



**BADERECH**

**RABBI JUDAH MISCHEL**

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## Chayei Sara: Steps

When Jewish life in Europe was teetering on the edge of existence, Reb Avraham Mordechai Alter, the 'Imrei Emes' of Gur, zy'a, transplanted seeds of the nearly decimated Chasidic community of his father (the Sefas Emes) and his grandfather (the Chidushei haRim) in Eretz Yisrael. Having survived the war, the Imrei Emes escaped Poland, and he arrived in Yerushalayim in 1940. There, in the holy city, he continued to stand as a towering presence of faith, stability and leadership. Three of his sons also survived and ultimately succeeded the Imrei Emes as Gerrer Rebbes, while most of the rest of his family was murdered in the Shoah. Even while carrying the crushing weight of the suffering of the remnants and shepherding the shattered, the Imrei Emes was actively planting new seeds of

Torah and Chassidus. With gentle resolve, he rebuilt Ger in Eretz Yisrael, ensuring that the chain of generations would continue.

Remarkably, even before his miraculous escape from the clutches of the Germans, the Imrei Emes visited Eretz Yisrael seven times, the first being in 1921. On the ship home after that first visit, he composed a moving letter to his family, later known as *Iggeres Al HaSefinah*, "A Letter From Aboard the Ship". After describing his time in Yerushalayim, the Imrei Emes writes:

I didn't visit any additional cities or settlements other than the city of Chevron. In Chevron, I was broken-hearted to see how שפחה כי תירש גבירתה, "a maid servant, has supplanted her mistress" (Mishlei, 30:23). For at the site of Me'aras haMachpela, where we should be allowed to enter, we are only able to go up the steps until a certain point. Past there, the Arab youth jump and fool around and they won't let Jews approach.

This quote from Mishlei, "a maidservant supplanting her mistress", is a lament used by Chazal to describe the tragedy of our holy places under foreign control, *rachmana l'tzlan*. During the British Mandate period, Jews were only allowed to climb the steps outside Me'aras haMachpelah up to the seventh step; entry beyond that was strictly forbidden by the Arab guards. The Rebbe shares his heartbreak at the disgrace, that evil descendants of Yishmael (the lowly "maidservants") were mocking and 'jumping around' freely at the entrance, the very

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gateway to Gan Eden (*Zohar*, Bereishis, 127b), while dignified, devout Yidden were denied the ability to approach, let alone daven at the graves of their fathers and mothers.

In our generation, we are fortunate to be witness to — and to participate — in the open miracle of *Shivat Zion*, the great return to Eretz haKodesh. The extraordinary *mesirus nefesh* of the dwellers and builders of Chevron and Kiryat Arba shines as a living testimony of emunah, and that fact that Hashem is opening the gates of return for our nation. Their dedication and sacrifice to reclaim our birthright and *nachalah* enables us to climb upward step by step. We are awakening the *zechus* of our forefathers and mothers resting in Me'aras HaMachpelah, restoring Hashem's honor and the nobility of our nation. The holy stones of Chevron are rejoicing in our courage, and the light of Geulah is beginning to shine, broadcasting a signal of hope and redemption throughout the world. While this light stirs up angry opposition, this light is nevertheless shining into the hearts of righteous people everywhere.

On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, the Temple stood silent except for the Kohen Gadol preparing for the *Avodah*. Before he could begin the sacred service, there was a pause, a moment to clarify that the day and the time for the Divine service to commence had arrived. The Kohen Gadol would ask: *“Is the eastern sky illuminated until the city of Chevron?”* (Yoma, 28a).

Why did he need to mention Chevron? Why didn't he ask if the eastern sky was illuminated in Yerushalayim, over the Mount of Olives, or on the *Har haBayis* itself? The Talmud Yerushalmi explains: Chevron, the city of our

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forefathers, is where Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov rest. Their merit endures beyond time. Even as the sun rises, even as the day breaks, it is their merit that is called upon to illuminate the path for Am Yisrael.

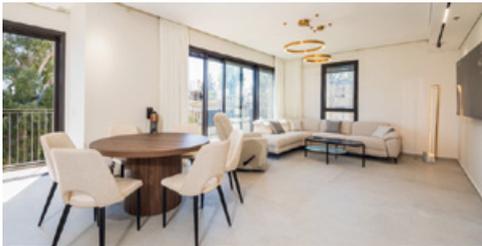
The Kohen Gadol, looking eastward is not only measuring daylight, rather he is measuring the light of the Avos, the light that has been passed down through generations. He is invoking their *zechus* so that the prayers of the nation will find favor.

Chevron is a compass, a spiritual marker. When the Kohen asks about its illumination, he reminds himself — and all who witness the Avodah — that the merit of the past is inseparable from the present. Just as the sun's first rays reach the city of our fathers, so too does their merit reach us, shining on our Yom Kippur service, on our tefillos, and on the everyday choices of our lives.

When the world seems darkened by evil and uncertainty, we look toward the eastern sky and the light of Chevron. The Avos and Imahos illuminate our path, and the faith-filled dwellers of that holy city remind us that the chain of merit is unbroken, and that even in our smallest act of sacrifice, we are carried forward by a light far greater than our own.

May we cherish each step upward, moving beyond all the obstacles and limitations of the past, and restore the honor of Hashem, His beloved nation, and of all righteous people everywhere. And may we finally step through the gateway of Gan Eden, the *Geulah haSheleima v'haAmitis*. ■

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