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Mesirus Nefesh

Reb Baruch and Sarah Nachshon were among the first families to return to the newly liberated city of Chevron after the Six Day War. For more than fifty years they braved many odds, including an unsupportive, unwilling Israeli government — yet with incredible sacrifice, persistence and faith, the Nachshons remained trail-blazers for the renewal and rebuilding of the holy city.

In 1975 the Nachshons suffered the unimaginable tragic loss of their beloved infant son, Avraham Yedidya, a'h. The sudden tragedy struck while R' Baruch was out of town, leaving Sarah to make preparations for the burial all on her own. Since the Arab pogroms of 1929, the Jewish cemetery of the old city of Chevron had been off limits to Jewish burials, and Sarah was instructed to choose a plot in the new area of Kiryat Arba or in a Jerusalem area *beis ha-chayim*. Ever-conscious of her family's *shlichus* and their role and place in history, Sarah decided that Avraham Yedidya, a'h,

should be the first Jew to be buried in the ancient Jewish cemetery of Chevron in this new era.

Fearful of angering the local Arabs and under direct governmental orders, Israeli soldiers blocked the road leading to the cemetery on the day of the funeral. They conducted a search of every car participating in the funeral procession from Kiryat Arba. The resulting standoff between the determined mourners and the soldiers was too much for the grieving mother to bear. After more than an hour, exhausted from the impasse, Sarah Nachshon emerged from the car holding the tiny body of Avraham Yedidya in her arms and addressed the soldiers: "You have your orders. I have mine!" Protectively cradling her child, she strode past the weeping soldiers, who were spontaneously powerless in the face of the *emunah* and resilience of this lone, brokenhearted Jewish mother. The levaya continued and mourners proceeded on foot up the steep hill to the ancient cemetery.

Finally, overlooking the *S'de haMachpelah*, standing adjacent to the mass grave of Jews murdered in the massacres of 1929, Sarah Nachshon lowered her child,

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on the birth of a great granddaughter



Avraham Yedidya, into a freshly dug grave. In the darkness illuminated only by the moon and a few scattered lanterns and flashlights, Sarah collected herself, and mustering other-worldly strength, cried out, “Avraham Yedidya, my dear son! Four thousand years ago our father Avraham acquired this holy ground for the Jewish People and buried his wife Sarah here! Tonight the circle has been closed, with Sarah burying her son, Avraham!”

וַיָּקָם הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזֹתָ קֶבֶר

“And the field and the cave within it were established to Abraham as burial property.” (23:20)


Rebbe Avraham Ibn Ezra taught that the Torah includes extensive details regarding the purchase of Me’aras haMachpela in order to accentuate the *mesirus nefesh*, the sacrifice and investment of time, resources, and effort expended by Avraham Avinu to acquire it as a *nachalah*, a burial place for his beloved Sarah. Furthermore,

וזכרה זאת הפרשה להודיע מעלת ארץ ישראל על כל הארצות, לחיים ולמתים


“This is mentioned in the parsha in order to make known the quality of Eretz Yisrael over those of all other lands — in terms of those who are living there, and those who are buried there.”

From the start, our collective relationship to Chevron is through death, and those who are buried in her holy caves: צדיקים, שבמיתתם נקראו חיים, the “tzadikim who in their deaths are called ‘alive’ (*Brachos*, 18a).

Each morning in the *Beis haMikdash*, the moment of dawn was announced: “The eastern sky is brightening all the way to Chevron!” Chazal (*Yoma*, 30b) explain



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that the holy city of Chevron was thus mentioned in order to invoke the merits of the patriarchs who are buried there. Students of the Baal Shem Tov learned from this that when we speak about holy places and people, we should invoke their great merits.

עורו ישני חברון!

May ‘those who sleep in Chevron’ awaken and their great merits stand for us all. And may the mention and memory of the righteous be a blessing.

Dedicated לענ' to Reb Baruch Nachshon zy'a, who was *niftar* this Aseres Yemei Teshuvah and buried in the same cemetery as his beloved Avraham Yedidya a'h. R' Baruch will always be remembered as a world renowned artist, a *shaliach* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and a courageous builder of Eretz Yisrael; *Yehi Zichro Baruch*. ■