

CHAYEI SARAH

THE GRAND FINALE

Endings are important. The last chapter in a book, the last scene in a play – are meant to leave us with a lasting impression as to what the story was all about. What transpires in the beginning and the middle is all a means, leading up to the finale. That is when we find out where all the twists and turns of the plot were leading us; only then do we find out whether the characters accomplished their goals.

The same principle applies to life. The finale of a great life is a high point at the end of a long ascent, a moment of maximum potential realized. This especially holds true for the *Avos* whose journeys in life have had everlasting effects on all those that followed them.

In *parashas Chayei Sarah* we find the last major narrative about Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu*: the death of Sarah *Immeinu* and the buying of the *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* as a burial plot for her and eventually for all the *Avos* and two other *Immabos*. There is very little narrative about Avraham *Avinu* following this event. He sends Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak *Avinu* and there is brief mention of him marrying Keturah and having children with her.

If this episode is the ending to Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu's* story, it must deserve the accolades of the finest finale ever written. Two such holy people as Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* would only have a spectacular ending. The task at hand is to discover the depth of this ending: why this act is the last one we are told, and how we can achieve a similar culmination of our own lives.

Our question is intensified when we consider the story immediately preceding this *parashah*, that of the *Akeidah*. Certainly we could argue that this was the most dramatic chapter of Avraham *Avinu's* life, if not his greatest test. Here he proves his willingness to offer up his son to God. What could be a better finale than that? Would it not make sense that the *Akeidah* conclude the chronicle of Avraham *Avinu* at a real high point? Yet it is this other narrative, about buying a burial site, that is chosen to complete his and his wife's story.

Moreover, why did Avraham *Avinu* have to bury Sarah *Immeinu* specifically in the *Me'aras HaMachpeilah*? What is it about that spot and its geographical location that made it worthy of being our *Avos'* final resting place?

Without further exploration, this ending and its abundant details about a burial plot seem perplexing. By looking closely at what Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* strived to achieve in their lives, however, we can find clarification.

A True Partnership

There are two levels in a marriage. The first level is that man and woman are meant to be one: one team, one partnership, one

entity on this earth. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explains¹ that the Torah establishes that husband and wife, man and woman, are fundamentally equal partners in life, as they are both described as having been created *betzelem Elokim*. Equal partners – but with different job descriptions. Man and woman are different physically, psychologically and spiritually, intended to complement each other and act as two halves of one being in achieving the goal of Creation.

Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* were the prototypes of a man and woman who shared a single destiny or life's purpose. They were partners in every way. Rabbi Soloveitchik shows² that this can be seen clearly in the episode where God tells Avraham that he is going to have a child from Sarah. Avraham *Avinu* responds that he already has Yishmael, to which Hashem replies, "But your wife Sarah shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Yitzchak and I shall uphold My covenant with him as an eternal covenant for his offspring after him."³ Not only was it important that Avraham *Avinu* have a child to continue the covenantal relationship between man and God, but it was critical that that child be connected to both members of the covenant, Avraham and Sarah. Without Avraham *Avinu* as the father and Sarah *Immeinu* as the mother the continuity of the covenant would not be assured.

Just prior to Avraham *Avinu's* receiving this information, Hashem had told him that his and Sarah's names were to be changed, and the difference in phraseology between Avraham *Avinu's* name change and Sarah *Immeinu's* name change also illustrates their interdependence. God first tells Avraham *Avinu* that "Your name shall no longer be called Avram; your name shall

¹ *Man of Faith in the Modern World*, p. 83-89.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Bereishis* 17:19.

be Avraham.”⁴ In contrast, in regards to Sarah *Immeinu* Hashem says, “Sarai your wife – you shall not call her name Sarai because Sarah is her name.”⁵ It sounds like Avraham *Avinu*’s name change is meant to go into effect in the immediate future – “your name **shall be** Avraham,” whereas Sarah *Immeinu*’s has already taken place – “Sarah *Immeinu* **is** her name.” But when exactly did this occur? The answer reveals the beauty of their relationship.

