

PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH

by Gedalia Litke

At the beginning of the Parsha Avrohom seeks a burial plot for Soroh.

1. As a wealthy man Avrohom owned a lot of land. Why weren't any of his own holdings suitable for a burial plot?
2. Avrohom speaks to Bnei Chais and asks them for permission to bury Soroh. After they agree conceptually Avrohom asks them to approach Efron to inquire whether he would specifically grant Meoras HaMachpela as a burial plot. Why is there a two-step process; what role do Bnei Chais play here and why couldn't Avrohom just approach the owner, Efron, directly? Throughout the first 20 psukim of the Parsha this duality is repeated - Avrohom speaking to Bnei Chais and separately to Efron - why are Bnei Chais a necessary party to the transaction?
3. In explaining 23:17 Rashi says that the pasuk is emphasizing that Efron's field was elevated by this purchase, as it passed from the hands of a commoner (Efron) to the hands of a king (Avrohom). Again, Avrohom had bought land from commoners in the past, so why is this idea emphasized only concerning this purchase and not in connection with prior purchases? Also, Avrohom was a tzaddik, but in what way is he a king?

Avrohom wished to bury Soroh in Eretz Yisroel. See Ibn Ezra and Ramban (as well as He'emek Dovor on 23:19). However, the lands owned by Avrohom were not yet considered Eretz Yisroel, they were still Eretz Canaan. The only way to solve this problem was by having the Bnei Chais (grandchildren of Canaan) relinquish their sovereignty over a plot of their land. By granting Avrohom sovereignty the land is elevated into being Eretz Yisroel. Avrohom needs Bnei Chais to transfer sovereignty, and, separately, he needs Efron to transfer basic ownership. [As to why Avrohom sought out Meoras Hamachpela in particular from among the lands owned by Bnei Ches, see Pirkei d'R Eliezer 33 and Baal Haturim in Parshas Vayeira 18:7.]

This explains the dual nature of the transaction. Some psukim are describing the basic ownership transfer while others are describing the international transfer of sovereignty. This elevation of sovereignty is a unique event (it is the first part of the land which becomes officially Eretz Yisroel) and therefore it is noted in the psukim (as explained by Rashi); and it is not Avrohom's righteousness which is relevant for these purposes, but his leadership ('king') of the people of Eretz Yisroel that is relevant.

This also explains why the pasuk emphasizes that Avrohom paid for the purchase using international

currency ('over lasocher'). Additionally, it provides some insight into why Chazal derive from this purchase the laws pertaining to what legally binds husband and wife in a Jewish marriage ceremony ('kicha kicha mi'sde efron'); the purchase from Efron, like a marriage, is not merely a business transaction but involves a fundamental change of status with newly created obligations and realities.

[This is based on shiurim of Horav Yochanan Zweig, Shlita.]

Gal Einai, Copyright © 2006 by Gedalia Litke and **Torah.org**