

# **BS"D Parashat Chayai Sarah 5783**

## **The Tenth and Conclusive Test**

The United States government has warned our government to refrain from appointing Knesset member Mr. Betzalel Smotrich as the next Minister of Defense and/or Knesset member Mr. Itamar Ben-Gvir from serving as our Minister of Internal Security. And if we do so, the American State Department, Defense Department and other relevant governmental and economic agencies will not co-operate with them.

What does the U.S. government have against these two Israelis, except for the fact that their ancestors stood at the foot of Mount Sinai when Hashem, the Creator of all, declared the Jews to be His chosen race and nation for all time; and closed the holy bond by mutual agreement that HaShem presents us with His 613 commandments intended solely for the Jewish nation; and we abide by them?

What did these two Torah observant Jews do to release the genie of discrimination and outright hate?

I submit:

HaShem put Avraham Aveinu through ten tests. The ninth was in last week's Shabbat parasha, the "binding of Yitzchak" (Akeidat Yitzchak) and the tenth in this Shabbat's parasha Cha'yai Sarah. the negotiations between Avraham and Efron the Hittite for the purchase of Ma'arat Ha'machpela as a burial site for Sarah.

Logic dictates that the physical and mental challenges of every succeeding test increase in difficulty. What is it about the last test of real-estate set before Avraham that made it more trying than the Akeida?

Was it due to the necessity to deal with worldly matters of “real estate” while in the midst of a profound emotional crisis at the loss of his beloved Sarah? Was it his being taken advantage of by the unscrupulous Efron who charged 400 shekels for a burial site which was not worth nearly that much?

These were indeed aggravating realities, but the hard core of the test, I believe, ran far deeper into the area which was to impact upon Jewish history.

A fundamental religious principle appears in many of our classical commentaries and responsa:

אברהם יצחק ויאקוב  
היו עומדים לפני ה' ונשאלים

*The actions of the fathers (Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov) guide their children (the Jewish people) along the path to redemption*

The moment of truth came when Avraham, despite the dangers inherent in what he was presently going to do, stood up before the Hittite council of elders and proclaimed:

אני אנוכי זר ודורש בכם

*I am a stranger and a resident among you.*

Rashi quotes the Midrash that explains Avraham's intent:

אם תרצה למכור את מקדש ה' אצלי אעשה  
'אנחנו נמכר' ונמכר לך

*If you wish [to sell the burial site amicably], I will act as a stranger who recognizes your rights over the area; but if you refuse to sell me the burial site, then I will implement my right of sovereignty and seize the land by virtue of God's promise to me, "And to your children will I give this land."*

At the time when Avraham was told by HaShem to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's home to take up residence in a land which HaShem would identify later, Europe was mostly desolate, as were most parts of Africa and Asia, not to speak of the Americas. But instead of sending Avraham to establish a Jewish State in some unpopulated area where there would be no protest, Avraham was directed to the most populous area in the world: a thin sliver of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea populated by seven pagan nations numbering in the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions!

Each of these peoples descended from Cham, son of Noach, and arrived in the land much before Avraham. They cultivated its fields, constructed buildings and established places of worship, which taken together served as a common civilization.

At this junction in their history, a stranger arrives from the east and declares before the Hittite council of elders:

אני אנוכי זר ודורש בכם

*I am a stranger and a resident among you.*

That he is the true sovereign over all the land. Not just the area of Canaan, but of all the lands from the Euphrates in the northeast to the Nile in the southwest, and from the Mediterranean to Mesopotamia. By this statement, Avraham, a lone unprotected Jew, was challenging the rights of countless peoples who considered themselves the owners of these lands by virtue of conquest and/or purchase.

This was an act of immense courage, because from that moment on Avraham was perceived by all those people to be a threat to their way of life and to their very existence.

Here is the thorn in the side of our relationships with all gentiles: we Jews are HaShem's chosen people! And Avraham spoke the plain, fundamental truth which all humanity must accept.

To the gentiles, Messrs. Smotrich and Ben-Gvir are guilty of the "sin" of their forefather Avraham. They spoke the truth: that the act that sealed the bond between the Creator and the Jewish people is possession of the holy land in all its borders.

Whether or not Messrs. Smotrich or Ben-Gvir will serve as ministers in the next government is irrelevant. What is very relevant is the fact that the majority of Israeli Jews, by their vote, testified that we have borne the torch of Judaism to this day despite the intense efforts of many people and faiths to extinguish its flame, the torch shines now brighter than it did even 2000 years ago.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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