



**RABBI AARON**

Editor, Torah Tidbits

**GOLDSCHIEDER**

# The Jew is a Member of Humanity

Toward the end of the life of Avraham and Sarah they had become celebrated figures, revered for their accomplishments and virtuous character.

Sarah passes away first. Avraham not only cries and eulogizes his beloved wife but must also begin the process of securing a burial place for her. Avraham approached the members of Chevron and as part of his plea employs a puzzling term to describe his place among them: “I am a *Ger V’toshav* (resident and stranger) in your midst.”

Are these not contradictory terms? Rashi makes the point that one can’t simultaneously be both. The two terms are mutually exclusive.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik famously explained that these two words encapsulate a central aspect of Jewish life. Avraham was communicating the idea that he was both a *ger* and a *toshav* at the same time. Avraham was expressing a sentiment that characterizes the life of every Jew. On the one hand, as a Jew, I am a resident. I care about the welfare of society, I am involved in commerce, science etc. I am a patriot

and I am concerned with advancing the common good.

A Jew in every generation is concerned with the welfare of others and shoulders the responsibility as a member of mankind. A verse from Jeremiah (29:7) emphasizes the importance of working and praying for the well-being of the city in which you reside in exile. The Mishna in Pirkei Avot also famously states: “Pray for the welfare of the government” (3:2).

However, Avraham Avinu was also expressing that he is a ‘stranger.’ When it comes to the area of anything religious, anything spiritual, any question of moral values, he is a stranger, he is different. He has his own set of rules and values based on the commands and Will of Hashem. (Reflections of the Rav, p.169)

The order in which the Torah places the two words, first *ger* and then *toshav* is intentional. One must be grounded and deeply entrenched in the singular way of Jewish living and only then venture out to make a contribution within broader society.

The burial of Sarah takes place in *Kiryat Arba*. Rashi quotes the midrash which says that Chevron was called Kiryat Arba because four couples were buried there. One couple was Adam and Chava; the other three were the patriarchs and matriarchs. The Rav suggested that they were buried in the same cave to demonstrate that the

covenant made with Avraham was meant to enhance and elevate the world around him. The Jew is a member of humanity. (Abraham's Journey, p. 203)

Arguably two of the most sacred moments in the Jewish calendar share an unexpected theme.

As the day of Yom Kippur begins to wane the Haftorah of Yonah is chanted. We recount the *teshuva*, not of an Israelite tribe, but of an Assyrian city whose population actually harbored hatred for Israel. We spend the majority of the day of Yom Kippur praying for Israel alone, but towards the end of the day, we include the rest of humanity.

A similar theme is expressed at the end of the Seder on Pesach night. On the one hand, is there any holiday that better symbolizes our chosenness and separateness

from the other nations? And yet, toward the Seder conclusion, after we have eaten our matzah and are about to recite the blessing on the fourth cup of wine, we say: "The soul of every being shall bless Your Name, Hashem our God, the spirit of all flesh shall glorify and exalt Your remembrance."

On Pesach, we pray not only for our redemption but for the redemption of mankind. Similarly, on Yom Kippur, we pray not only for our atonement, but for the atonement of mankind as well. (Rabbi Soloveitchik On the Days of Awe, p. 158-159)

- The wisdom a Jew gains from the Torah compels each of us to enlighten those around us and be a light to mankind as whole.

- The mission to improve mankind is part and parcel of our religious aspirations and our loftiest spiritual longings. ■

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