

# CAVING IN TO TRUTH

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

The life of Sarah was 127 years--[thus were] the years of Sarah's life. Sarah died in Kiryat Arbah, which is Chevron, in the land of Canaan. (Bereishis 23:1-2)

Though the Torah doesn't mention it, we know from the Midrash that it was the Akeidah that caused Sarah to die:

"Avraham came ..." From where did he come? From Be'er Sheva. If you will ask, who brought Sarah to Chevron, I heard that the Satan came and said to her, "Where is Yitzchak?" She answered him, "To learn about offering sacrifices." He told her, "He is the sacrifice!" She didn't believe him, so she went to Achiman, Shaishi, and Talmi, and said, "You are tall and can see from a distance. See if there is an older man and two youths." They told her, "We see an old man and he is binding one young man, and there is a knife in his hand!" Immediately she died. (Yalkut Reuvani in the name of the Zohar)

Perhaps this is alluded to in the first word of the parshah, vayeheyu, which adds up to thirty-seven (vav, yud, heh, yud, vav: 6+10+5+10+6), the age at which Yitzchak underwent the Akeidah.

The truth is, Sarah wasn't the only one to die that day because of the Akeidah--Yitzchak also died. According to the Midrash (Midrash HaGadol 22:12), the moment Avraham put the knife to Yitzchak's neck, his soul left him; it only returned to him after G-d told Avraham not to lay his hands on the lad.

However, as the Ohr HaChaim points out in last week's parshah (22:20), Yitzchak did not get back the same soul he lost, for, before the Akeidah, his soul had been feminine (coming from Chava; Chidah, Seder HaDoros), whereas after the Akeidah, his soul was masculine, which is what made it possible for him to later father children. That is why the parshah ends with the account of Rivkah's birth, as if to say, now, after the Akeidah, Yitzchak can marry and have progeny.

What makes this interesting is that the source of Sarah's soul had also been Chava (Chidah, Seder HaDoros). It is as if Chava's soul was somehow rectified and returned to its source because of the Akeidah, as if the Akeidah was a rite of passage for the soul. However, the very fact that Rivkah was born at this precise time (Seder Olam 1), and that she continued on the blessings that were the hallmark of Sarah's life (which represented rectification for Chava's sin; see Perceptions, Chaye Sarah, 5758, Shabbos Day), indicates that the loss of Yitzchak's portion of Chava's soul, and the loss

of Sarah's portion, made possible the birth of Rivkah and the unification of the soul within one person.

So, though on the surface Sarah's death may seem disturbing, below the surface, her death represented an important turning point in history. It is another proof of the mysterious hand of G-d orchestrating to precision the fulfillment of His master plan--the Truth behind the

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## Shabbos Day:

Avraham got up and bowed down to the people of the land, to the sons of Ches. He told them, "If you wish to bury my dead, appeal on my behalf to Ephron son of Tzohar, so that he will let me have the cave of Machpelah at the edge of his field. Let him give it to me for the full price as a burial property among you." (Bereishis 23:7-9)

... Why is it called "Machpelah"? Kafula b'zugos--Because it has many couples (i.e., "kafula" is the root of the word "machpelah"). To Mamre, the city of Arbah (four) ... (Bereishis 25:29); Rebi Yitzchak: The city of four couples (i.e., Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah, and Ya'akov and Leah). (Eiruvim 53a)

That the Forefathers and the Foremothers are buried in Ma'aras HaMachpelah makes the place extremely holy and important to the Jewish people. However, the fact that Adam and Chava are buried there too makes the place extremely mystical as well:

"The mystery of Ma'aras HaMachpelah is that Adam and Chava are buried there, and even though this is not made known in the Torah, it is a true tradition that has gone from mouth-to-ear; it is in the Zohar: Rebi Kisma said: Ma'aras HaMachpelah is near the opening of Gan Aiden, for there is no doubt that Gan Aiden is in Eretz [Yisroel]. When Chava died, Adam buried her there, and the smell was that of Gan Aiden. For this reason, Adam wanted to dig further, but a Heavenly Voice came out and said, 'It is enough for you! Stand there, and do not dig further.' He was also buried there by his son Shais, who was in his likeness. Rebi Rechumai said, 'The Holy One, Blessed is He, was involved in his [Adam's] creation and his death, and no one knew [about the place] until Avraham came along and purchased it for a lot of money; the smell is that of Gan Aiden, and he heard the voices of the Ministering Angels says, "Adam is buried there." ' ' (Yalkut Reuvaini, Tziyoni, Chaye Sarah)

