

# THE SPARKS OF THE PATRIARCHS

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Vayechi

### The Sparks of the Patriarchs' Souls

**By Shlomo Katz**

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Today's Learning:  
Nedarim 9:8-9  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Rosh Hashanah 32  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shabbat 65

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This parashah describes Yaakov's final days, his request to be buried in the Me'arat Ha'machpelah in Chevron, and his burial. R' Moshe Wolfson shlita (mashgiach ruchani of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn) observes that Chevron is one of two cities that Tanach singles out as a holy site. The other is, of course, Yerushalayim. What is the difference between these two places?

R' Wolfson explains: As the name implies, the Me'arat Ha'machpelah is a double cave. Some say it is a cave within a cave, while others say it is a cave below a cave. Either way, the burial place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs is well hidden, and one who wishes to locate the actual cave would be hard pressed to do so. In contrast, the special status of Yerushalayim is related to the Bet Hamikdash which stood there. This was a very public structure.

This contrast is no coincidence. R' Wolfson notes that the name "Chevron" has the same Hebrew letters as the word "churban" / "destruction," and, it shares a root with the word "chibur" / "connection." Chevron represents the sparks of the Patriarchs' souls that are hidden within each of their descendants. It represents our continuing connection to G-d following the destruction of the Temple in Yerushalayim. Chevron, where the graves of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are hidden, represents that part of our connection to G-d and to Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and their wives that no enemy can sever.

Our Sages say that our prayers ascend to Heaven through Chevron. Why, then, do we face Yerushalayim in prayer and not Chevron? Because the significance of Chevron is not the place; rather, the place of Chevron is in every Jew's heart, a metaphor for the unbreakable connection between us and Hashem, a connection that ensures that our prayers will indeed ascend Heavenward. (Tzion Ve'areha p. 82)

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*"The time approached for Yisrael to die, so he called for his son, for Yosef . . ." (Bereishit 47:29)*

Midrash Rabbah connects this pasuk to the verse (Divrei Hayamim I 29:15), "Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope." Says the midrash: "Not like the shadow of a wall or a tree, but like the shadow of a bird ('oaf')." What does this mean?

R' Yehoshua Horowitz z"l (the Dzikover Rebbe, whose 94th yahrzeit was this week) explains: We say in the High Holiday prayers, "A man's origin is from dust, and his destiny is back to dust." This is meant to teach man humility. However, this thought can also lead to depression. One might reason: What difference do my good deeds make since I am so insignificant before G-d? For this reason, the prayer concludes: "ka'chalom ya'uf" / "like a dream flies." This, writes R' Horowitz, is a reference to Chanoch, about whom the Torah says (Bereishit 5:24), "Chanoch walked with G-d; then he was no more, for G-d had taken him" - i.e., he entered Gan Eden while still alive. Indeed, the gematria of the word "chalom" (dream) equals the gematria of the name "Chanoch." This teaches that any person can, through his good deeds, ascend to Heaven in the same way that Chanoch did.

This is what the midrash is teaching: "The time approached for Yisrael to die" - if a Yisrael (a Jew) is humble and negates himself like one who is dead - let him remember to call for "Yosef" - the gematria of which equals the gematria of "oaf" / "bird." Let him remind himself of his ability to elevate himself to the highest levels.

(Ateret Yeshuah)

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*"Then Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and he said, 'Who are these?' Yosef said to his father, 'They are my sons, whom G-d has given me ba'zeh / with this'." (Bereishit 48:8-9)*

Did Yaakov not know Yosef's sons? Rashi explains: Yaakov wished to bless them but the Divine

Presence departed from him because the wicked kings Yeravam and Achav would come from Ephraim, and Yehu and his sons from Menashe. Yaakov thus asked, "Why are they unfit to be blessed? Yosef answered, "Ba'zeh" / "With this." He showed Yaakov the shtar erusin and ketubah / contracts of betrothal and marriage.

Where in our verses is there an allusion to a shtar erusin and a ketubah? R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1994; the Klausenberger Rebbe) explained (when he was nine years old) as follows:

Yaakov wondered: A marriage ceremony is invalid in the absence of kosher witnesses. How, then, did Yosef get married in Egypt?

Yosef answered him: In general, a person's admission can take the place of witnesses. This is learned from the verse (Shmot 22:8), "... about which he says, 'This is zeh / it!'" Why is marriage different? Because we do not accept someone's admission when it causes a detriment to others, as in the case of marriage, where the marriage partners now become unavailable to marry every other person in the world. In Egypt, though, there were only two Jews - Yosef and his wife, Osnat. They, therefore, could marry without witnesses and their signatures on the marriage documents would suffice as an admission, as we learn from "This is zeh."

