

The Narrative Begins Here

The stabbings in Israel continue. They have been all over the country. But they have often been focused on Jerusalem's Old City and more recently have focused on Hebron. The story of Hebron begins in this week's parsha.

The Radak (R. David Kimche, 13th century Provence) points out that the *M'arat Hamakhpela*, the Cave of the Patriarchs, was the first piece of Holy Land purchased by our ancestors. God had already promised the Land to Abraham. Ephron was willing to give Abraham the Cave for free. But Abraham, knowing that he was an instrument of God's plan and his descendants' destiny, understood that there had to be more. His progeny had to have a stake in the Land wrought by normal, human means, one that would last through the generations. Thus, a purchase.

There is a wonderful Midrash (Bereshit Rabba 79:7) that explains this idea.

R. Yuden b. Simon says: (There were) three places that the nations of the world cannot oppress Israel by saying, "This is stolen property in your hands." These are the *M'arat Hamakhpela*, (as purchased for a high price by Abraham in our Sidra), the (place of) the Temple (as purchased by King David and noted in First Chronicles 21) and the (future) burial spot of Joseph in Shekhem (as purchased by Jacob in Genesis 33).

The Torah is not only a book of rules and instruction. It is also a book of history - the history of our people. Thus, these three incidents of purchase reinforce our people's connection to our Land - not only via a God-given inheritance but also by an enduring, accepted, legal means.

Isn't it ironic that these three places, symbolic of our people's bond to *Eretz Yisrael*, are the three most hotly disputed places in Israel today? Not long ago, terrorists burnt down Joseph's Tomb in Shekhem. And isn't it further ironic that Hevron, site of the Cave, has as its Hebrew root *haver*, meaning friendship or connection? Or that Jerusalem's name means City of Peace?

In my role as Chicago Board of Rabbis President, I recently had the privilege of introducing Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger, an Orthodox American Oleh to Alon Shvut (and neighbor of my kids) and Abu Ali Awaad. Together they run something called "Roots", a local Palestinian-Israeli initiative for understanding, non-violence and transformation. Awaad was especially interesting. A former rock-thrower and prisoner, whose brother was killed in action against the IDF, he has renounced violence. He told us that he wants to hear our narratives, but asks us to listen to his narrative as well. He believes, "The road to a Palestinian state is through the hearts and minds of Israelis".

Irrespective of whatever concessions Israel may make to Palestinian rule whether for its own security and peace or for other reasons, we have a right to this land. We should hear other narratives. But we have to start by clearly knowing our own narrative. Every Jew should remember that we share a bond with our Land. This bond began with Abraham's high-priced purchase of a cave in which to bury his wife, as recorded in this *sidra*.