The addition of a letter from the name of Hashem to the names of Sarah and Avraham signified that they would now both have a spiritual role in the world – to reach out to the people of other nations so that Avraham *Avinu* would become the father of multitudes, and Sarah *Immeinu* the mother.

Sarah *Immeinu*’s name and subsequent role changed at the same moment that Avram became Avraham. At that very instant, Sarai became Sarah, because they worked in unison, indivisible from one another. Even in regard to one of the biggest accomplishments of Avraham *Avinu*’s life, making converts, Sarah *Immeinu* gets equal credit. Rashi on the words “*Ve’es hanefesh asher asu beCharan* (and the souls **they** made in Charan)”⁶ explains that while Avraham *Avinu* influenced the men, Sarah *Immeinu* worked hand-in-hand with him, influencing the women.

Perhaps the greatest proof of their partnership, Rabbi Soloveitchik notes,⁷ is the fact that the Torah ends the story of Avraham *Avinu* after the death of Sarah *Immeinu*.

Without his partner in creating the covenantal community, Avraham *Avinu*’s lifework could not be continued. The Torah tells

⁴ *Bereishis* 17:5.

⁵ *Bereishis* 17:15.

⁶ *Bereishis* 12:5.

⁷ *Man of Faith in the Modern World*, p. 83-89.

us how he completed his role by finding a burial place for his partner and by sending Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak *Avinu* – in essence finding a replacement for Sarah *Immeinu* to assure the continuation of the covenantal community.

When Eliezer brought Rivkah *Immeinu* back, “Yitzchak brought her to the tent of Sarah *Immeinu* his mother and he took Rivkah *Immeinu* and she became a wife to him and he loved her and Yitzchak was comforted about his mother.”⁸ As Rashi there tells us, all the signs and the wondrous things that were found in Sarah *Immeinu*’s tent returned when Rivkah *Immeinu* was brought into that tent. As soon as a new partnership was created between Yitzchak *Avinu* and Rivkah *Immeinu*, it was clear that Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu*’s legacy would live on.

Based on this level of understanding about marriage – man and woman fulfilling their destiny in life together – we can understand why the Torah ends Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu*’s story with her burial. Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* were one, and they could only realize their role in the world by partnering with each other. Just as Sarah *Immeinu*’s mission was completed with her death, so was Avraham *Avinu*’s. They could not work one without the other and all the viewers of their story would agree that the perfect finale for a couple so intertwined would be to walk off the stage together hand in hand.

***Tikkun Olam* – Perfecting the World**

With this understanding of marriage, we come to see not only why the burial of Sarah *Immeinu* had to be both Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu*’s ending, but also why the burial site had to be

⁸ *Bereishis* 24:67.

specifically *Me'aras HaMachpeilah*. Years before Avraham *Avinu* purchased this plot for Sarah *Immeinu*, the first couple – Adam and Chavah – were buried there. If Sarah *Immeinu* and eventually Avraham *Avinu* were meant to be buried in the same spot, there must be a connection between the two couples.

Before Adam and Chavah's sin, there was both good and evil in the world. However, evil was something external. After Chavah ate from the tree, evil became intermingled with good. Chavah was responsible for the murky mixture of good and evil in the world, and Sarah *Immeinu* was the first person that came along after Chavah who was able to untangle them.

Rabbi Gedalyah Schorr quotes⁹ from *Midrash Tanchuma* where it is explained that the eulogy Avraham *Avinu* said for Sarah *Immeinu* was none other than the famous *Eishes Chayil* (the chapter from *Mishlei* that praises the ideal woman).

The *midrash* goes through the entire *perek* (chapter), ascribing each verse to different attributes that Sarah *Immeinu* embodied. “*Darshah tzemer ufishtim* (she seeks out wool and linen)”¹⁰ was when Sarah *Immeinu* separated Yitzchak and Yishmael. Just like wool and linen are polar opposites, unable to be worn together, Sarah *Immeinu* knew that Yitzchak and Yishmael could not stay together. “*Zamemah sadeh vatikacheihu* (she envisions a field and acquires it)”¹¹ refers to the field of *Me'aras HaMachpeilah*, and the fact that its acquisition was really in Sarah *Immeinu*'s merit, even though it was purchased after her death. Rabbi Schorr reveals that these two verses are a direct cause and effect.

