

“Let him grant me the Meoras HaMachpeiloh which he owns”

Eliyohu HaNovi Awakens Those Sleeping in Chevron and Washes Their Hands so that They May Pray and then Puts Them back to Sleep

In this week’s parsha, Chayei Soroh, we learn of the tremendous effort expended by Avraham Avinu in his dealings with “bnei Cheis.” Ultimately, he succeeded in purchasing the “Meoras HaMachpeiloh” from Ephron as an ancestral burial plot—paying full price for the purchase. It is only fitting, therefore, that we examine this transaction more closely. What prompted Avraham Avinu to go to such lengths to acquire this particular plot of land—the “Meoras HaMachpeiloh”—as an ancestral burial ground?

Let us begin our enlightening journey by explaining why Avraham Avinu purchased the Meoras HaMachpeiloh based on the possuk itself (ibid., ibid., 2): **“ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע היא חברון בארץ כנען”**—Soroh died in Kiryas Arba which is Chevron, in the Land of Canaan. Rashi comments in the name of the Midrash: **“על שם ד’ זוגות שנקברו שם איש ואשתו - אדם וחווה, אברהם ושרה, יצחק ורבקה, יעקב ולאה”**—the place was named Kiryas Arba, literally the City of Four, because of the four couples who were buried there—Adam and Chava, Avraham and Soroh, Yitzchok and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah. Hence, Avraham yearned to acquire the cave, so that he and Soroh, along with the other Ovois and Imohois, could be buried there together with Adam and Chava.

How, indeed, did Avraham Avinu become aware of the fact that Adam and Chava were buried in the Meoras HaMachpeiloh? This is explained by the Zohar Chodosh (Midrash Ruth 97b):

“רבי קיסמא אמר מערת המכפלה סמוך לפתח גן עדן. בשעה שמתה חווה בא אדם לקברה שם, ושם הריח מריחות גן עדן, באותו הריח שהיה שם, רצה לחצוב יותר יצתה בת קול ואמרה דיך. באותה שעה עמד ולא חצב יותר ושם נקבר. מי נתעסק בו, שת בנו שהוא היה בדמותו ובצלמו.

אמר רבי רחומאי הקב”ה נתעסק בו כשנוצר ונתעסק בו כשמת, ולא היה מי שיודע בו עד שבא אברהם אבינו ע”ה ונכנס לשם, וראה אותו, והריח ריח בשמים של גן עדן, ושמע קול מלאכי השרת אומרים, אדם הראשון קבור שם, ואברהם יצחק ויעקב מוכנים יהיו למקום הזה, ראה הנר דולק ויצא, מיד היתה תאוותו על המקום הזה.”

Rabbi Kisma explains that the Meoras HaMachpeiloh was near the entrance to Gan Eden. When Chava passed away, Adam went to bury her there and smelled the scents of Gan Eden. He wanted to dig even further but was commanded to stop by a heavenly voice. He stopped digging and he was also buried there. Who took care of his burial? Sheit, his son, who resembled him.

According to Rabbi Rechumai, HKB”H took care of Adam’s formation and also his burial. Until Avraham Avinu, a”h, entered the cave, no one knew where he was buried. Avraham saw him, smelled the scents of Gan Eden, and heard the ministering angels saying: “Adam HaRishon is buried there; Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov are destined to be in this place.” He saw a lit candle; and he exited the cave. From that moment, he longed for that place.

All Prayers Pass through the Meoras HaMachpeiloh

Continuing along this path, let us rise to the occasion and embellish this thought. We can understand Avraham’s great desire to purchase the Meoras HaMachpeiloh as a family burial plot based on a concept we find in our sacred sources. They explain that all of Yisroel’s prayers pass by way of the Meoras HaMachpeiloh. Let us introduce several of these sources.