Wait. There's more:

"Ma'aras Machpelah, which is in Chevron, is the place where the Forefathers are buried, and it is known that it is the passageway to the lower Gan Aiden; hence, the words "over la-socher" (Bereishis 23:17; "current money to the merchant") equal in gematria "orach l'Gan," the "path to the Garden." As well, the word "la-socher" is missing the letter "vav," giving it a gematria equal to the word "chatzer"

(courtyard), because Ma'aras Machpelah is the courtyard to Gan Aiden ... Furthermore, anyone who dies and is buried there merits to ascend to the lower Gan Aiden without obstruction ..." (Yalkut Reuvaini, Tov Ha'Aretz, Chaye Sarah)

In fact, according to the Tov Ha'Aretz, one of the main reasons why the Angel tried to damage Ya'akov's leg when they fought together was to create a spiritual blemish in Ya'akov that would deny him the right to be buried there with his wives! It's as if Ma'aras Machpelah is some kind of spiritual "litmus test" for the Jewish people--if a person was worthy, the cave accepted him for burial; if not, the cave rejected him. If so, we can understand why Avraham was prepared to go to great lengths to buy the cave from Ephron. And if so, we can have a better appreciation why the cave and Chevron are playing such a major role in current politics as history begins to wind down.

This may be hard for a non-believing Jew to grapple with, for whom Ma'aras HaMachpelah may be just another tourist attraction. But for the Torah-observant Jew, Ma'aras HaMachpelah represents far more than just another stop along the tour, and if it was so important to Avraham, then it ought to be important to us as well. After all, Ma'aseh Avos siman l'banim--the actions of the father are lessons for the sons.

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#### SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Rivkah had a brother named Lavan who ran to the man by the well. When he had seen the ring, and the bracelets on the hands of his sister, and heard the words of Rivkah about what the man had told her, he came to the man standing with the camels by the well. He told him, "Come in, blessed one of G-d; why stand outside? I have cleared the house, and a place for the camels." (Bereishis 24:29:31)

From this episode, Lavan sounds like a fine specimen of a human being. In fact, from the following, he even seems like he has fear of G-d:

Lavan and Besuel answered, "This has come from G-d. We cannot say anything to you, bad or good. Take Rivkah and go, so that she may be the wife of the son of your master, as G-d has said." (Bereishis 24:50-51)

Interestingly enough, these are similar words to the following:

Lavan said to Ya'akov, "What have you done? You have stolen my heart and led my daughters away like captives taken by the sword! Why did you flee secretly and leave without telling me? I would have gladly sent you away, with songs and drums and lyre. You didn't even give me a chance to kiss my sons and daughters. This time you have acted foolishly. I have the power to harm you. However, the G-d of your father spoke to me last night and told me, 'Make sure not to speak to Jacob either good or evil.' " (Bereishis 31:26-29)

In fact, it had been Lavan's intention to murder Ya'akov, his nephew, and take his entire family back

with him to Padan Aram. When we talk about the "Arami" in the Haggadah shel Pesach who wanted to "kill our father," we are referring to Lavan. In fact, it was Lavan who later reincarnated into Bilaam, the evil sorcerer who first advised Paroah to enslave and torture the Jewish people, and then later, tried to curse the Jewish nation at Balak's request.

And to think that he was called "Lavan"--which means white! Is this another example of the Torah's wry sense of humor?

Perhaps. But it actually alludes to a far deeper idea. In fact, there are things in life that in certain conditions can be positive, while in other conditions can be very negative. Even positive character traits when used at the wrong time can have evil results. For example, it was Shaul HaMelech's misplaced mercy for King Agag of Amalek that resulted in Haman and, perhaps, down the road, Hitler. It was his misplaced sense of judgment that caused him to have Nov, the city of kohanim wiped away for helping the fleeing Dovid.

So too was it this way with Lavan. At his spiritual root, Lavan was "pure" and "white." However, as his soul traveled down into the physical world to his body, it became affected by the physical world, and its potential for good became stifled while its potential for evil increased. It is not unlike what happens to a well-behaved child who falls in with wrong company, and eventually forsakes his well-groomed ways for the delinquent behavior of his friends.

