

PARASHAT CHAYEI SARA

Based on a shiur by Rav Amnon Bazak

"And the field, and the cave therein, were upheld unto Avraham for a possession..."

I.

One of the outstanding features in the Torah is the tremendous importance ascribed to the acquisition of land in Eretz Yisrael. Whenever such a transaction is mentioned, it is described in great detail, all the minutiae scrupulously recorded, and especially - the price. Our parasha tells of the first field which was bought, and the beginning of the parasha - all of chapter 23 - is devoted to the lengthy negotiations between Avraham and Ephron the Chittite. In concluding the matter, the Torah emphasizes and re-emphasizes:

"And Avraham weighed out the silver which he promised the sons of Chet, four hundred talents of silver in current coin. And the field of Ephron which was in Machpela which is before Mamreh, the field and the cave therein, and all the trees in the field within all its surrounding borders, were established as the acquisition of Avraham before the eyes of the sons of Chet amid all who came within the gates of the city ... And the field and the cave within were established as the possession of a burial ground of Avraham with the consent of the sons of Chet."

The Torah describes at length the refusal of Avraham to accept the field for free; he demands to pay Ephron its full value. The Torah emphasizes that the purchase is "before the eyes of the sons of Chet amid all who came within the gates of the city," and repeats - twice - that the field "was upheld" (va-yakom) as Avraham's possession and burial ground.

Interestingly, whenever the Torah hereafter refers to the Cave of Machpela, it proceeds to describe at uncharacteristic length the way in which the field was bought. Thus, for example, at the end of the parasha:

"And Yitzchak and Yishmael his sons buried him in the Cave of Machpela, in the field of Ephron the son of Tzohar the Chittite, which is upon Mamreh, the field WHICH AVRAHAM BOUGHT FROM THE SONS OF CHET, that is where Avraham and his wife Sarah were buried."

So also in the request of Yaakov, before his demise (49:29-32):

"And he commanded them: 'I am going to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the Cave which is in the field of Ephron the Chittite, in the Cave in the field of Machpela which is upon Mamreh in the land of Canaan, the field WHICH AVRAHAM BOUGHT FROM EPHRON THE CHITTITE for a burial ground, that is where they buried Avraham and his wife Sarah ... the field and the cave therein WERE BOUGHT FROM THE SONS OF CHET.'"

Likewise at the fulfillment of the request (50:13):

"And his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the Cave of the field of Machpela, the field which Avraham bought for a burial ground from Ephron the Chittite, upon Mamreh."

II.

The same phenomenon is evident in other cases as well. Yaakov buys a field in Shekhem from Chamor, and again the Torah spells out the price:

"And he bought the field where he pitched his tent from Chamor, the father of Shekhem, FOR A HUNDRED KESITAS."

Later, when Yosef was buried there, the transaction is again described in detail (Yehoshua 24:32):

"And the bones of Yosef, which benei Yisrael brought up from Egypt, they buried in Shekhem, in the field which Yaakov bought from

Chamor, the father of Shekhem, FOR A HUNDRED KESITAS, and it became the inheritance of the sons of Yosef."

Sefer Shmuel concludes, as the backdrop for Sefer Melakhim, with the purchase of the granary of Aravna the Yevusite. The story of the purchase is quite reminiscent of the acquisition of the field by Avraham: in both narratives, a highly esteemed figure (Avraham - "you are a prince of God in our midst;" and David, the King of Israel) initiates contact with a Gentile (Ephron, Aravna) in order to buy a plot of land. In both cases we read of socially correct dialogue, replete with prostrations, in which the seller offers the land free of charge ("I have given you the field, and I have given you the cave therein;" "My lord the King may take and go up as he sees fit"). In both instances the buyer insists on paying the full price in silver. As Avraham, so David (Samuel II 24:24):

"And the King said to Aravna, 'No, for I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer up sacrifices to the Lord my God for naught.' And David bought the granary and the cattle for fifty silver talents."

[It should be noted that the author of Chronicles I (21:24) appears to have been aware of this intended similarity, and in the parallel description of David's purchase he uses the expression "No, for I will surely buy FOR THE FULL PRICE - (kesef malei)," an idiom which was first used by Avraham when he bought the Cave of Machpela.]

III.

From the unusual length at which Scripture details these transactions, it appears the Torah aims to remove all possible doubt regarding the validity and legality of the sale. The statement of Chazal on the matter is well-known (Bereshit Rabba, 79:4):

"'And he bought the field where he pitched his tent' - Said Rav Yudan bar Simon, this is one of the three places regarding which the nations of the world cannot slander Israel and say 'You stole them!' The places are: the Cave of Machpela, the Temple, and the Tomb of Yosef. For of the Cave of Machpela it is written - 'And Avraham deferred to Ephron, and Avraham weighed out the silver...;' of the Temple it is written 'And David gave to Arnan...;' and as for the Tomb of Yosef - 'And he bought the field.'"

IV.

There is one more place whose acquisition is recorded (Melakhim I 16:23-24):

"In the thirty-first year of Asa the King of Yehuda, reigned Omri over Israel ... He bought the mountain of Shomron from Shemer for two loaves of silver. And he built the mountain, and called the city which he built Shomron, after Shemer the master of the mountain."