The Megaleh Amukos writes (Lech Lecho): **“ג’ תפלות שתיקנו בכל יום אבות העולם... שאין תפלה שלנו נשמעת אלא כשעולין דרך מערת המכפלה ששם ג’ אבות”**—the three daily prayer services were instituted by the three Patriarchs; our prayers are not heard unless they ascend by way of the Meoras HaMachpeiloh, where the three Ovois are located. Elsewhere, the Megaleh Amukos on Voeschanon writes (250): **“ולכן כל התפלות אינן נשמעין, עד שהולכין מתחלה דרך מערת המכפלה ששם נקברין ג’ אבות, לזה היתה כוונת הבקשה של משה ליכנס לארץ ישראל”**—Moshe requested to enter Eretz Yisroel, because all prayers must first pass by way of the Meoras HaMachpeiloh, the burial place of the three Ovois, in order to be heard.

Our next source comes from the divine kabbalist, the Rama of Pano, in an essay entitled Yonas Ilem (Chapter 15):

“וידוע כי ארץ ישראל נקראת תמיד ארץ כנען אפילו בשעת כיבוש וחילוק... ובזוהר (פרשת נח עג.) אמרו שנקרא כן [ארץ כנען], כדי שלא תזוח דעתנו בה [שהיא תמיד שלנו], כי היא ניתנה לנו על תנאי, ולא להיקרא שמותינו עליה, רק אם בחוקותיו יתברך נלך, [אבל אם ח"ו לא נלך בחוקותיו תחזור להיות ארץ כנען].”

ועוד נקרא כן על שלמות רב אשר שמענו ונדעהו, מן הנוטריקון הנכבד הנדרש בתואר הזה [כנען שהוא ראשי תיבות] (תהלים פא-ג) כנו"ר נ'ע"י"ם ע"ם נב"ל בגימטריא אברה"ם יצח"ק יעק"ב, וכן הוא בראשי תיבות (שם לג-ג) ש"ירו ל'ה' ש"יר ח'דש, כי כל תהלה ותפלה העולה למרום עוברת דרך עליהם במערת המכפלה.”

Eretz Yisroel is always referred to as Eretz Canaan, even during the years of conquest and division of the land. According to the Zohar (Noach 73a), it is called Eretz Canaan so that we do not take it for granted—thinking that it is ours forever, no matter what. The land was given to us on the condition that we obey the Almighty's laws; only then is it referred to by our name. Otherwise, chas v'shalom, it becomes Eretz Canaan, once again.

Additionally, the Hebrew name כנען is an acronym for כנו"ר כנע"י"ם ע"ם נב"ל—the sweet harp with the lyre (part of a possuk in Tehillim 81, 3). This phrase has the same numerical value as the sum of the names of the three Ovois--(638) אברה"ם יצח"ק יעק"ב (ibid. 33, 3): ש"ירו ל'ה' ש"יר ח'דש—sing Hashem a new song—also total 638. These allusions indicate that all praise and prayers that ascend to the heavens must first pass by way of the Meoras HaMachpeilah, the resting place of the three Ovois.

This vital principle is also presented by the Noam Elimelech, authored by the great Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy"א, (Vayechi): “דאיתא בספרים דהתפילות עולות למעלה דרך מערת המכפלה, והוא “מעורר את האבות”—pointing out that these prayers actually arouse the Ovois. According to the Tiferet Shlomo (Bamidbor), not only do all prayers pass through the Meoras HaMachpeilah, but actually all Torah and mitzvot do so, as well. Here is what he writes:

“דהנה כבר מבואר בספרים שכל המצוות ומעשים טובים ותלמוד תורה ותפלה של האדם, הנה כולם עוברים בעלייתם דרך מערת המכפלה אל האבות ואל אדם הראשון, ודרך שמה יעלו בית אלהים לרצון לפני ה', כאשר האדם מכוון בהם כראוי להם ואשר ייטב לפניהם, הנה גם לפני השי"ת יהיה טוב.”

After passing by the resting place of the Ovois and Adam HaRishon, they ascend to the House of G-d to please Hashem. If man prays with proper intent, it benefits both man and Hashem.