⁹ *Ohr Gedalyahu, Bereishis*, p. 74.

¹⁰ *Mishlei* 31:13.

¹¹ *Mishlei* 31:16.

“*Darshab tzemer ufishtim?*”: Sarah *Immeinu* separated good from bad by sending Yishmael away from Yitzchak. Yishmael was the archetype of this admixture of good and evil. On the one hand, he was the son of Avraham *Avinu*; he had a *bris milah* at the age of thirteen, and there was good in him – but there was plenty of evil in him as well.

It is not easy to recognize this admixture in another person, and it was Sarah *Immeinu* who was able to do so. She had the wisdom and perception to see that the evil part of such a person will ultimately corrupt the good in him. When Sarah *Immeinu* took the initiative to untangle good and evil she became the *tikkun* (correction) for Chavah. Rivkah *Immeinu*, next in line to lead the covenantal community, continued this *tikkun* by separating between her sons, Eisav and Yaakov.

We learn from Sarah *Immeinu* that all women have this power of discernment. In fact, Rabbi Aharon Feldman teaches¹² that women in general are more spiritually oriented and less affected by physical passions and drives. Throughout Jewish history – in Egypt, in the desert and beyond – our Sages point out that it is the women who have been the guiding force in pushing towards the positive and steering away from the negative. That is their job: to be *mevarer* (to separate), to detect the *ra* (evil) in the *tov* (good) and expel it.

This is the nature of a woman, to the extent that the Sages say that a woman has deeper insights into a guest’s character – all the more so, Rabbi Feldman points out, into her husband’s character. That is why there should be openness between husband and wife in all aspects of life, both physical and spiritual; they should work together closely, because the wife has the ability to give her husband tremendous insight into himself.

¹² *The River, the Kettle and the Bird*, p. 55-56.

Rabbi Gedalyah Schorr says¹³ that Sarah *Immeinu*'s special powers of discernment regarding *tov* and *ra* were crucial in helping Avraham *Avinu* navigate his life.

Only Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* together could rectify the sin of Adam and Chavah. While Chavah introduced an admixture of good and evil into the world, Sarah *Immeinu* separated between good and evil. While Adam listened to Chavah who gave him bad advice about eating from the tree, Avraham *Avinu* was told by Hashem “*kol asher tomar eilecha Sarah shema bekolah* (everything Sarah will say to you – listen to her),”¹⁴ and he did so, to the benefit of the development of his family. *Me’aras HaMachpeilah* was acquired in the merit of Sarah *Immeinu*, because with her aid she and Avraham *Avinu* were able to rectify the sin of the first couple buried there, Adam and Chavah.

Rabbi Moshe Wolfson mentions¹⁵ that under the *chuppah* (marriage canopy) we mention Adam *HaRishon* in the *berachah* (blessing) “*asher yatzur es ha’adam betzalmo* (Who created man in His image)” because every couple has the ability to rectify the sin of Adam and Chavah by following in Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu*'s ways of partnership. We possess the tools within us. By working together as one, each doing our own unique part, we can all help to create a world where there is discernment between good and evil, and merit an ending like the *Me’aras HaMachpeilah*.

Two Halves of a Whole

There is another level to a marriage that is deeper than just being partners in this world in order to fulfill God's will. Rabbi

¹³ *Ohr Gedalyahu, Bereishis*, p. 74.

¹⁴ *Bereishis* 21:12.

¹⁵ *Wellsprings of Faith*, p. 93.

Moshe Wolfson explains¹⁶ that a bride and groom are connected long before their wedding day. Their souls are linked together beside the *Kisei HaKavod* (the Heavenly throne), in a realm above time and space, before they descend into this world. When they come down to the physical world, the souls separate only to find each other and once again become one. When that day comes and the bride and groom stand under the *chuppah*, the *berachah* of “*vebiskin lo mimenu binyan adei ad* (He [God] prepared for man an eternal edifice)” is said.