The reason why this idea is so important because it acts as a warning to the Jewish people, whom, according to the Nefesh HaChaim, control the spiritual quality of the world. If we fulfill our mandate to be a "light unto the nations," then the world exists on a higher spiritual plain. However, if we choose to ignore our raison d'être, then the world sinks to profoundly spiritually low levels, and the Lavans of history end being the "shachors" (black) of history, making the world a dangerous place for everyone, especially the Jews. This does not mean that every evil person in history has a pure soul at its root. However, there are many that do, especially among the Jewish people, whose attitude towards us may very much depend upon the spiritual climate of the day.

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## Melave Malkah:

Avraham lived 175 years, and died at a good old age, an old, fulfilled man. He was gathered to his people. His sons Yitzchak and Yishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron. (Bereishis 25:7)

Rebi Yitzchak said: At the time of the destruction of the Temple, The Holy One, Blessed is He, found Avraham standing in the Temple. He said to Avraham, "What is My beloved doing in My house ..." (Yirmiyahu 11:15)? Avraham answered, "I came to inquire about my children." "Your children have

sinned and were therefore exiled," explained G-d. Avraham pleaded before G-d, "Maybe they sinned accidentally?" Whereupon G-d replied, "Seeing she has acted lewdly ... (ibid.)" "But perhaps only a minority sinned," Avraham argued. "With many ... (ibid.)" G-d responded. "Still, you should have remembered Bris Milah!" Avraham pleaded. G-d responded, "The holy flesh has passed from you ... (ibid.)" "Perhaps if You had waited they would have done teshuvah ..." Avraham told G-d, to which G-d said, "When you do evil, then you rejoice. (ibid.)" Immediately Avraham raised his hand over his head and began to weep, and lamented, "G-d forbid they will never be forgiven!" Whereupon a Heavenly Voice said, "A leafy olive tree, fair with good fruit, the L-rd called your name. (ibid.)" In other words, just as the olive gives the best of its fruit at its oldest age, so also will Israel flourish at its oldest age. (Menachos 53b)

In this week's parshah, Avraham Avinu dies. The Torah does not actually eulogize Avraham, as it does Moshe Rabbeinu at the end of Sefer Devarim, and as Avraham was reported to have done for his wife Sarah, at the beginning of this parshah. However, the above Talmudic quote, which reveals how deeply he loved all of his descendants, serves as the basis for such a eulogy, summing up why Avraham was called the "Father of the Jewish people."

On the other hand, the Talmud elsewhere provides a radically different account that begs explanation:

In the Time-to-Come, The Holy One Blessed is He, will say to Avraham, "Your children have sinned before Me!" Avraham will answer, "Master of the Universe! Let them be wiped away for the sake of Your Holy Name!" (Shabbos 89b)

From the former quote, it sounds as if G-d was looking to punish the Jewish people, and as if Avraham was trying desperately to save them from Divine wrath. However, in the latter quote, it sounds as if G-d was looking to forgive the Jewish people, but as if Avraham himself was condemning them. Does that sound like the father of the Jewish people?

Yes, because the greatest asset of a good parent is his profound love for his child, and, the greatest detriment to being a good parent is one's profound love for a child. It is this love that unifies the life of the child with the life of the parent to such an extent that the parent is willing to sacrifice anything and everything for the welfare of his or her child.

However, there is a limit to such sacrifice, the passing of which not only does not benefit the child, but can actually damage the child. Sometimes the parent, for the sake of the child and a higher purpose, in spite of the love and because of the love, must let the child wallow in its own woes. It takes a great parent filled with love of his or her child to act this way, and a pretty astute one to know which of the two paths to walk at any given moment. Avraham was such a parent to his children, and all those children that followed as well.

"Harsh behavior is one thing," you may be saying, "but wipe them away?" What good is a father if no children remain? The answer to this question lies in the Akeidah. Avraham was a man of truth, of G-

d's truth, which meant doing whatever G-d said and trusting that His promises will become fulfilled, one way or another. Slaughtering Yitzchak at the Akeidah meant Avraham believed that G-d can fulfill the promise of a son and descendants--even if that son were to die. Just how that would happen was a mystery--but happen it would.

This is part of Avraham's proclamation here as well. It is as if to say, "If justice requires that you wipe the sinners away, so be it. I trust You have alternative ways to bring those souls to Gan Aiden, one way or another. Those details I leave to you."

Have a great Shabbos, Pinchas Winston

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