

Chaye Sarah

by Lewis Glinert

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Yerushalayim, it is often observed, lives behind the Torah scenes. It is never mentioned as such but as Shalem or Moriah or even more obliquely, and what ensues there is brief if portentous. Reasons for this are not hard to come by.

Chevron is a different story. It is there in bold: the place where Avraham built his third altar, where he resided, performed the brit, acquired the first title-deed to the Land. And yet the Torah seems to be hiding something about the name Chevron: Persistently, it refers to it as Kiryat Arba or Kiryat HaArba or Mamre, and then (sometimes) adds that 'this is Chevron'. And Bereshit Rabba itself is less than forthcoming: the commentary on Chaye Sarah gives reasons galore for the name Kiryat Arba; for Chevron, however, there is silence, until Yaakov sends Yosef to find his brothers, and there – almost en passant – the Midrash records R Acha's interpretation, using sound play, of Emek Chevron as 'the deep counsel that GD shared with His handsome friend [Avraham] who lay buried in Chevron', *chaver ha-na'eh she-haya kavur be-chevron* (cited by Ramban ad loc).

But let us look more carefully at the wording of the Torah and its context. Chevron is based on the root *ch-v-r*, evoking *chavar*, *chibber*, *chaver* 'join, attach, comrade'. In Bereshit 13:18, Avraham first arrives in 'the plains of Mamre in Chevron' after having detached himself from the Lot crowd (*hippard na mealay* 'separate from me'), and now he is apparently more alone than ever. For the prophet of outreach, the *av hamon goyim*, this is a critical moment – and the name Chevron seems to be fraught with significances or even ironies: Promptly (14:3), we find the first use in Torah of *ch-v-r* as a verb, *kol ele chavru el emek hasidim* 'they all joined [battle] at the valley of Siddim'. Here, indeed, is a camaraderie, one widely regarded as the highest form of camaraderie between men, comradeship in arms. But in this case it involves everything Abraham is committed to oppose: the Gang of Four, the 'cosmocrats' (superpowers) as the Midrash on Chaye Sarah describes them, against the Gang of Five – a foreshadowing (cf. Ramban) of the four Biblical evil empires.

All sides to this conflict are spelled out in that other name for Chevron, which we first encounter at the death of Sarah – its original name, Kiryat Arba. Rashi singles out the references to the four individual giants of evil (the family Anak) and the four giants of good, or more accurately the four pairs of good (Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah etc) -- the *zugot*. 'Four' twosomes are 'joined' to make eight, *arba x chevron*, and all of them joined across the ages in the transmission of truth.

This is far from exhausting the spiritual-linguistic significance of Chevron. When Avraham is invited (13:17) to criss-cross the Land of Israel, he promptly 'pitches his tent', *vayeehal*, and reaches Chevron, even while Lot is 'pitching his tents' (13:12) to reach Sodom, *vaye'ahal ad sedom*. In Chevron, Avraham proceeds from a tent to a permanent stake, an *achuza* – by the name of Machpelah. It is surely not by chance that the roots *ch.b.r* and *k.p.l* occur together in the same verse in Teruma (Shemot 26:9), describing the attachment of the five curtains and the six curtains to create a tent, *ohel*, over the Mishkan: *ve-chibarta* and *ve-chafalta*. Chevron appears to foreshadow the Ohel Mo'ed, that first, temporary focus for Am Yisrael. Yet in the attachment of the

Ohel Moed, separation is paradoxically emphasized: *chamesh ha-yeriot levad* the five curtains separately.'

The Jewish People were divided by design into tribes and tribal territories. Israel's unity and Israel's divisions are two sides of one coin: *chaverim kol yisrael* but (Yechezkel 37:16) *etz efrayim ve-chol bet yisrael chaverav*. And much later, it would be in Chevron, after the divisive war of Shaul's succession, that representatives of all Israel would join to anoint David as King of Israel, and Chevron would be the first capital of the united kingdom.

This, then, is the true Chevron, a place and source of spiritual 'connection.'

But I still wish to ask: Why does the Torah, and the Midrash, appear to be so reticent about the name Chevron? Might there be some indication in the fact that the Torah calls Chevron just plain 'Chevron' on only two occasions: When Yaakov sends Yosef *me'emek Chevron* 'from the valley of Chevron' (Rashi: through the deep design of the tzaddik buried in Chevron...) on his fateful mission to his brothers; and when Calev makes his lonely pilgrimage to Machpelah to pray for protection from the *etza* 'designs' of the other spies. In both cases, the Midrash talks of *etzah* 'designs', first good and then evil. There is something very deep about Chevron. And how striking that Abraham, just before reaching Chevron, is told (13:17) *kum hithalech ba-aretz le-orkah ule-rochbah...* 'Arise and traverse the Land, lengthwise and breadth wise.' These two dimensions of Eretz Yisrael will be complemented by a third dimension, 'depth', that appears to be special to Chevron and Emek Chevron. This, then, could be the reason why the Torah is so sparing with the name Chevron, and why the Midrash Rabba only expounds on it when Yaakov draws on the *etzah amukah* of his grandfather who lies there.

