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Why We Never Leave Anyone Behind: The Eternal Power of Kevurat Yisrael

After eleven long years of waiting, last year, Am Yisrael had the sacred privilege of bringing home Hadar Goldin Hy"d for *Kevurat Yisrael* in Kfar Saba. Whether it was Zachary Baumel returned after 37 years, Zvi Feldman after 43 years, Yehuda Katz after 44 years, or the military *Chevra Kadisha* teams sifting through burnt ash in Kibbutz Be'eri for the smallest remnant of little Liel Hetzroni, the Jewish nation exhibits an unmatched, almost obsessive devotion to burying our dead with dignity.

When Prime Minister Netanyahu requested Zachary Baumel's remains from Vladimir Putin in 2019, Putin was reportedly bewildered: *Why spend vast military resources for someone who fell nearly four decades ago?*

What is the source of this profound Jewish obsession with burial?

The answer lies in Parshat Chayei Sarah, which records the very first Jewish burial in history.

TWO TEXTUAL ANOMALIES

During the negotiations between Avraham and Bnei Chet over Sarah's burial plot, two subtle details stand out:

- **Achuzat Kever vs. Kever:** Avraham repeatedly demands an ***Achuzat Kever***, a permanent, acquired holding. Ephron and Bnei Chet repeatedly refuse that term, offering only ***kvor metecha***, permission to merely drop a corpse into the ground anywhere. What is the hidden debate between them?
- **The Gra's Linguistic Shift:** The phrase "bury your dead" is repeated seven times in the negotiation. However, the Vilna Gaon (Gra) notes that while the first six times it says *kvor metecha* ("bury your dead"), the seventh time the words flip to ***metecha kvor*** ("your dead bury"). Why?

THE SECRET PORTAL OF ME'ARAT HAMACHPELAH

The Zohar explains that when Avraham ran after a calf to serve his three angelic guests, the animal escaped into Me'arat HaMachpelah. Following it inside, Avraham discovered Adam and Chava resting peacefully, surrounded by burning candles and the fragrance of Gan Eden.

Avraham recognized that the Cave was the gateway connecting our physical world to the spiritual realm. This is why the city is named **Chevron**, from the word *chibur* (connection).

Avraham's insistence on buying this site reveals the two pillar reasons why *Kevurat Yisrael* is central to Judaism and why Avraham refers to burial as *Achuzat Kever*:

1. The Future:

Olam HaBa* & *Techiyat HaMeitim

In *Gesher HaChayim*, Rav Tucazinsky offers a parable of twin fetuses in the womb. The skeptical twin believes womb life is all there is, terrified that severing the umbilical cord means death. The wise twin understands that birth is a transition into a far grander, brighter world. The same is true with this world, it is only a passageway for an everlasting world.


Zechariah Baumel Hy"d

Ephron (from the word *afar*—dirt) viewed human existence as purely physical; once life ends, a body is just dust to be discarded. But Avraham demanded an *Achuzah*, an eternal anchor, proclaiming that death is merely a birth into *Olam HaBa*, awaiting *Techiyat HaMeitim*.

2. The Past & Present:

Chelek Eloka Mima'al

Every Jewish soul is a *Chelek Eloka Mima'al*, a direct piece of Hashem. The Gemara teaches that a deceased Jew is like a torn *Sefer Torah*. Just as sacred objects that held G-d's Name cannot be thrown away but require reverent burial (*genizah*), a body that housed a holy soul demands absolute reverence. This is why cremation is strictly forbidden and why every drop of blood is collected for burial.

THE GRA'S INSIGHT ON THE SEVENTH MENTION

The Vilna Gaon explains that besides for Adan and Chava, seven individuals were ultimately interred in Me'arat HaMachpelah: six Tzaddikim (Avraham & Sarah, Yitzchak & Rivkah, Yaakov & Leah) and the head of Eisav.

For the six Tzaddikim, who lived purposeful lives connected to eternity, the Torah writes *kvor metecha*, they lived, died, and were then buried. But for the seventh mention (referring to Eisav), the text flips to *metecha kvor*. Because *reshaim b'chayaihem karuiim metim*, those who live solely for immediate material pleasure are considered "dead" even while walking the earth.

OUR DAILY TAKEAWAY

When an entire nation stands at attention to bring back Hadar Goldin after 11 years, we proclaim to the universe that every single Jew possesses infinite, eternal worth.

If this is the extraordinary level of honor we show to a deceased body simply because it *once* housed a piece of Hashem, imagine how much love, honor, and respect we must show to every living person around us who *currently* carries a piece of G-d inside them! ■

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