Understood in this light, it is reasonable to suggest that Avraham Avinu longed to purchase the Meoras HaMachpeilah, because he realized by means of “ruach hakodesh” that all of the prayers of his offspring Yisroel were destined to pass through there. In truth, this explanation coincides with the original explanation presented above. The reason all of Yisroel's prayers travel by way of the Meoras HaMachpeilah is because the holy Ovois and Imohois are buried there.

Nonetheless, this wonderful idea seems to contradict what we learned in parshat Vayeitzei. After sleeping on the site of the future Beit HaMikdash, Yaakov Avinu wakes up (Bereishis 28, 17): “וירא—ויאמר מה נורא המקום הזה אין זה כי אם בית אלקים וזה שער השמים” and he became frightened and he proclaimed, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of G-d and this is the gate to the heavens!” There Rashi comments: “וזה שער השמים—מקום תפלה לעלות תפלתם השמימה, ומדרשו שבית המקדש של מעלה מכוון כנגד בית המקדש של מטה”—a place of prayer, for their prayers to ascend heavenward. Its midrashic interpretation is that the Beit HaMikdash on high is aligned opposite the Beit HaMikdash below. We see from here that all prayers ascend heavenward via the site of the Beit HaMikdash down on earth. If so, how can this be reconciled with all of the sources presented above which claim that prayers travel by way of the Meoras HaMachpeilah?

Eliyohu Wakes the Ovois up to Pray

I have been inspired to propose an explanation reconciling these two apparently divergent traditions. First let us explain why all prayers must pass by the Meoras HaMachpeilah based on a revelation from our blessed sages. They teach us that “Eliyohu HaNovi zachur la'tov” goes to the Meoras HaMachpeilah to wake up those sleeping in Chevron—i.e. the holy Ovois—so that they will pray. Here is the passage as it appears in the Gemara (B.M. 85b):

“אליהו הוה שכיח במתיבתא דרבי, [Rabeinu HaKadosh's yeshivah one day, it was Rosh Chodesh and Eliyohu came late] יומא חד ריש ירחא הוה נגה ליה ולא אתא, [to the yeshivah] אמר ליה [Rebbe asked Eliyohu], מאי טעמא נגה ליה למר [why were you late?], אמר ליה [Eliyah replied] אדאוקימנא לאברהם ומשינא ידיה ומצלי ומגנינא ליה, [until I woke Avraham up,

[and washed his hands, and he prayed and I put him back to sleep
 וכן ליצחק, וכן ליעקב] [and did the same for Yitzchok and Yaakov]

[The Gemara poses the following question] **ולוקמינהו בהדי**
 הדידי [Why didn't Eliyohu wake all three Ovois up at the same time] **הדידי**
 [so that they could pray together? The Gemara answers
 Eliyohu feared that if the] **ברחמי ומייתי ליה למשיח בלא זמניה**,
 Ovois all prayed together, their combined influence would be so
 overwhelming that their prayers would elicit divine mercy causing
 Mashiach to come prematurely, before the designated time for the
 [geulah; therefore, he woke each one up to pray individually]

The Maharsho, in Chidushei Aggodos, explains Eliyohu's
 routine of waking up the Ovois and washing their hands in
 preparation for davening as follows:

“אדאוקמינא לאברהם ומשי ידיה ומצלי כו’. הוא מבואר שהצדיקים
 במיתתם קרויין חיים, והמיתה אינה אלא כשינה כאמור [בברכת מחיה
 המתים: ומקיים אמונתו] **לישני עפר,** והוא שאמר אדאוקמינא לאברהם,
 שהעמידו מתוך השינה, ומשי ידיה לתפלה, כדין הישן על מיטתו שצריך
 נטילה לתפלה.”

Chazal state that tzaddikim even in death are still referred to as
 living; death is only a form of sleep or hibernation. In keeping with
 this idea, in the second berachah of Shemoneh Esreh, the dead
 tzaddikim are referred to as “those sleeping in the dust”—**לישני עפר**.
 This is what Eliyohu means when he says that he wakes
 Avraham up from his slumber and washes his hands for davening;
 it is just like one rises from one's bed in the morning and is required
 to perform “netilat yadayim” prior to davening.

