

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #32—Parshat Chayei Sarah 5762

"And Avraham bought the Land from Efron, the Cave of Machpelah...."

The Midrash teaches: There are three places in the Holy Land that the nations can never claim belongs to them and not to the Jews. They are the Cave of Machpelah (*Genesis* 23); the city of Shekhem (aka Nablus, where the tomb of Yosef is located; *ibid.*, 33), and the Temple Mount (1 *Chronicles* 29; *Bereishis Rabbah* 79:7). These three places were purchased outright from their owners. They were paid for in full, in cash. No mortgages, no checks, no barter, no other means of payment. Straight cash payment. So, despite the claim of the nations that the Land was once theirs (see [essay #1](#)), and we took it from them, such a claim is not at all applicable to these three places.

Tell this Midrash to those brave people who moved into Hebron since 1967. Tell it to those who suffer from the barbaric terrorism of the Arabs who populate Hebron, who massacred in cold blood the innocent Jewish dwellers of Hebron in 1929 and whose descendents continue to murder other Jews there since 1967. Tell this Midrash to the soldier who took nearly six hours to bleed to death after being attacked in Shekhem, while the prime minister of the time — who was also at one time the chief-of-staff of the Israeli army and should care more for his soldiers — was afraid to offend the Arab dwellers and murderers of Shekhem. Finally, this Midrash needs to be told to the Wakf who runs the mosque on the Temple Mount, the Wakf who has all but obliterated any sign of a Jewish presence on the Temple Mount and who has completely denied the existence of the Temple and any historical claim we have to it.

But our Sages state that even if the nations present a legitimate claim to the rest of the Land, these three places are undisputedly ours?! There must be more to this Midrash than meets the eye.

To better understand it, we return to last week's Torah reading, about the Akeidah, the Binding of Yitzchak. "Avraham raised his eyes and saw the place from afar." "Afar," represents prophecy which allows one to see a vision of the Future, but only from "afar" (see *Shemot Rabbah* 1:22). That is, Avraham foresaw the place, he knew that his descendents would merit greatness and that the place of the Akeidah would be the place where the Temple stood. But this was at a distance, from afar, for it did not seem at all possible. Avraham was, after all, on his way to sacrifice Yitzchak, which would put an end to any greatness his descendents might have inherited. With Yitzchak dead, there would not *be* any descendents. Thus, his view of the Future was very obscure, and contradicted by what he presently understood.

But, Reb Noson explains, such is life. It is filled with obscure moments. We see a bright Future, we know that God will fulfill His promises to us, redeem us and free us from exile and return us to the Holy Land, in peace and prosperity. But, somehow, at every turn, in every moment, we find ourselves facing difficulties. Just as soon as things begin to look up, they take another turn, seemingly for the worse, and dash our hopes. Let us look at some episodes in the lives of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

After the Akeidah, Avraham sought a wife for Yitzchak, who was 37 at the time. But Rivkah was born only then. Yitzchak had to wait for her to grow up and mature. Then, when they finally married, Rivkah was found to be barren. They could not have children until after twenty years of prayer. In the interim, Sarah passed away and Avraham, who was promised the Land, had to purchase the property for her burial.

When Rivkah finally did give birth, there was no peace, for Esav caused Yaakov to flee. When Yaakov married, after all of Lavan's chicanery he was lucky to escape with his life and wives and children. The moral of the stories? Nothing comes easy. This is a lesson in patience we all must learn, in order to be able to survive and merit seeing the salvation of the Future. If we look carefully, we can see this salvation daily (*Likutey Halakhot, Shiluach HaKen 5:2*).

Interestingly, Yishmael is the one who took hold of the Cave of Machpelah, which even by his reasoning is not his. There are four couples buried there: Adam and Eve, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah, Yaakov and Leah. When Yaakov passed away, Esav demanded the grave where Yaakov was ultimately buried. Esav claimed that he, too, was Yitzchak's heir and was therefore entitled to the plot in the Cave of Machpelah. (Causing a ruckus which turned nasty, Esav was beheaded by Yaakov's grandson, Chusham, on the spot. Had Esav not been so greedy, he might have lived longer; see *Sotah 13a*.)

However, we do not find that Yishmael made any claim whatsoever to the Cave of Machpelah. This was because he knew it was not his, nor would it ever be. Furthermore, even if the Arabs want to claim the Cave, their claim is, by their own admission, a minority claim. They too admit that there are four couples buried there. However, Yishmael and his wife Fatima, are **not** buried there. If the Arabs claim a heritage from Avraham, they can still claim only three ancestors: Adam, Eve and Avraham. We Jews, on the other hand, are the majority heirs, even by Arabic standards, for all eight occupants of the Cave are our ancestors. Thus, Yishmael, the Arabs, make mockery even of themselves.

Thus, the nations have no claim. Not to the Land, certainly not to the three places which were purchased outright for cold cash. But the lesson of our Sages is that despite our payments, the nations seek more payment. They are not satisfied with our original payments, but wish more and additional payments, whether in cash or in blood. They cannot honestly claim the Land, for they know, very clearly, it is not theirs.

We find that when Avraham began negotiating for the Cave of Machpelah, he said to the people: "I am an immigrant and a resident among you." Rashi explains that Avraham was telling them that he was asking to purchase the property and thus be treated as an immigrant who comes to a Land to purchase property. Should, however, they wish to exclude him, then he will invoke his residency status: The Land is his, promised to him by none other than God Himself. He will just take from them the Land he requires. Yet, Avraham knew that the time for him to inherit the Land had not yet come. God had other plans. So he sought to buy the property — a property that was rightfully his — and rely upon God for whatever the Future held in store. For he knew the Future, he already saw his descendents worshipping upon the Temple Mount in all their future glory and greatness. But he also knew it was in the distant future, from "afar."

So too with us. The Land is ours. Any novice historian knows that the Arabs have no claim whatsoever to this Land. The Palestinians NEVER had any control of it nor any authority over it. They were nomads who settled here when the Jews did, migrant workers seeking work for the few dollars they could earn

off a Jew. As with Efron, from whom Avraham purchased the Cave, who portrayed himself as a magnanimous person yet demanded top dollar for whatever he could squeeze from Avraham, so too, the Arabs wish to squeeze the Jews for whatever they can. And so, they claim and reclaim, and seemingly conquer territory that is unquestionably not theirs. What is not paid for in cash they demand in blood. Anyone's blood, even from other nations, other peoples. Just as long as he can kill others.

The parshah concludes with Yishmael spreading out his tribes and tentacles throughout the Middle East. Thus, the implication is that Yishmael, the Arab, is here to stay, to counter any blessing we might receive, to bleed us dry physically and financially, as he seems to be doing today. But, if we believe in God, if we believe in His promises for the Future, then we need not worry. For the final verse states that Yishmael *nafal* (dwelt) in the presence of his brethren. The word *nafal* also means "to fall."

The Baal HaTurim points out that immediately following this verse (in next week's parshah), Scripture states, "These are the descendents of Yitzchak..." That is, currently Yishmael *nafal*-dwells. However, his time is coming to an end. He WILL *nafal*-fall. Yishmael's demise is imminent, especially because of his penchant for the death and destruction of others. When his fall takes place, "The descendents of Yitzchak," the Jews, will again rise to their glorious position of being a light unto the nations, blazing the path for God's Malkhut to manifest for all. Then there will not be any claim against the Land, for, in the Future, the now not-too-distant "afar," all will recognize that, by God's decree, the Land is ours.

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