This *berachah* is not referring to the public act of getting married, for a marriage cannot be described as an eternal edifice if the couple can only be together for a finite number of years. Rather, explains Rabbi Wolfson, it is referring to the connection of the two souls, which is an eternal connection. A husband and wife are attached well before and after their time in this world. A marriage is not just a partnership in which a husband and wife work together to accomplish life’s goals; it is also a coming together of their very souls.

This is so because every Jewish marriage is meant to be a metaphor for the ultimate marriage between God and the Jewish people. The relationship between husband and wife is a model for our relationship with God. God is often referred to as a bridegroom and the Jewish people as His bride. The book of *Shir HaShirim* is entirely dedicated to talking about the love that God, our beloved bridegroom, has for us, His beloved bride. To the extent that a bride and groom understand their marriage as a fusion of souls – past, present and future – to that extent will their relationship with God flourish.

¹⁶ *Wellsprings of Faith*, p. 84.

Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* were aware of the fact that their marriage was a model for a Heavenly marriage and that people would use their marriage as an example for how their relationship with God should be. They knew that everything they did to strengthen their marriage would in turn not only strengthen their relationship with God but also the relationship between God and future generations. They were the paradigm of a couple who believed that just as they were bound together body and soul, so too is each and every Jew with his Creator. Therefore, when Sarah *Immeinu* died, Avraham *Avinu* knew that that was not the end of their connection. He looked for a resting place for Sarah *Immeinu* where they could eventually be buried together, a place where their souls would forever be linked, because while their physical outward marriage was over, their spiritual predestined marriage would continue on.

The name of *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* literally means “cave of doubling.” One of the reasons stated by Rashi¹⁷ for this name is that the cave was *kefulah bezugos* – it had in it a doubling of couples. Rabbi Wolfson explains¹⁸ the depth of this statement as being that the cave contained both human married couples and the Heavenly marriage between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael* (the nation of Israel).

When a bride and groom get married, the groom gives the bride something of monetary value in an act called *kiddushin*. Nowadays the item is usually a ring. We derive this *halachah* (Jewish law) from the fact that Avraham *Avinu* bought the *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* with money. It seems strange that on a day that is meant to be filled with immense joy we derive a *halachah* from an

¹⁷ Commentary on *Bereishis* 23:9.

¹⁸ *Wellsprings of Faith*, p. 92.

event having to do with death. In light of what we now know about marriage, we can appreciate Rabbi Wolfson's insight that this is the perfect source for a *halachah* relating to a wedding day.

By buying *Me'aras HaMachpeilah*, Avraham *Avinu* was saying that Jewish marriage transcends the physical: ours is a marriage of souls, an eternal marriage. As a couple embarks on their marriage, they too express that their union will be everlasting and the bride accepts the groom's offering with elation.

Everything that Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* did in their lives was to form a stronger bond with Hashem. Even the way in which Sarah *Immeinu* died was for this purpose.

One of the first comments of Rashi in *parashas Chayei Sarah* asks¹⁹ about the juxtaposition between the *Akeidah* and Sarah *Immeinu's* death. The Sages teach us that these stories follow one another to indicate that Sarah *Immeinu* died as a result of the *Akeidah*. Apparently, the Satan came to Sarah *Immeinu* to tell her that Avraham *Avinu* had almost slaughtered Yitzchak. This caused her soul to leave her and she died.

It seems unfair that Sarah *Immeinu* would deserve to die like this, from the shock and grief she felt upon hearing that her husband was ready to kill her son. However, Rabbi Gedalyah Schorr brings²⁰ an insight that explains that this is not exactly what happened.

He says that Sarah *Immeinu* already knew before her visit from the Satan that Yitzchak was to be a *korban*, and she had supported her husband in fulfilling the will of God. Therefore, her death upon hearing news of the *Akeidah* was not brought on from

¹⁹ Commentary on *Bereishis* 23:2.