Here, too, the verses spell out the exact price paid for the city. There are four places, then, where land in Eretz Yisrael was bought for a price: Chevron, Shekhem, Yerushalayim and Shomron. The four have something else in common. These cities were the four which served as capitals during different periods:

Chevron - after the death of Shaul, David asks God where to have his capital (Samuel II 1:11):

"And the Lord said to him: Go up! And David said: Where shall I go? And He said: To Chevron! And David went there ... and the men of Yehuda came and anointed David as king over the House of Yehuda ... And David reigned in Chevron over the House of Yehuda for a period of seven years and six months."

Shekhem - the first capital of the kingdom of Israel. Rechav'am arrives in Shekhem in order to be coronated (Melakhim I 12:1), but as a result of the "counsel of the children" to increase the people's burden - advice which was providentially directed "in order to fulfill His word, which the Lord had spoken through Achiya the Shilonite to Yerov'am son of Nevat" (v. 15) - the Kingdom splits, and eventually Yerov'am is crowned at Shekhem, which becomes his capital.

Yerushalayim - the capital of the united Kingdom of Israel: after the death of Avner and Ishboshet, the elders decide to accept upon themselves, as did their brethren in Yehuda, the kingship of David. His first step is the capture of Yerushalayim, and its establishment as his capital (Samuel II 5:5): "And in Yerushalayim he ruled thirty-three years over all Israel and Yehuda."

Shomron - the dynasty of Omri, despite its corruption, was the strongest and most central which ruled over the tribes of Israel, and its capital was Shomron. Chazal noted this (Sanhedrin 102b):

"Why did Omri deserve kingship? Because he added a major city to the Land of Israel, as it says: 'He bought the mountain of Shomron.'"

The common element to these four purchases was that they were bought not privately, but by the common entity representing the nation. In the case of the "avot," this is true by definition, once we accept that an "" represents "klal yisrael." In the latter two cases, the king bought the area for a national purpose - the place of the altar (and ultimately the Temple), and the capital of the kingdom of Israel. This is presumably the reason why they served as capital cities. The purchase gave them a status of national property rather than private or tribal property.

On second thought, perhaps Avraham's and Yaakov's purchase was merely private, acquiring it for them as individuals, and of course for their heirs, but not for the nation? Notice that in our parasha, the finality of the sale appears twice:

34:17: "The field of Ephron which was in Machpela, which was before Mamreh, the field and the cave therein, and all the trees that were in the field within its surrounding borders, were established as an acquisition (le-mikna) of Avraham..."

Two verses later, the Torah repeats this legal summary:

"The field and the cave therein were established as a possession of a burial ground (achuzat kever) by the sons of Chet."

What is the difference between the two verses? The first enumerates the physical details of the sale, including the trees, and refers to it as a "mikneh" - a sale, an acquisition. The term means no more than "something bought." The second verse is less concerned with the details of the fields and refers to it as an "achuza," a possession, an estate. What has taken place between the two descriptions? One verse - "After this, Avraham buried Sara his wife in the cave of the fields of Machpela before Mamreh ..." A commercial transaction by Avraham merely made the field the property of the individual Avraham. Burial of Sara, the matriarch, granted the field the status of achuza - the term used later in Vayikra (ch. 25) to describe Eretz Yisrael ("eretz achuzatkhem") and the portion given to each Jew as his inheritance in the land

(achuzato). Mere financial possession was not enough; the field had to be dedicated for a national purpose.

A similar process appears to take place with Yaakov's purchase of the field outside Shekhem. The verse in Yehoshua states that Yosef was buried in that field, and "Va-yihyu li-vnei Yosef li-nachala." The plural verb "va-yihyu" leads the commentators to refer this statement to the bones - Yosef's bones were a nachala of the sons of Yosef. Since bone cannot really be inherited, and nachala is always associated with land, the Radak explains that they viewed the burial of Yosef's bones as sealing the nachala-status of the burial ground. The verse opens by reminding us that the Jews - the Jewish people - brought the bones of Yosef out of Egypt. Perhaps here too, Yaakov's private purchase became "nachala" only after it was dedicated to a national purpose, the burial of Yosef.

In the case of "Goren Arnon," the purchase was explicitly for the sake of an altar, which David immediately builds. David is king of Israel, so his purchase is public purchase by definition. (The verse in Shmuel says the price was 50 pieces of silver. The corresponding verse in Divrei Ha-yamim says the price was 600 [DH I, 21:25]. The standard explanation is 50 from each tribe - $50 \times 12 = 600$. In other words, it is crucial to ensure the national character of this purchase).

(In an extraordinary piece of arithmetic computation, the Arugat Ha-bosem proves that 400 shekel - the price of sdei ha-machpela - was enough to buy 2.4 million square amot, based on the price of land given in Vayikra 27:16. In other words, there is 4 cubits, "daled amot" for 600,000 Jews.)

These three places, then, are dedicated to the nation by virtue at their having been bought "be-kesef malei" - Yosef's burial place, ma'arat ha-machpela, and the Temple mount.

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