

ONE THING THEY CAN'T TAKE AWAY

By Ozer Bergman

"Give me a burial plot... If it be your desire that I bury my dead...speak on my behalf to Ephron" (Genesis 23:3, 8).

What was it about *Ma'arat HaMakhpelah* (the Twin Caves) that made Avraham Avinu (our Patriarch) so intent on making it the burial ground for Sarah Imeinu (our Matriarch) and, eventually, himself? Why was he willing to spend so much money for it? Because every thing in Creation wants to go home, to be in its right place—especially your *neshamah* (soul).

Did you ever have an opportunity to do a mitzvah that you could have done, and you knew that you should do it, but you didn't do it because you were, let's say, too lazy or too depressed to do it? Yeah? Me, too.

Did you ever have an opportunity to do something you knew was *not* a mitzvah, and you knew that you shouldn't do it, but you did it anyway because you were, let's say, too curious or too excited to not do it? Yeah? Me, too.

Most of us Jews feel down any time one of the above happens. We feel worse the second and third time, and even worse the fourth and fifth time. But after that, most people don't feel so bad. Why? Because they give up or, pardon me, they quit. It's hard to blame them. After all, how many times can a person try and try and try without seeing success, constantly feeling like a failure or, pardon me, a loser?

So naturally we readjust our attitude. Changing goals, discounting the importance of what we were striving for, or just "walking away from the game" are fairly typical responses when the results—or lack of same—become too uncomfortable and too disconcerting. Such responses are satisfactory if one is thwarted in becoming a concert pianist or professional athlete. Why? Because there is no Divine mandate to become either of those. But there is a Divine mandate to become the best Jew you possibly can.

There's the rub. We foolish mortals equate success with results, facts that are tangible, measurable or spendable. For 99.99% of life, this standard works. But for the remaining point-oh-one percent—the pursuit of being a better Jew—it does not work at all. Not that we

shouldn't seek concrete improvement in our Jewishness. We should. But we aren't always granted that.

Imagine that you have been arrested, God forbid, and sentenced to a frozen wasteland. No minyan, no kosher food, and certainly no *tefillin* or Shabbat candles. What's left of your Jewishness? Imagine God's Temple was destroyed. You and your people are exiled to the four corners of the earth. Your new neighbors have you "tied up" with extra taxes and fewer rights and privileges than they have. Perhaps they tied you up with a juggernaut of delightful distractions or anxiety-inducing bogeymen? What would be left of your Jewishness?

The reality is that your *neshamah*, which had every delight and satisfaction in its Heavenly home, has been exiled. It is now locked in a prison with a physical body. The body's needs and pleasures weary the *neshamah*. What it could accomplish if it were "untied," free enough and strong enough to control the body as it truly wants, is far more than what we actually do. What we—the *neshamah*—have is *ratzon*, desire to be a better Jew. No matter how tied up and tied down you are, no matter how confounded you are by personal weakness, your *ratzon* need not evaporate. Whatever you desire in your quest to be a better Jew, it need not be sacrificed, no matter how many times you've failed or been thwarted.

The Twin Caves are the "exit ramp" that the soul takes when leaving this world. It is the sacred entrance to Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden), the *neshamah's* true abode, for which it longs while exiled in this world. This is why Avraham Avinu pursued its purchase. He and Sarah Imeinu, through their years and years of constant kindness, so sanctified their bodies (and the world around them) that their longing for Gan Eden was nearly insatiable.

Our ancestors' burial at the entrance to Gan Eden reminds us what we are to do in this world, how we ought to spend our lives in exile. It reminds us that no matter what, our true desire to be better Jews is our ticket to Gan Eden.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

(Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Areiv* 3:8-10)

SIDEPATH

Shortly before Reb Noson passed away, he gave a very deep sigh. When asked the reason for this, he replied, "It occurs to me that perhaps I have not properly fulfilled what Rebbe Nachman taught."

The people standing around him were amazed. "If not you, then who can honestly say that he has fulfilled the Rebbe's teachings?!" they exclaimed.

"As to fulfilling the Rebbe's advice," Reb Noson answered, "I did what I could. The question is, have I fulfilled the teachings with the simplicity that the Rebbe demanded of us?" (*Rabbi Nachman Burstein*).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

23:1 Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years

Our Blessings And Prayers Create A Life Of Godliness

One hundred years represent the one hundred blessings we should recite daily. All these blessings are drawn through our prayers—i.e., "the words of our mouths"—which are formed from the twenty-seven letters of the Hebrew alphabet (there are twenty-two letters plus five final consonants). Thus, the one hundred blessings and twenty-seven letters combine to make "Sarah's life"—a good life, a life of Godliness (LH V, p. 458).