²⁰ *Ohr Gedalyahu, Bereishis*, p. 76.

shock; on the contrary, it was at her encounter with the Satan that she realized how close a connection with God her husband and son must have achieved. It was her great desire to ascend to that same level that led her to want to, so to speak, give up her soul to get there. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One, Blessed Be He) simply agreed to abide by this holy request – and therefore took her soul.

Sarah *Immeinu* could not have died from despair, as the *Netziv* describes²¹ Sarah *Immeinu* as being even greater than Avraham *Avinu* – not in *nevu'ab* (prophecy), but in *ruach hakodesh* (spirit of holiness). She had the ability to be connected to Hashem at all times, to be in a state of joy and able to feel His presence in every circumstance. Even in times that one would despair, she maintained her desire to connect with Hashem.

Thus, Sarah *Immeinu* did not die of fright and pain, but rather of a deep desire to reach the level of *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) that she saw exemplified by her husband and son, giving oneself completely to God. It was as if her soul jumped out of her body to achieve this high level, wanting so much to leave the world at that moment of *kedushah* (holiness). From this interpretation, we can appreciate that Sarah *Immeinu* died in a manner befitting her greatness, and not as it first appears, in a cruel or unjust way. Sarah *Immeinu's* response to the news of the *Akeidah* reveals the endless bond that she had with her husband and ultimately the bond that both of them had with Hashem.

By now, the burial of Sarah *Immeinu* should seem like a fitting final scene in Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu's* story. A finale is a culmination of everything leading towards that point. Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* worked for eternal attachment to God.

²¹ *Ha'amek Davar, Bereishis 23:1.*

When their narrative ends, we see that they achieved their life's goal: everlasting marriage to each other and everlasting connection to God in *Me'aras HaMachpeilah*. Beyond their personal achievements, their lives stand as an example of the eternal bond between God and each and every one of His beloved Jewish people.

The Cave of Doubles

Now we know why the burial of Sarah *Immeinu* is the paramount ending to Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu*'s story and why Sarah *Immeinu* had to be buried in the same place where Adam and Chavah were buried. But the question still remains as to why the Torah needs to describe the acquisition of the plot in such detail. What is it about *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* that our *Avos* had to be buried in a place with those specific physical features? We look to Rabbi Moshe Wolfson²² for clarification.

As mentioned above, the word *machpeilah* comes from the word *kaful*, meaning “double” or “copy”. The *Zohar* explains that this is because the *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* is a copy of Yerushalayim. Both Yerushalayim and Chevron have the property of being an intermediary between people and God. Yerushalayim is a place that connects heaven and earth; it connects this physical world with the spiritual world. *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* in Chevron is also a point of connection. It is the entrance to *Gan Eden* and the point souls pass through on their way to the next world.

There is nothing that God creates that is redundant. Everything has its unique purpose. While Chevron and

²² *Wellsprings of Faith*, p. 51-52.

Yerushalayim are both pathways of connection, they manifest themselves in different ways.

In Yerushalayim there is an open and public revelation of God. It is located on a mountain high up for all to see and the House of God stands there. His love and presence is displayed and no one can mistake His revelation. On the other hand, in Chevron God is concealed. He is still very much present in all His Glory but He is not shining atop a mountain. He is in a cave within a cave, and one must look very closely in order to see the connection.

We are who we come from, Rabbi Wolfson writes.²³ Just as a seed contains the genetic material for the tree that will grow from that seed and all subsequent trees that will come from that original tree, so, too, we are a direct continuation of our ancestors. We have their abilities and potentials within us. The *Avos* created an unbreakable bond with Hashem and because they are a part of us, we too have inherited this bond. Because the *Avos* are buried in the *Me'aras HaMachpeilah*, that is their point of continuous connection and therefore it is also ours.

In the course of history, Yerushalayim, the place of open godliness, has seen destruction of its focal point, the *Beis HaMikdash*, but Chevron has never experienced this. Rabbi Wolfson explains that this is because *churban* (destruction) has three elements: Man ceases to perform the service of God in that place, God's involvement in the world becomes concealed, and open revelation of God's presence is removed. However, something can be hidden only if it was first revealed. For that reason, Chevron is not susceptible to *churban*. In Chevron, God is not publicized, but He can be found if you have the inside

²³ *Wellsprings of Faith*, p. 61.

information as to where He resides. It is an indestructible and everlasting place of holiness and connection.

