

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Chayei Sarah

Acquiring Ma'aras HaMachpeilah

וַיָּקָם שָׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּמַכְפֵּלָה... לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי חַת.
וַיָּקָם הַשָּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזוֹת קֶבֶר מֵאֵת בְּנֵי חַת.

Efron's field in Machpeilah was confirmed... to Avraham as an acquisition in the view of Bnei Ches. (23:17-18)

The field with the cave that was in it was confirmed to Avraham as a burial plot from Bnei Ches (Ibid. 20)

We note that the Torah describes the “confirmation” of Avraham’s acquisition of Ma’aras HaMachpeilah twice. What is behind this repetition?

The Halachah states that land can be acquired through the transfer of payment. This is true both for a Yisrael and for a Ben Noach (gentile). However, the view of Rav Hai Gaon¹ is that if a Yisrael wishes to purchase land from a Ben Noach, or vice versa, the transfer of funds is not sufficient to effect the acquisition. Rather, the transfer of funds causes the original owner relinquishes his ownership; but the land does not enter the ownership of the purchaser until he performs an additional act, either drawing up a document to that effect or performing a proprietary act, known as *chazakah*.

This leads us to a most interesting question. We know that Avraham is the father of the Jewish People, but was Avraham himself Jewish? Was the status of “Yisrael” something that his descendants attained later on in history, or was it already attained by Avraham himself?²

The Meshech Chochmah takes the view that the Avos themselves graduated from the status of Ben Noach to Yisrael. As such, the transfer of payment was not actually a sufficient means through which Avraham could acquire *Ma’aras HaMachpeilah*. However,

¹ Cited in Commentary of Vilna Gaon to Choshen Mishpat 194:1.

² See Parshas Derachim (by the author of Mishneh Le’Melech) drush one for a lengthy discussion of this topic. We should note that this discussion is independent of the tradition that the Avos kept the taryag mitzvos, for it is possible that they elected to perform the mitzvos even though their status was still that of Ben Noach.

the Bnei Ches, in whose presence the acquisition took place, were not aware that Avraham had a different status to theirs. As far as they were concerned, he was a Ben Noach and acquired the field as soon as he paid.

This is what lies behind the two references to Avraham's acquisition.

- ▶ The first pasuk is written after Avraham paid Efron for the field. At this stage, the Torah states that it was confirmed as Avraham's acquisition "in the view of Bnei Ches." This phrase is not merely indicating *that* they saw it, but rather, is describing it *how* they saw it, i.e. as a full acquisition.
- ▶ In reality, however, the field was not Avraham's through payment alone. He still needed to perform a "chazakah" act of ownership. This is what is described in the intervening pasuk: "And afterwards, Avraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpeilah." Through this additional act, the field became the property of Avraham, as the following pasuk states: "The field and the cave that was in it was confirmed to Avraham... from Bnei Ches."

What Lavan Discovered in the Short Run

וַיָּרֵץ לָבָן אֶל הָאִישׁ הַחוּצָה אֶל הָעֵינַן. וַיְהִי כִּי רָאָתָא אֶת הַנֶּזֶם וְאֶת הַצְּמִדִּים עַל יָדֵי אָחִיתוֹ וְכִשְׁמָעוּ אֶת דְּבָרֵי רִבְקָה אָחִיתוֹ לֵאמֹר כֹּה דִּבֶּר אֵלַי הָאִישׁ וַיָּבֵא אֶל הָאִישׁ וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל הַנְּמָלִים עַל הָעֵינַן.

Lavan ran to the man, outside to the spring. And it happened, when he saw the nose-ring and the bracelets on his sister's hands and upon hearing his sister Rivkah's words saying, "This has the man spoken to me," he approached the man, who was standing by the camels by the spring. (24:29-30)

Upon hearing Rivkah's report of what had transpired at the well, the pasuk states that Lavan ran out to Eliezer. Why did he run?

