Avraham agreed with Ephron; and Avraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants. So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was east of Mamre, the field and the cave which was therein and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made sure to Avraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. After this, Avraham buried Sarah, his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Chevron) in the land of Canaan. The field and the cave that is therein were made sure unto Avraham for a property of a burying place by the Hittites" (*Bereishit 23:10-20*).

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Just as there are four couples buried in the Machpelah: Adam & Chava, Avraham & Sarah, Yitzchak & Rivka, Ya'acov & Leah so it the purchase of the Machpelah mentioned four times, twice "before the eyes of the sons" and twice "before the ears." Silver is mentioned three times, and both verse 2 and verse 19 it mentions "The same is Chevron in the land of Canaan." Emphasizing that Chevron is part of the land of Canaan and not Philistine land. These and other redundancies clearly indicate that Avraham purchased the *Machpelah* cave with its surrounding land before the eyes and ears of those present, so no misunderstanding could ever occur about Chevron belonging to Avraham and Sarah's descendants. In fact, the most disputed places, which the Arabs claim as their exclusive holy sites are actually the exact places that the Torah most explicitly describes as being legally purchased to maintain an everlasting Jewish inheritance.

### The Torah's Preemptive Foresight to Refute the False Claims to Jewish Holy Sites

מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה עט פסקה ז

(ז) ויקן את חלקת השדה אשר נטה שם אהלו וגו' במאה קשיטה א"ר יודן בר סימון זה אחד משלשה מקומות שאין אומות העולם יכולין להונות את ישראל לומר גזולים הן בידכם ואלו הן מערת המכפלה ובית המקדש וקבורתו של יוסף מערת המכפלה דכתיב (בראשית כג) וישמע אברהם אל עפרון וישקול אברהם לעפרון בית המקדש דכתיב (ד"ה א כא) ויתן דוד לארנן במקום וגו' וקבורתו של יוסף (בראשית לג) ויקן את חלקת השדה יעקב קנה שכם:

...Rabbi Yuden son of Simon said: This is one of the three places in which the nations cannot affront Israel saying: "You have robbery in your hands." These are they: The Cave of *Machpelah*, The *Beith Hamikdash* and the burial of Yosef [in Shechem]. The *Machpelah* Cave, as it states: "Avraham listened to Efron, and Avraham weighed out the silver for Efron." (*Bereishit* 23:16). The Temple, as it states: "David gave to Ornan for the place 600 Shekel of gold by weight" (*I Divrei Hayamim* 21:25). The burial of Yosef, as it states: "He bought the piece of land on which he had spread his tent, at the hand of the sons of Chamor, Schem's father for a hundred pieces of silver" (*Bereishit* 33:19), (*Bereishit Rabbah* 79:7).

The Torah clearly foresaw the current false claims over the holiest sites of the Promised Land, and therefore it preempted to clarify to Israel that we have an undisputed historical, religious and political right over these vortex points that infuse the entire Land of Israel with its inherent holiness. Therefore, we should not be afraid to claim this right. Yet, in spite of the fact that Israel legally liberated these holy sites in the Six Day War, Israel sadly still accept limited access to them. Today, Jews are barred from entering and praying at the main part of the Machpelah Cave except for ten days a year! Are the Muslims the only ones who have a right to pray at the entire Machpelah Cave and on the Temple mount? The Arabs living in Israel and their leaders clearly think so and act upon it. They don't hesitate to use violence to prevent freedom of worship as guaranteed by Israeli law and deny Jews entry to their holy places. (<http://www.westernjournalism.com/analysis-heres-what-the-bible-says-about-the-muslim-claims-to-holy-sites-in-the-land-of-israel/>). If we truly learn our Torah lesson, muster up courage to stand up for our spiritual rights in our Promised Land and stop succumbing to the pressures of the world powers, b"H the terrorists will cease from our Land, and we will be able to live in security, rebuild our Holy Temple and engender everlasting world peace!