YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Chayei Sara**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch Gigi**

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**In loving memory of Rabbi Dr. Barrett (Chaim Dov) Broyde ztz"l**

**הוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים וּפֹעֵל צֶדֶק וְדֹבֵר אֱמֶת בִּלְבָבוֹ​**

**Steven Weiner & Lisa Wise**

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### Taking Hold of the Land

Adapted by Immanuel Meyer and Elisha Oron

Translated by David Strauss

Two stories take center stage in *Parashat Chayei Sara*: the story of Avraham's purchase of Makhpela Cave and the story of Rivka's joining Avraham's family. These two stories are told at great length and in great detail. The detailed account is so excessive that it gives rise to *Chazal's* dictum:

The ordinary conversation of the patriarchs' household servants is more pleasing to God than even the Torah of their children. (*Bereishit Rabba, Chayei Sara* 60:8)

We must, however, examine the matter: why in fact does the Torah go on at such length in these two stories? Surely it would have been possible to summarize our entire *parasha* in a verse or two at most: "And Avraham purchased Makhpela Cave, and buried his wife Sara in it. And Yitzchak took Rivka the daughter of Betuel the Aramaean as his wife, and he loved her." Why does the Torah choose to present these stories as it does?

To answer this question, we need to examine the two stories more closely. In the story of Avraham's acquisition of Efron's field, we see that the purchase of the field is assigned a place of its own within the story. Sara's burial in the field is described after the field's purchase, as an additional detail in the story:

And after this, Avraham buried Sara his wife in the cave of the field of Makhpela… (*Bereishit* 23:19)

The very purchase of the field stands on its own. Why? The burying of one's dead seems to symbolize a significant hold on the land. Thus, the commentators emphasize the importance of the purchase of Makhpela Cave, and the ramifications of this purchase for future generations. Regarding the verse cited above, ibn Ezra writes:

Afterwards Avraham purchased the field, and from then on the field became his property for a burial place for him and his descendants. This story is mentioned in order to inform us of the superiority of the Land of Israel over all other countries for both the living and the dead. It also demonstrates the fulfillment of God's words to Avraham that he would have an inheritance.

According to ibn Ezra, the entire *parasha* is written in order to teach us the superiority of the Land of Israel, to show how important it is to Avraham and to prove that God kept His promise to Avraham.

The Ramban, as well, emphasizes the symbolism and importance of burial in the Land of Israel, but in a different way. According to him, burial in the Land of Israel expresses living in the country as one of its inhabitants:

"I am a stranger and a sojourner with you" — it was their customary practice that each person would have a separate burial site for his family and that there be a common burial field for all the strangers. Hence Avraham said to the sons of Chet: I am a stranger from a different land, and so I did not inherit from my fathers a separate burial site in this land. But now I am a sojourner among you, for I wanted to settle in this land. Give me then a burial site to be forever in my possession just like you. (*Bereishit*, 23:4)

Finally, let us cite the words of Chizkuni, who adopts a position similar to that of the Ramban:

"I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." A stranger, in that I come from a foreign land, and a sojourner, in that I wish to settle among you. (Chizkuni, *Bereishit* 23:4)

Thus we see that many biblical commentators emphasize in this story the importance of the Land of Israel, something which can explain the long-windedness in the *parasha.* However, we still have not explained the connection between the purchase of a burial site and taking hold of the land.

When they first wanted to bury people in Gush Etzion, the subject was brought for discussion to Levi Eshkol, who struggled with the issue. One of the main reasons for his dilemma lay in the significance of burying the dead and the meaningful hold that this gives on the land. Once the dead are buried in a particular place, there is no intention of leaving.

Indeed, in Gush Katif we discovered that this rule is not absolute. Even when the dead are buried in a certain area, its inhabitants may be uprooted from it. However, as a rule, burial of the dead symbolizes possession of and connection to the land.

This is the significance of buying a burial field in the Land of Israel. We must remember: this is not only the site of Sarah's burial, but also the place where Avraham is buried, as is described later in the *parasha*, and then later the other patriarchs and matriarchs. The one person who is not buried in Makhpela Cave is Rachel, about whom the prophet says: “Rachel weeps for her children” (*Yirmeya* 31:14).

Why is it Rachel who weeps for her children? The answer seems to be simple: Rachel is the one person who is not buried in Makhpela Cave, which symbolizes the Jewish people's hold on the land, with irreversible, eternal burial. Outside the Makhpela Cave, Rachel is detached from the land, and therefore it is specifically she who is capable of understanding the suffering of her people, who are being exiled from their land.  Here we learn the importance and the significance of taking hold of the land.

This is the place to reiterate the meaning of the expression used by the biblical commentators: “*Ma’aseh avot siman la-banim*,” “The actions of the fathers are a sign for the children." This is not merely a technical and external rule. This is not a sign, that if Avraham acted in a certain way, Yitzchak must of necessity do the same, e.g., if Avraham dug certain wells, Yitzchak must dig those same wells and call them by the very same names. This rule relates to deeds with profound inner meaning. The act of purchasing land leaves its mark in the world in a most significant way, impacting also on future generations. This is the reason that the Torah describes at such length the negotiations concerning the purchase of Efron's field.

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The centrality of the Land of Israel also stands at the heart of the second story in the *parasha.* As stated, this story too is told at great length and in great detail. Avraham's servant repeats the entire story in his own unique manner. At the beginning of the story, Avraham emphasizes:

You shall not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell. (*Bereishit* 24:37)

Why not? Were Charan's daughters necessarily better than the daughters of Canaan? Apparently the answer to this question is yes. If we want to build a house in the land of Canaan that will continue in the path of Avraham, that house cannot contain the negative background of the nations of Canaan. This is a house that must be established on firm foundations, free of the practices customary in Canaan, according to *Parashat Acharei Mot*:

And after the doing of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, shall you not do. (*Vayikra* 18:3)

(This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat parashat Chayei Sara 5772 [2011].)