

Dvar Torah for Parshat Chayei Sarah

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One Thing They Can't Take Away

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

What about Maarat HaMakhpelah (the Twin Caves) made Avraham Avinu (our Patriarch) so intent on making it the burial ground for Sarah Imeinu (our Matriarch)? 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 do 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, with 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 per-cent—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 globe. 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 distraction 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” the soul takes when leaving this world, the sacred entrance to Gan Eden through which every *neshamah* returns to its 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’ being buried at Gan Eden’s entrance reminds us what we are to do in this world, how we ought to do spend our lives in exile. They remind us that no matter what, our true desire to be better Jews is our ticket to Gan Eden.

Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Areiv* 3:8–10

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

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