

Chayei Sarah 5779

BS"D Parashiot Lech Lecha – Chayei Sarah 5779

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Why do we experience such tragedy?

The sudden, tragic murders of 11 Jews in Pittsburgh, and yesterday's horrendous accident near the Dead Sea where the entire Atar family was killed – parents and 6 children, bring forth again that incontestable question – why did HaShem make it happen?

These two tragedies, as with most of Jewish history, have no rational basis in human logic and are not acts of compassion. The reality of our lives leaves one standing in profound anguish before the inexplicable decisions of the Creator.

As we confront with our limited intellectual resources the para aduma and other chukim (mitzvot whose reasons were not disclosed by HaShem) we conclude that we know nothing of the big secrets of existence. Moreover, we are aware of dual and sometimes contradictory processes in our existence.

There is rationality and causality in life which permits us to predict the outcome of our actions. But we are also aware that our lives are subject to a randomness that makes a mockery of statistical conclusions and historical precedents.

From the beginning of time until its end in every atom of matter in existence, we can observe the two opposing forces of rationality vs. randomness. On the molecular level, the bonding and decomposition of elements are as predictable as tomorrow's sunrise, but the quantum theory will tell you that

nothing is predictable when you enter the sub-atomic world of quarks and strings.

HaShem makes us aware of His presence in two ways: the impressive order and predictability of the natural world vs. the sudden, irrational, uncompassionate, volatile episodes in our lives. It is as if HaShem is telling us, "I am the Ba'al ha'Bayit (Master) of My world and can do whatever I wish. Do not restrict Me to the boundaries of logic, for then logic becomes God. Do not restrict Me to the limits of pity and compassion, because then they become God. I am the Creator of logic and compassion, and they are subject to My will".

The randomness of life makes us shrink before the Almighty who controls the destiny of us all. It also opens the way to prayer. The message is, that no matter how the situation might look and what conclusions we reach, HaShem can change the outcome in an instant.

Nowhere are these principles more evident than in Eretz Yisrael. We have experienced frightening moments and situations from which, at the time, there seemed no escape. The War of Independence, the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War were all seen by the world as the demise of the Jewish State. In stark contrast, HaShem saved the Jewish people in the holy land and miraculously brought us to new and greater heights.

The Path to Redemption

Our rabbis have taught that HaShem put Avraham Avinu through ten tests. The ninth was the "binding of Yitzchak" (akeidat Yitzchak) and the tenth, the negotiations between Avraham and the Hittite Council of Elders for the purchase of Ma'arat Ha'machpela as a burial site for Sarah.

Logic dictates that since every succeeding test increases in difficulty, the question arises: what was the focus of this last test set before Avraham which caused it to be more difficult than the Akeida? Was it 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? Perhaps! Was it his being taken advantage of by the unscrupulous Efron the Hittite, who charged 400 shekels for a burial site which was not worth nearly that much? Perhaps! These were indeed aggravating realities, but the real 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: "The actions of the fathers (Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov) guide their children (the Jewish people) along the path to redemption". The moment of truth came when Avraham, despite the ramifications of what he was presently about to do, stood up before the Hittite council of elders and proclaimed: "I am a stranger and a resident among you". Rashi quotes the Midrash which explains what Avraham meant: "If you wish [to sell the burial site], I will act as a stranger who recognizes your right of ownership over the area; but if you do not [sell me the burial site], I will implement my right of sovereignty and seize the land by virtue of God's promise to me, which proclaimed 'And to your children will I give this land'.

Recall that 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. At that time, Europe was 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 an 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 7 nations numbering in the

hundreds of thousands, even millions. Each of these peoples, all descendants of Cham, the son of Noach, 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 juncture in their history, a stranger arrives from the east and declared that he was the true sovereign over all the land. Not just the area of Canaan, but of all the lands from the Euphrates in the north to the Nile in the south, and from the Mediterranean in the west to Mesopotamia in the east.

By this statement, Avraham challenged the rights of countless peoples who considered themselves as the owners of these lands by virtue of conquest and possession. 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; to their very existence. We were here before you!

You are a foreign implant in the Middle East. We do not tolerate other beliefs! Does this sound strangely familiar? Don't we hear it daily from Arab spokesmen, echoing the feelings of the ancient children of Cham when reacting to Avraham's declaration of sovereignty?

These anti-God, latter-day advocates of denial spew their venom in the media, on campuses, in the Security Council, on Capitol Hill and on the Temple Mount. And we ask ourselves: where is the Avraham of our generation who will stand up before the world and declare that Eretz Yisrael is our God-given heritage? This is obviously too huge a test for today's Jewish leaders; whether they be great talmidei chachamim, who almost to a man advocate a low profile when dealing with Yishmael in the east and Esav in the west, and certainly the secular Jews who believe that our ties to the land are merely historic and do not stem from HaShem's promise to our forefathers.

If I were to merit the opportunity to stand before an

international forum, I would shout the words of Avraham Avinu: that although we recognize certain individual rights of non-Jews in the Holy Land, God and His people Israel are the sovereigns over the entire Land of Israel.

The rejection of our sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael as being God given is the root cause of all our problems today in Eretz Yisrael.

In wake of the 1967 Six Day War, when HaShem presented to Am Yisrael the entire area of Eretz Yisrael west of the Jordan river on a silver platter, the Jewish thing to do would have been to immediately demolish the two abominations standing on the Temple Mount; annex all the areas of Shomron, Yehuda, Aza, and the Golan Heights into the State of Israel; open the bridges over the River to Jordan and help, facilitate, assist, and inspire all the Arabs to leave the country; commence on an ambitious project of resettling the newly acquired land between the Ocean and the River; open ever wider the gates of aliya for the millions who would have returned had the government acted according to the first four.

However, since our leaders lack the Jewish pride which filled Avraham Avinu, we are witnessing the negation of everything which is right.

The Temple Mount has become the focal point for Moslems in Eretz Yisrael, when on a Friday in Ramadan 300,000 Moslems ascend the Mount and turn their backs on Yerushalayim and face Mecca. And instead of diminishing the Arab population, our government does all to increase it as they turn a blind eye to the multiple Arab marriages, so that a Bedouin family can number from 50 to 75 and more children, and slowly take over the entire Negev.

All this because of the weakness of the "children" compared to the pride and strength of Avraham Avinu, when he declared our God-given sovereignty over every millimeter of this Holy Land.

Fortunately, as in past desperate periods in our history, HaShem sends a leader who exhibits the Jewish pride exemplified by Avraham Avinu. In our time when that day comes, and I believe wholeheartedly that it will come, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran and all the other would-be Hitlers who slither around the planet, will be no more. And the banners of the twelve Jewish tribes will be raised by the people who have returned to take possession of all of Eretz Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom,

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