

Parashat Chayeh Sarah 5783, 2022:

Eretz Yisrael: Our Land Forevermore

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechezkel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Yitzchak Chaim ben Yehoshua, Alexander Leib ben Binyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah sh'laimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

One of the major themes of our *parasha* is the death and burial of *Sarah Emanu* in *Ma'arat HaMachpelah*. Another, found in the subsequent chapter, focuses on Eliezer finding Yitzchak's future wife, Rivka. (24) Following this extensive presentation, the Torah informs us: "And Avraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah." (*Sefer Bereishit* 25:1, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach* with my emendations) With but few exceptions, *Chazal* identify Keturah with Hagar, Sarah's former maidservant and the mother of Yishmael. If this is the case, why was the new name "Keturah?" Rashi (1040-1105) offers the following explanation based on *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 61:4: "Keturah: This is Hagar. She was called Keturah because her deeds were as beautiful as incense (*ketoret*)." In his supercommentary on Rashi's *Commentary on the Torah*, the Maharal (Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Bezalel, born between 1512-1526, d. 1609) explains why Keturah's deeds "were as beautiful as incense":

Even though she had returned to worshipping the false gods of her father's house (Rashi 21:14), [after having been sent away by *Sarah Emanu*], once she saw the kindness Hashem did for her when He sent a *malach* (angel, 21:17), and the waters of the well rose to meet her (21:19), she returned to Hashem [and abandoned all false gods]. (*Gur Aryeh, Sefer Bereishit* 25:1, translation and brackets my own)

According to Rashi and the Maharal, Keturah emerges as a spiritually appropriate wife for Avraham during the post-*Sarah Emanu* years of his life, as she, too, eschewed idol worship and embraced monotheism. They were *zocheh* (merited) to have six children and a number of

grandchildren, all of whom the Torah describes as “*b’nai Keturah*—the children of Keturah.”

(25:2-4). Immediately thereafter, we find these two *pasukim*:

And Avraham gave all that he possessed to Yitzchak. And to the sons of Avraham's concubines, Avraham gave gifts, and he sent them away from his son Yitzchak while he [Avraham] was still alive, eastward to the land of the East. (25:5-6)

The verse, “and Avraham gave all that he possessed to Yitzchak,” teaches us that Yitzchak was the sole inheritor of *Avraham Avinu*’s property. We are left to ponder the exact content of this inheritance. Fortunately, there is a fascinating narrative in *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin* 91a that speaks directly to this issue:

The Gemara relates: ... the descendants of Yishmael and the descendants of Keturah came to judgment with the Jewish people before Alexander of Macedon. They said to the Jewish people before Alexander: “The land of Canaan is both ours and yours, as it is written: ‘And these are the generations of Yishmael, son of Avraham, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s maidservant, bore unto Avraham’ (25:12), and it is written: ‘And these are the generations of Yitzchak, son of Avraham’ (25:19). Therefore, the land should be divided between Avraham’s heirs.” ... Geviha ben Pesisa said to the descendants of Yishmael: “From where are you citing proof that the land of Canaan belongs to both you and the Jewish people?” They said to him: “From the Torah.” Geviha ben Pesisa said to them: “I, too, will cite proof to you only from the Torah, as it is stated: ‘And Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzchak. But to the sons of the concubines that Avraham had, Avraham gave gifts, and he sent them away from his son, while he yet lived, eastward, to the east country.’ (25:5–6). In the case of a father who gave a document of bequest [*agatin*] to his sons during his lifetime and sent one of the sons away from the other, does the one who was sent away have any claim against the other? [Of course not!] the father himself divided his property.” (Translation, with my brackets and emendations, *The Koren-William Davidson Talmud*, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz *zatzal*, editor)

The essence of this passage is the fourth century BCE attempt by the descendants of Yishmael and Keturah to acquire a portion of *Eretz Yisrael*, as demonstrated by their purported inheritance claims. Geviha ben Pesisa, *Chazal*’s representative to Alexander of Macedon, cites *pasukim* that prove the inaccuracy of their specious assertions, and concludes with a logical argument congruent with Greek law which stipulates that it is the father’s legal right to divide his property using an *agatin*, and such choices remain inviolate. Alexander apparently accepted Geviha’s arguments since there is no further discussion of this case in the Gemara.

Unfortunately, the descendants of Yishmael and Keturah have unceasingly continued their quest to deny our G-d given right to *Eretz Yisrael*. One particularly powerful incident involving Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook *zatzal* (1865-1935), the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine, gives voice to their never-ending efforts:

In 1929, the Arabs, supported by the British authorities in the land of Israel, were attempting to deny Jews the right to pray before the Western Wall. When Rabbi Kook appeared before a commission set up to deal with the matter, he turned to the head of the commission and said in a trembling voice: “What do you mean by saying that this commission will decide who has ownership over the Western Wall? Does this commission or the League of Nations control the Wall? From whom have you received permission to decide who owns it? The entire world is the possession of the Holy One, blessed be He, the Creator of the world. And the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the nation of Israel possession of the entire land of Israel, including the Western Wall. No power in the world, no League of Nations and not this commission can suspend this divine right.” The commission head commented that almost two thousand years had passed since the Jews had possessed the land of Israel, including the Western Wall. To this, Rav Kook replied quietly and calmly: “In Jewish law, there is a concept of an owner’s giving up his right to his property—including his land. But when a person’s land was stolen from him, and he protested and continues to protest, his rights never expire.” (Simcha Raz, *Malachim Kivnei Adam*, p. 179, translation, Yaacov David Shulman, <https://www.ravkook.net/the-land-of-israel.html>)

May the time come soon, and in our days, when we will witness the complete fulfillment of the *bracha* we recite in the daily *Shmoneh Esrei*: “Behold our affliction, take up our grievance, and redeem us speedily for Your Name’s sake, for You are a powerful Redeemer. Blessed are You, Hashem, Redeemer of the Jewish people.” (Translation, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, page 103, with my emendations). *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)