23:9 Let him give me the Cave of Makhpelah, which is his, in the corner of his field

Seeing The Godliness In Everything

A great light existed in the Cave of Makhpelah, shining out from the Garden of Eden. But Ephron did not see this light, and so he was eager to sell the cave. Abraham did see the light, and he knew that it marked the gateway to the Garden of Eden. Thus, he was eager to purchase the cave.

Similarly, both the common person and the tzaddik are exposed to awesome levels of Godliness that abound in the world, but only the tzaddik appreciates them. A wise person strives to overcome his foolishness and material desires in order to come close to the tzaddik, who can then reveal to him that awesome Divine beauty (LM I, 17:2).

24:1 Abraham was old, advanced in years, and God blessed Abraham with everything

The Blessings Of Old Age

When a person attains the level of being “old”—i.e., a wise elder—he is blessed with great wealth. This wealth enables him to delve deeply into Torah mysteries and deepen his understanding of Godliness (see LM I, 60:2).

We Should Ascend To Level After Level Of Holiness

There are a number of principal levels of holiness, with interim levels between them. One must strive to ascend from level to level, taking care not to skip any of the interim levels.

Ba be-yamim (advanced in years) may also be translated as “he entered into many days.” Abraham utilized every day and every moment of every day. Thus, he attained awesome levels of holiness, including the holiness found within the interim levels.

Even if a person does not utilize his days properly, he must at least strive to attain the principal levels of holiness, running quickly from one to the other (LM II, 59).

We Must Nurture Our Faith In God

“God blessed Abraham *ba-kol* (לכל, with everything)—Abraham had a daughter whose name was Bakol (*Bava Batra* 16b).

Abraham’s “daughter” corresponds to faith (LM I, 57:4). Just as a person nurtures his daughter, so must he nurture his faith.

24:8 But if the woman does not want to follow you

When A Man Guards His Covenant, His Wife Is In Accord With Him

If a wife does not comply with her husband’s wishes, it is because he does not guard his covenant properly. The husband represents the *sefirah* of Yesod, through which bounty from Above is channeled to Malkhut, which represents the wife. If a man’s foundation of sexual morality is misdirected, then the bounty he channels is also misdirected. Since his wife does not receive a direct flow of bounty from him, she naturally turns elsewhere for it. A man can always strive to better himself and rectify his covenant; the most propitious time to do this is during the Hebrew month of Elul.

Abraham transmitted this knowledge to Eliezer when he told him to seek a wife for Isaac. This is alluded to in Abraham’s words: *Ve-im Lo toveh ha-isha Lalekhet Acharekha* (וְאִם לֹא תֵאבְרָה הָאִשָּׁה לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרַיךָ, if the woman does not want to follow you.) The initial letters of the first two and last two words of this phrase spell *ELUL* (אֱלֹוּל). The two middle words, *toveh ha-isha*, mean “the woman will desire.” In other words, after a man actualizes the meaning of Elul—i.e., repentance—his wife will follow his lead (LM II, 87).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

6 — “Summon Joshua” (Deuteronomy 31:14) *(continued)*

9. When a person wishes to go on the path of repentance, he must be an expert in Jewish law. He must possess two types of expertise—namely, that of “running” and that of “returning,” in the sense of “rising” and “falling,” as expressed in the verse “If I ascend to Heaven, You are there; if I go down to Hell, here You are.” In other words, a person who wishes to return to God must gird his loins and strengthen himself in God’s ways at all times, whether he is spiritually “up” or “down.” This is the idea of “If I ascend to Heaven, You are there; if I go down to Hell, here You are.”

This means that if a person merits some spiritual ascent to some high or [even] low level, nevertheless, he should not remain there and not be satisfied with this. He must be extremely well-versed in this, to know and to believe that he must always go further and further. This is what it means to “know how to run.” Conversely, even if a person should

fall, God forbid, to whatever place he falls to—even to the deepest hell, God forbid—there too, he must never give up on himself, God forbid, no matter what. Rather, he should seek and look for God, and fortify himself wherever he may be, in whatever way he can. For even in the deepest pit of hell, God is there, and even there it is possible to attach oneself to Him. This is the idea of “If I go down to Hell, here You are,” and this is what it means to “know how to return.”

It is impossible to attain repentance without these two types of expertise. And in truth, it is an extremely great expertise indeed to merit to know that one must exert himself and struggle constantly in the service of God, and to continually anticipate reaching a higher level while at the same time not falling for any reason. No matter what happens, God forbid, nevertheless, a person must never get discouraged in the least, and he should internalize “If I go down to Hell, here You are.” When a person possesses these two types of expertise, he thereby trots the path of repentance. Then God’s right hand is extended to accept his repentance and he merits “God’s honor”; and through this, he becomes a “man” to sit upon the throne (cf. Ezekiel 1:26). Happy is he!



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