(Quoted in Ke'motzai Shalal Rav)

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From the Haftarah . . .

*"I am going the way of all the earth; be strong and become a man. Safeguard the charge of Hashem, your G-d, to walk in His ways, to observe His decrees, commandments, ordinances, and testimonies."*  
(Melachim I 2:2)

R' Moshe Yechiel Halevi Epstein z"l (the Ozhorover Rebbe; died 1971) writes: Why did King David use the phrase, "I am going"? He answers: It is well known that angels are called "those who stand," while the righteous are called "those who walk." Thus we read (Zechariah 3:7), "If you walk in My ways and safeguard My charge, . . . I shall permit you to walk among these [angels] who stand." This is because angels have no opportunity for spiritual improvement or decline; they simply fulfill their assigned tasks. In this sense, they stand still. In contrast, mankind is constantly faced with opportunities to grow spiritually. Thus, man is constantly on the move - or, at least, he should be.

This is true as long as man lives. What about after his death? Our Sages say (Berachot 64a), "Tzaddikim have no rest - not in this world and not in the World-to-Come. If a person has left either children or students who follow in his ways and study Torah, we apply to him the verse (Kohelet 5:11), "The satiety of the rich does not let him sleep." As the Midrash Rabbah explains, if someone has a son who toils in Torah study, it is as if he never died.

In this light, we can understand King David's charge to his son Shlomo. "I am going the way of all the earth; be strong and become a man." I wish to continue, even after my death, to be one who goes, not one who stands still. Therefore, "Be strong and become a man. Safeguard the charge of Hashem, your G-d, to walk in His ways, to observe His decrees, commandments, ordinances, and testimonies."

(Be'er Moshe)

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*"But now, you are not to hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man, and you will know what you are to do to him, and you are to bring down his white hair to the grave in blood."* (Melachim I 2:8)

How are we to understand King David's final words to his son and successor, Shlomo? These words seem more appropriate to a coarse individual than to a tzaddik.

R' Chaim Shmuelelevitz z"l (1902-1979; Rosh Hayeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva) explains: There are two kinds of revenge. One is the coarse emotion with which most people are familiar and which is prohibited by the Torah. However, there is another kind of revenge - it is the feeling experienced by tzaddikim who yearn to see Hashem's honor defended through the elevation of the righteous and the downfall of the wicked. It was this latter feeling that motivated these words of King David.

The Gemara (Sotah 13a) says that just as Yaakov's sons prepared to bury him, Esav appeared and challenged Yaakov's right to the last available plot in the Cave of Machpelah. Immediately, Yaakov's grandson Chushim, the son of Dan, slew Esav. At that moment, Yaakov opened his eyes and smiled, to fulfill the verse (Tehilim 58:11), "The righteous will rejoice when he sees vengeance." This, too, refers to the type of revenge which is proper - seeking the downfall of the wicked.

(Sichot Mussar 5733 No. 12)

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## Diaries

This week we present another excerpt from Ma'agal Tov, the diary of R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; 1724- 1806), describing the author's travels as a "Shelucha D'rabbanan" ("Shadar" or "meshulach") on behalf of the Jewish community of Chevron. The entry presented here is dated 12 Av 5515 [1755]. Note that some of the poetic language and Biblical references are lost in translation.

Sunday. While it was still daylight we entered the great city of Paris. I went to Senor Yaakov Rodriguez-Pereira who lived there, for I had brought for him a letter of recommendation from Amsterdam. I asked him to find me a lodging place, and he found me a room with a Jew, Senor Leon, may G-d grant him life.

Now, an astounding thing of wisdom did the said Senor Yaakov relate to me. With his wisdom, and by exercise of his intellect, together with painstaking care, he had succeeded in taking a deaf-mute

who, from the womb, could not hear or speak, and bringing him to a state of speaking whereby he could reply with his mouth to something they would ask him in writing, for yes - "Yes," and for no - "No." He could also write with his hand in the French language and in the Holy Language, and with his mouth he could read in the books of both languages. [Chida then describes at length how the young lad communicated by finger-spelling.] . . .

I also visited the bibliotheque (library) and I saw some 20 people engaged in reading and copying. I asked the man standing there if there was any manuscript of the Rambam there. He answered, "Today we open printed books, and on Friday, written books. Come to me on Friday and I will show you all the manuscripts. But, in any event, we have a printed Rambam; if you wish, please take a look at it." Out of politeness, I took the Rambam [printed with the commentary] Migdal Oz. I sat there and read two chapters. Afterwards, I arose and looked at the Jewish books there. . . Verily, there are houses full of books of all the religions and philosophies in all languages, something remarkable.

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