Is there perhaps some way of tying this in with the mysterious aside in Shelach Lecha (13:22) *...ve-chevron sheva shanim nivneta lifney tzoan mitzrayim* '...and Chevron had been built seven years before Tzoan of Egypt'? A clue may lie in Yeshayahu 33:20, in the verb *tzaan* which appears just once in Tanach, in this verse: 'Gaze upon Zion, our city of assembly; your eyes shall behold Jerusalem as a secure homestead, a tent that cannot be swept away (*bal yitz'an*), whose pegs shall never be pulled up...' Tzoan was the mighty, age-old royal seat of Israel's old enemy, but Yeshayahu plays mockingly on the Hebrew meaning of the word Tzoan: 'swept away'. In this chapter, the prophet graphically depicts the Holy City as protected on all sides by mighty rivers (*neharim ye'orim*) that no army can cross, a tiny sail-ship or tent buffeted by winds but holding firm. In his imagery, Isaiah chooses to evoke not only the mighty flood of Assyrian forces approaching Jerusalem but also Israel's ancient memories of Egyptian aquatic power (its *yeorim*) and its demise. Tzoan was swept away; Jerusalem will not be.

What Yeshayahu says of Zion holds true also for Chevron. Chevron is the place where the tent of G-D holds firm. The ground may have been rocky and untilled, and there may have been far richer places to encamp, as Lot knew all too well. But in Chevron a great light would burn in Sarah's tent and G-D would speak at Abraham's tent door. And of Tzoan, capital of Egypt, nothing would remain but a heap of tangled ropes.

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Why Israel Needs a Thanksgiving

By Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz

As an American living in Canada, I get pretty homesick on Thanksgiving. Yes, Canada has a Thanksgiving too, but it's a pretty tepid affair, basically an October rerun of Labor Day.

To Americans, Thanksgiving is serious business. Yes, the rituals are pretty simple: turkey, cranberry sauce and football. But it feels like a national holiday. In fact, Thanksgiving has a unique message that makes it the most popular national holiday in the U.S., even more popular than America's Independence Day, the fourth of July.

The genius of Thanksgiving is that it bases patriotism on gratitude. Other national holidays around the world are grandiose, flag waving affairs, intended to glorify the country and inspire loyalty in the citizenry. These holidays feature public events, military parades and fireworks displays. Thanksgiving is a far simpler affair: it is always celebrated at home. It is about gratitude for a home, a happy family, a harvest, and at the same time, gratitude for a safe country. This minimalist approach to patriotism resonates with everyone, because countries don't have to be great to be appreciated; they just have to be a place we can call home. The Rabbis of the Mishnah understood this, and said one must even pray on behalf of inferior governments, because without them "one person would devour the other alive". Patriotism rooted in simple gratitude will have the widest appeal.

Gratitude is more than a popular argument for patriotism, it is the very foundation of any society. The Sefer Hachinuch, a 13th century theological work, sees gratitude as the foundation of all relationships, including belief in God. Indeed, in a gratitude free world, pessimism reigns. And pessimism is a harsh corrosive, with negativity about life in general infiltrating into, and undermining, all relationships. A marriage, a family or a community devoid of gratitude will certainly fall apart. Of course, this is true of a country as well.

Perhaps the one thing that the noisier ideologues of the right and left in Israel agree upon is pessimism. Both believe the country is falling apart; they simply quibble over who is to blame. Extremists on the left invoke the assassination of the Yitzchak Rabin to demonstrate that the right are a bunch of bloodthirsty extremists who hate democracy. Extremists on the right invoke the disengagement from Gaza to demonstrate that the left are a bunch of appeasing, heartless people who throw their fellow Jews out of their homes. However, if you remove the political particulars, all of these arguments are essentially the same: "The country is falling apart. And you, you (leftist idiot or rightist fanatic or religious dinosaur or soulless secularist) are the traitor who is to blame."

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Ironically, this pessimism is self-fulfilling. The greatest danger to Israel is not the right or the left or the religious or the secular, but rather the way all segments of society relate to each other. These nasty divides are the product of sincere, but pessimistic ideologues, who are doing their best to prevent the destruction of Israel. But their pessimism adds a dangerously bitter edge to their rhetoric, transforming political opponents into personal enemies, and democratically elected Prime Ministers into dangerous pursuers of innocent blood.

Yes, as an American expatriate in Canada, I should not be giving sermons to people who have invested their lives in the Jewish homeland. But any casual observer of the Israeli scene is aware that in political and public discourse, pessimism prevails over gratitude.

This is why Israel needs a Thanksgiving. A day to remember all the blessings we can be grateful for: for freedom and prosperity, for being able to live in the country of our ancestors, for a democracy, which, with all of its flaws, is still a true democracy. (Anyone who's forgotten what a dictatorship looks like should visit one of Israel's neighbors). And most importantly, we need to thank God for the miracle of the State of Israel. One hundred and fifty years ago, the probability of a state of Israel existing was less likely than a Martians invasion. Our ghetto dwelling ancestors, had they been able to see movies of contemporary Israel, would have assumed the Messiah had arrived. An Israeli Thanksgiving would allow reclaiming the sense of wonder previous generations had about the State of Israel.

Perhaps, if we get intoxicated with gratitude, we may begin to appreciate our brothers and sisters. Maybe the supporters of the left will show gratitude for the right's intense love for this country. And supporters of the right will show gratitude for left's intense concern for social justice. Maybe the Haredim will appreciate how secular Jews have built a safe and prosperous country; maybe the secularists will appreciate the profound Jewish spirituality the Haredim bring this country. Maybe we'll learn to appreciate each other.

On Israeli Thanksgiving, we could thank God for nourishing food and loving families, for our homeland and our country. And we could thank God for each other, for making us part of the wild and wonderful family known as the Jewish people.

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