Rashi explains that Lavan's enthusiasm was due to his seeing the items of jewelry, which are mentioned in the following pasuk. The Meshech Chochmah, however, explains that the reason for Lavan running is mentioned in the preceding pasuk,³ which states that Rivkah ran home and told her mother "כְּדִבְרֵי אֵלֶּה." This phrase is commonly translated as "these matters," referring to the entire episode at the well. However, the Meshech Chochmah translates it literally as "these words," referring to Eliezer's words of thanks to Hashem at the conclusion of the test:⁴ "בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם... אֲנֹכִי בְּדַרְךְ נִחְנִי ה' בֵּית אָחִי" – *Blessed is Hashem the God of my master Avraham... Hashem has guided me on the way to the house of my master's brothers.*"

Upon hearing these words, Lavan ran to meet the man. Why?

3 Pasuk 28.

4 Pasuk 26-27.

Commenting on the pasuk in the beginning of perek 24, “וְה' בֵרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל” – *And Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything,*” the Gemara⁵ explains that this means that Avraham also had a daughter. As such, when Lavan overheard Rivkah saying that Hashem had led Eliezer to Avraham’s brothers’ house for purposes of finding a match, he thought that the match was for Avraham’s daughter and that Eliezer had come *for him!* Hence, he raced out of the house to meet “the man at the well.”

However, Lavan’s sprint did not last long. As the next pasuk describes, he saw and heard things which gave him to understand that his initial conclusion was mistaken:

- ▶ He saw the expensive jewelry that had been given to his sister, Rivkah.
- ▶ He heard a more detailed account of Eliezer’s words to Rivkah at the well – “Thus did the man say to me.”

Faced with all this, Lavan realized that Eliezer had come, not for him, but for Rivkah. With himself no longer in the running, he abruptly curtailed his own running and, as the second pasuk describes his rather more subdued strides, he “approached the man.”

Classic *parshanut!*

Yishmael’s Teshuvah

וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם... וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל עַמּוּיוֹ. וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ יִצְחָק וַיִּשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנָיו אֶל מְעַרַת הַמַּכְפֵּילָה.

Avraham died... and he was gathered to his people. His sons Yitzchak and Yishmael buried him in the cave of Machpeilah. (25:8-9)

The Gemara⁶ states that the mentioning of Yitzchak before Yishmael in the pasuk indicates that Yishmael allowed Yitzchak to go before him, and is a reflection of the fact that Yishmael did teshuvah.

- ▶ How is Yishmael letting Yitzchak go before him a sign of him doing teshuvah? Perhaps it is merely a sign of courtesy?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that to understand how this was an act of teshuvah, we need to understand Yishmael’s primary area of sin. The pasuk⁷ states that Sarah saw Yishmael “laughing” when Avraham made a feast to celebrate the weaning of Yitzchak, and demanded that Avraham send him away from their home. What was the nature of this laughter and why was it the cause for such a harsh reaction?

The Seforno⁸ explains that Yishmael was laughing at the feast itself which Avraham made for Yitzchak, for he was spreading the words of the scoffers of the generation that

5 Bava Basra 16b.

6 Bava Basra 16b.

7 Bereishis 21:9.

8 Bereishis ibid.

Yitzchak was not born to Sarah from Avraham, but from Avimelech. This idea would have major ramifications for Yishmael himself, since, if Yitzchak was not actually Avraham's son, then Yishmael was his only son and heir. This is why Sarah insisted that Yishmael be sent away, for his continued presence in their house threatened to undermine Yitzchak's status as heir to the legacy of Avraham.

With this in mind, we can understand how allowing Yitzchak to go before him in the burial of Avraham was an act of teshuvah on Yishmael's part, for it addressed the primary area in which he originally sinned. By letting Yitzchak go first, Yishmael was recognizing that Yitzchak was indeed the primary son of Avraham, in retraction of his earlier position.