

Parshas Chayai Sarah - Chevron-The First Jewish City, Our Granparents' Home by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

To the south of Jerusalem, lies our first Jewish settlement, the city of Chevron. It was here that our patriarch Avraham decided to stay for most of his years in Eretz Yisroel. This has given it a special place in our hearts. After all, Avahram and Sarah spent significant years here teaching the world about Hashem's oneness. It was our grandparent's home as well as the illumination of holiness to the world. Chevron was also known as Eilonai Mamre, Plains of Mamre and Kiryas Arba, City of four. Mamre was a close friend and advisor to Avraham and four important couples were buried there. The Torah records for us how Avraham bought the Cave of Machpela as a burial plot for his Sarah. In time Yitzchok and Rivka and Yaakov and Leah were interred there as well. According to our tradition, the first man and woman, Adam and Chava were also buried there,

A great deal of Jewish history took place in Chevron as well. In Sefer Yehoshua [14 13-14] we are told that Yehoshua awarded Chevron to Calev because Calev went to pray specifically by the graves of the patriarchs and matriarchs that he should not be led astray by the masses who did not want to take the possession of the Promised Land. His prayers were answered and he and Yehoshua alone were the only ones who did not follow the crowd and entered the Promised Land. Perhaps we can see Chevron as a symbol of inner strength, pursuing the truth even when it means going against the trends of an entire society.

Chevron was Dovid Hamelech's first capital city. For the first seven and half years of his kingship we are told in Shmuel II 2 1-4 that he reigned there. In Sefer Nechemiah[11-25] we are told that Chevron retained its Jewish community after the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash. Even after the second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, there was a Jewish presence there till 1948 when Chevron was captured by the Jordanian Arab Legion. During this time no Jews were allowed to live there or even visit the holy sites. Baruch Hashem, in 1967, after the Six-Day War, Chevron, along with the West bank, was rightfully in Jewish hands again.

In his commentary on Chumash in parshas Chayai Sarah, Rabbeinu Bachaya comments that Chevron is very important in holiness as well. Chevron is a gateway to the four camps of Shechina similar in design to the camp of Bnai Yisroel in the desert. Anyone buried in Chevron merits to have his/her soul attached to this camp of holiness. Rabbeinu Bachaya adds that Sarah Emainu had a special merit of passing away and being buried there attaching herself immediately to this source of holiness. Is it any wonder that Avraham wanted to live there and have a burial plot there as well?

Even when we had our Bais Hamikdash in Yerushalayim and brought korbonos there exclusively, there was still a connection to Chevron. The Mishna in the beginning of the third chapter Yoma tells us that when they would check to if it was time to slaughter the lamb for the morning Korbon Tamid, they would ask if the east had lit up yet. The Tanna, Shmuel Ben Masya held that the questioned should be phrased as to whether it had been lit up to Chevron which the commentaries say recall the merits of our patriarchs and matriarchs. This view is accepted. In other words, while Chevron may be of lesser holiness than Yerushalayim, nevertheless, our korbonos were incomplete if we did not link them to our great ancestors. We are who we are because of them and this link to them must be present in our entire service of Hashem. We see this very clearly in the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayers where we constantly ask Hashem to have special compassion for us because of these ancestors and their memorable deeds. Even in our daily Amidah prayers we begin with recalling that Hashem is the G-d of Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov. In all areas of serving Hashem, whether in davening or acts of kindness to others, we need to be cognizant of our linkage to our illustrious grandparents and following the model that they have set for us. May the merit of the Avos and Emahos specially protect those who on a daily basis forgo many comforts to live in Chevron and may Hashem bring peace and safety to Jews all over the world till the final geulah.