



Hebron, Grounding our Nation

Ma'arat HaMachpela, the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, is a 2000-year-old Herodian structure built over a twin burial cave at the edge of a field bought by Avraham Avinu approximately 3800 years ago.

When we drive there today, we can actually feel the terrain as we travel on a windy, narrow, steep road to the large complex down in the valley, surrounded by hills. One of those hills is the site of Tel Rumeida/Admot Yishai, thought by most to be the Biblical city of the Hittites, where Avraham makes the business transaction, as recorded in detail in *Parashat Chayei Sarah*. It later served as King David's first capital in a united kingdom. Avraham's spring is just below the Tel.

The topography and layout are the same as in Ir David, ancient Jerusalem; the fortified town on the heights, a spring providing water all year round on the terraced slopes, and fields in the valley. The difference in the cities is in how we relate to them; in Jerusalem, the emphasis is on the peak, specifically the Temple Mount above the town, but in Hebron, the focus is on the lower part of the site, the shrine above the caves.

Thereby the land itself physically reflects the different roles the cities play in our tradition. Jerusalem was the place where the people, as a nation, met to pay homage to G-d on holidays and forge a bond as a nation

with the Creator above. Hebron's role is different. It is the place where the first *kinyan* – legal transaction – is made with the people and the Land of Israel. Hence it makes sense that our ties to the Land, in the form of the permanent burial of the founding couples of monotheism and the Jewish people, be in Hebron, but in the low area, well in the ground. Our roots, literally planted in the depths of the earth.

In Kabbalistic teachings, each of our holy cities represents one of the four elements. Tzfat is air, Tiberias water, Jerusalem fire and Hebron earth. Hebron today, despite the massive building and development in the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority, still reflects that simple idea. You feel it in your feet as you walk and see it in the archaeological discoveries exposing more and more just under the surface.

For example, three enormous *mikvaot* (ritual baths) from Second Temple times, food storage, oil and wine presses, pottery kilns and more from all periods of Jewish life. Jerusalem's archaeology is now uncovering the pilgrims' roads leading to the Temple Mount, while Hebron's reveals more of the trappings and implements of everyday life and work.

We need both, the physical and the spiritual.

Next time you're in Hebron, let the natural topography speak to you.

Avraham Avinu's overwhelming love and grief for his wife Sarah, that spurred him to buy the cave, was a prescient act to forever connect future generations with the city.

Last month, during Sukkot, I was with a group on Abu Sneina Hill, where we had special permission to visit the army base there. In this critical spot, our soldiers watch and protect visitors and worshipers from those who want to terrorize us into leaving our holy Land. It becomes very clear from there how vulnerable the plaza is, how dedicated our soldiers are and how our nation will not be deterred from reconnecting with our forefathers and mothers.

Listen to the Land and the messages from our glorious past. Stand with Tanach in hand in our complicated present, read the verses and understand how and why the events happened in this place. For too long we were humiliated and refused the basic human right of peacefully praying in our own Land.

No longer.

We head into a magnificent future of pride in our Land and our heritage. But only if we recall the history and how closely it relates to us.

And for that, there is no place like Hebron.

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