Every human being is a microcosm of the world at large. Therefore, every person has inside him both a Yerushalayim and a Chevron. There are times in life when we feel so inspired and can see God so clearly, when the Yerushalayim within us is built and flourishing. However, there are also times when we feel alone and detached, when our *Beis HaMikdash* is destroyed. It is at these times that we look toward Chevron, to the place deep within us that is and always will be connected to God, our own personal *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* where the *Avos* are helping us to forge a relationship with Hashem.

Chevron is also called Kiryas Arba. Rashi gives²⁴ two explanations for this, the first being that four giants lived there, and the second being that four couples are buried there. Rabbi Wolfson asks²⁵ why this holy city would be named after four wicked people and why that would be Rashi's first explanation. His answer is that Chevron is a place that outwardly appears evil, while hidden deep within it is *Am Yisrael's* holiness. When we first look at Chevron from a distance, we may see wicked giants and assume that it is not a blessed place. Yet if we take a second look, we will see the four couples' holiness that is found within.

Rabbi Wolfson applies this pattern to the individual as well. When a Jew is involved in sin, he has an outer appearance of wickedness like the four giants, but no matter how bad the outward appearance is, every Jew has the holiness of the *Avos* deep within him. We may see the wickedness first, but there is

²⁴ Commentary on *Bereishis* 23:2.

²⁵ *Wellsprings of Faith*, p. 75.

always holiness inside that just needs to be recognized and brought to the surface.

This is why *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* in Chevron had to be the place where our *Avos* were buried. No other plot would have sufficed. It is the point of unyielding connection, where husband and wife and man and his Creator are linked forever. It is this place to which future generations could look in order to maintain their ties to God no matter what the outward circumstances are.

Me'aras HaMachpeilah gives us hope that even if it may seem like we are alone and we are no longer under the marriage canopy with God, that is never the case. Like the bond between two halves of one soul, Chevron is a place that forever remains intact and can never be destroyed, both in the world and inside each of us.

Caught Unawares

A *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* informs²⁶ us that Avraham *Avinu* was subject to ten *nisyonos*. His tenth test was considered his greatest. Most agree that the *Akeidah* was his last test; however, Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon writes²⁷ that when Rabbeinu Yonah lists Avraham *Avinu's* tests, he counts the *Akeidah* as his ninth test, and the *kevurah* (burial) of Sarah *Immeinu* as his tenth and most difficult.

The source for his opinion is a passage in the *gemara* that describes²⁸ the Satan's denunciation of Iyov. Before speaking of

²⁶ *Pirkei Avos* 5:4.

²⁷ *Matnas Chaim: Maamarim*, p. 35-40.

²⁸ *Bava Basra* 15b.

Iyov, he speaks of Avraham. He says to Hashem, “Master of the Universe, I have traversed the entire world and I have not found anyone as faithful as Your servant Avraham, to whom You said, ‘Get up and walk in the land, its length and breadth, because to you I shall give it’²⁹ and even so, when he did not find a place to bury Sarah *Immeinu* until he bought it for four hundred silver shekels, he did not question Your attributes.”

Hashem had promised Avraham *Avinu* that the land would be his. However, when it came time for Avraham *Avinu* to bury his wife, he did not even have access to a burial plot. At a time of emotional anguish, Avraham *Avinu* had to involve himself in all kinds of mundane, commercial tasks, negotiating for land and ultimately buying it at an exorbitant price – and yet he remained without a trace of resentment or questioning of Hashem’s goodness, thanking Hashem with a full heart for the ability to attain *Me’aras HaMachpeilah*.

This is a great accomplishment, to be sure, but why did the Satan, in extolling Avraham *Avinu*’s loyalty to Hashem, not mention his willingness to give up his beloved son for God? Why did he choose to point instead to Avraham *Avinu*’s mindset at the time of Sarah *Immeinu*’s burial? How can this test compare in any way to the test of the *Akeidah*?

