

*Mamre's Contribution to the World*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, my sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, and Shifra bat Chaim Alter, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Yehonatan Binyamin Halevy ben Golda Friedel, and Moshe Reuven ben Chaya.

Our *parasha* begins with the following *pasuk*: “And Hashem appeared to him [Avraham] in the Plains of Mamre and he sat in the opening of his tent in the hottest part of the day.” There are many different aspects of this verse that bear analysis. I would like, however, to focus upon one seemingly minor detail, the expression: “in the Plains of Mamre.” This is the third time the Torah uses this phrase. The first time is in *Sefer Bereishit* 13:18. At that point the Torah tells us that the Plains of Mamre (*Alonei Mamre*) were located near Hevron. We are also informed that this was where Avraham camped when he came to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel). Moreover, as an act of gratitude, he constructed an altar to Hashem upon which to offer his *korbanot* (sacrifices). The second instance of the term “*Alonei Mamre*” is found in *Sefer Bereishit* 14:13. A war refugee (according to Rashi, this was Og *Melech Habashan*) came and informed Avraham that his beloved nephew, Lot, was captured in battle. It is here that the Torah states that Avraham was dwelling in the Plains of Mamre. Moreover, we are told that Mamre was an Amorite and that he was a comrade-in-arms of Eshkol and Anar. In addition, we are told that all three of these men were Avraham’s allies.

The Torah is usually very succinct in its use of language. Repetition of seemingly minor details is not the Torah's mode of presentation. Given all of this, what is the Torah teaching us when it states for the third time that Avraham was in *Alonei Mamre*?

The Midrash in *Bereshit Rabbah* 42:3, gives us a deep insight as to why the expression *Alonei Mamre* is repeated three times within our holy Torah:

Why was Mamre called "Mamre?" Rabbi Azariah in the name of Rabbi Yehudah bar Simon said: "He [Mamre] stood up to Avraham (*sh'himrah panim b'Avraham*). At the time that *HaKodesh Baruch Hu* told Avraham to go and circumcise himself, he went and discussed this with his three closest friends. Anar told him: 'You are already 100 years old! And you are going to go and cause yourself such great misery?' Eshkol said: 'Why should you go and make yourself physically stand out among your enemies!' Mamre said to him: 'Your G-d Who stood by you when you were tossed into the fiery furnace, through famine, and against [marauding] kings, is the self-same one who has now told you to perform circumcision upon yourself, and now you question whether you should listen to Him!' *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* then said to Mamre: 'You have given him [Avraham] the advice to go through with the circumcision. I hereby swear that I will not reveal myself to him [Avraham] neither in the palace of Anar nor in the palace of Eshkol, but rather in your palace.' This is why it is written: 'And Hashem appeared to him [Avraham] in the Plains of Mamre.'"

Avraham's *brit milah* (circumcision) was a physically transforming act that is filled with unending spiritual ramifications that echo until our own day. He was about to become different in body and soul as a result of performing this momentous action. Little wonder, then, that he sought out the advice of his friends. He wanted to be in touch with "the pulse of his time" before performing an action that would forevermore mark him as being different from everyone else around him. Anar answered him in a naturalistic manner: "You are already 100 years old! And you are going to go and cause yourself such great misery?" Anar saw Avraham as a true friend. As such, he did not want him to be in what he perceived as gratuitous pain. Why should a 100-year-old man submit himself to his own knife? What possible benefits could obtain from such an act? The entire procedure

from beginning to end seemed totally unnecessary in his eyes. Clearly, Anar did not begin to understand the kind of relationship that obtained between Avraham and Hashem.

Eshkol's response: "Why should you go and make yourself physically stand out among your enemies!," is really the response of most gentiles to Jews when Jews act according to our holy Torah. "Why do you eat different foods, follow 'strange' marital behaviors, and refrain from work on your Sabbath?" is the next question that Eshkol and his kind would likely ask us. Eshkol had little problem with Avraham's belief structure. The belief in one G-d or in many gods did not bother Eshkol. This, after all is a personal matter that does not impact upon anyone else. What bothered Eshkol is that Avraham was about to cross the line from belief to practice, and a "strange practice" at that. Avraham was now going to be physically different, in his flesh, from everyone else around him. This was a frightening and alienating thought for Eshkol. In his eyes, since Avraham was going to be different, things between them would no longer be the same. Existentially, Avraham was to become someone else. This was abhorrent to Eshkol. He therefore counseled Avraham against entering into this new and radical covenant with the Almighty.

In stark contrast to Anar and Eshkol, the Midrash portrays Mamre as truly understanding Avraham's depth-level commitment to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. As his genuine friend, Mamre realized that Avraham was meant to be different in kind and degree from all those who surrounded him, including himself. This was the path that Avraham had blazed when he left his birthplace and traveled to *Eretz Yisrael*. While Mamre did not share Avraham's spiritual future, he loved him as a true friend and encouraged him to follow his G-d-given destiny. As such, Mamre took Avraham to task for questioning whether or

not he should follow G-d's command and perform the act of *brit milah* (ritual circumcision) upon himself. As a result, Mamre was rewarded for all time through Hashem's revelation to Avraham having taken place upon his land and its subsequent recording in the Torah. The message is clear: Everyone has the potential to play a role in bringing Hashem's glory and truth to mankind.

Our world is one wherein true Jewish principles are under ceaseless attack. Honesty, morality, ethical behavior, and family values are constantly challenged by the hedonistic pleasures of the moment. The clichéd phrase “eat, drink, and be merry,” symbolizes our secular society no less than that of ancient Greece or Rome. Moreover, immutable Torah principles are under incessant assault by the false prophets of modern moral relativism. Now, more than ever, we need to embrace the everlasting ideals of *Avraham Avinu* (our father Abraham) and his dedication to Hashem. May the Almighty give us the strength to walk upon Avraham's path, and may we be active participants in bringing *Mashiach Tzidkeinu bimharah u'vmeinu* (the Righteous Messiah soon and in our days). *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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