Rabbi Salomon explains that often when we go through a difficult test, we are aware that we are being tested and so we are able to rally all our resources and energy – and fight. This awareness enables us to do whatever it takes to succeed. The *Akeidah* is the paradigm for such a test. However, mundane irritations and frustrations that we do not think are *nisyonos* – like dealing with a broken washing machine for the second time in a

²⁹ Bereishis 13:17.

month, or with the upstairs neighbor's children who have thrown things onto your porch after having asked them four times not to – can be a greater test, because we do not have all our faculties prepared to triumph. Avraham *Avinu's* *nisayon* (trial) in arranging Sarah *Immeinu's* burial was such an event.

This explains why it was the Satan who came to tell Sarah *Immeinu* news in order to kill her. Killing is ordinarily not the role of the Satan; rather, it is reserved for the *Malach HaMaves* (the Angel of Death). The Satan's sole mission in the world is to mislead people. Although Sarah's death was the result, the goal of telling her the news of the *Akeidah* was a way to get Avraham *Avinu* to stumble in his devotion to Hashem. He had failed to frustrate Avraham *Avinu's* success in the *Akeidah* so he tried a new angle – Sarah *Immeinu's* death.

Avraham *Avinu* was on a tremendous high when returning home from passing such a great test. The Satan thought that the extreme contrast of the shock of his wife's death would cause Avraham *Avinu* to feel uncertain about Hashem's goodness, especially when confronted with obstacles to her burial. But this did not occur. Avraham *Avinu* was steadfast in his relationship with Hashem and he passed the test with flying colors.

Burying Sarah *Immeinu* was Avraham *Avinu's* tenth and final test because it revealed his ultimate potential, his true greatness. Here he showed himself capable of being loyal to God not only when he knew he was being tested, but even when he did not know. He held on to his Chevron: the knowledge that even when Hashem cannot be seen clearly, He is still there. He persevered in his relationship with God in spite of all the frustrations.

“*Umatzasa es levavo ne’eman lefanecha* (You found his heart faithful before You).”³⁰ This test showed that Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* had developed their commitment to God to such an extent that it remained strong in the face of challenges and obstacles, even when those challenges came without warning or even without them being identified clearly as tests.

Culmination of a Life

Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu* spent their lives trying to influence people to believe in, trust in and have a relationship with God. They taught this principle by direct instruction, but also by being an example. They were the ultimate team in their lives and beyond. We continue to learn from their relationship how, as men and women, we need to work together to do God’s will and perfect this world.

When we look to their model, we see what our relationship with the Creator is supposed to be like. Like the souls of a *chassan* and *kallah* (groom and bride) are connected to each other eternally, so, too, we are connected to God always and forever. When we lose this feeling of divine inspiration, of being connected to our ultimate spouse, we need to reach deep down into the core of our being, into our own personal *Me’aras HaMachpeilah*, and derive guidance from our *Avos* buried there. In the Chevron in our hearts, the connection between God and his beloved Jewish people can never be destroyed.

There are times when we go through daily obstacles or aggravations and we are unaware of being watched, like Avraham *Avinu* in his last test. It is specifically at these moments that we

³⁰ *Nehemiah* 9:8.

have to hold on to our commitment to Hashem; because even though we may not be able to see Him, He is always there. We are eternally connected. Maintaining unswerving feelings of respect and closeness in the ordinary moments in life, as well as in the dramatic ones, is an expression of true reliability and fidelity, of true greatness.

There could have been no better end for Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Immeinu*'s lives than to finish their tale together, and have a burial plot together, symbolizing their and all their future generations' eternal bond with Hashem. We must follow in their ways and know that God is our beloved and we are His and that no matter how distant we feel from Him, we remain His blushing bride. If we look towards Yerushalayim and pray for the revelation of God's Glory, and all the while keep Chevron – unyielding *chibbur* (connection) – in our hearts, then we too can have a story that people will want to read and re-read for all of time, with the ultimate grand finale.