Do the Ovois Pray Daily or Only on Rosh Chodesh?

Let us examine Eliyohu's protocol more closely. Why does he
 only go to rouse the Ovois for prayer on Rosh Chodesh? It is
 feasible that they do not daven on a daily basis? Indeed the Shitah
 Mikubetzet senses this difficulty and presents this question in the
 name of one of the Rishonim, the Rosh: **“אדמוקימנא ליה לאברהם.**
תימה והלא בכל יום היה עושה כך. הרא”ש”

Without a doubt, the Rosh, who was so well-versed in all
 aspects of the Torah and was privy to the secrets of the Torah,
 resolved this difficulty by himself; however, his lofty words and
 answers are not available to us. Nevertheless, it remains our
 responsibility to search for an answer to this question. In fact, we
 find an explanation in the incomparable teachings of the Ben Ish
 Chai, in his commentary on the Aggodos (parables) of the Talmud,

the Ben Yehoyodo (B.M.). Here is his explanation as to why Eliyohu
 only wakes the Ovois up to daven on Rosh Chodesh:

**“כי הוא לא היה הולך להעמיד האבות כדי להתפלל אלא רק ביום
 ראש חודש, אבל בשאר ימים מתפללים בעודם שוכבים. ומה שאמר
 ומגננא ליה, משמע מלבד שמעמידם חוזר ומשכיב אותם בידו, והטעם
 מפני שבשעה שמעמידם נעשה להם תחייה ממש, ובעת שמשכיב אותם
 נעשה להם כעין מיתה, כי הראשונים שכיבתם זו היא קבורתם, ולכן צריך
 לעשות להם קבורה חדשה בידו.”**

On Rosh Chodesh, he stands the Ovois up to daven; whereas
 on all other days, they daven while still lying down. Not only does
 he stand them up, but afterwards he lies them back down. The
 reason he does this is because standing them up is similar to the
 process of resurrection; whereas lying them down is a procedure
 similar to death.

Let us interpret his explanation in the following manner. In
 truth, the holy Ovois daven every day; however, their daily prayers
 are performed by their neshamot alone, while they are still lying
 recumbent in the cave—i.e. the neshamah does so without being
 clothed in a body. Yet, on Rosh Chodesh, Eliyohu rouses them
 from their slumber, so that their neshamot will enter their bodies
 and then pray. This interpretation coincides beautifully with the
 Maharsho's explanation above that Eliyohu washes Avraham's
 hands: **“כדין הישן על מיטתו שצריך נטילה לתפלה”**—as is required
 of someone who awakes from him sleep and must wash his hands
 in preparation for davening.

Nonetheless, it is clear to all that the Ben Yehoyada's explanation
 requires some further clarification. If the Ovois pray daily while still
 lying down in the cave, without being clothed by their bodies, why
 does Eliyohu bother to awaken them on every Rosh Chodesh in
 order for them to pray in their bodily garb? Furthermore, why is he
 so concerned not to wake them all up simultaneously, out of fear
 that it will arouse divine mercy and bring the geulah prematurely?

Eliyohu Wakes the Ovois up to Pray with Him for the Geulah

It appears that we can provide clarification for the position
 of this tzaddik, the Ben Yehoyada, based on the writings of
 the Maharsho in Chidushei Aggodos (ibid.). Rosh Chodesh is
 particularly suited to praying for the geulah. It is the time of
 the month when HKB”H fills in the moon's deficit, and the light
 of the moon resembles the light of the sun. Hence, there is a

greater concern that the unified prayers of the Ovois on Rosh Chodesh will stimulate divine mercy—resulting in the geulah coming before the appropriate time. Here are the words of the Maharsho for perusal:

”יומא חד ריש ירחא הוה כו’. כי זה היום אשר בו חידוש הלבנה הוא רמוז על התחדש מלכות ישראל לעתיד, ויום מוכן להתפלל על דבר זה [על הגאולה], כמאמר נוסחו (קידוש הלבנה) וללבנה אמר שתתחדש עטרת תפארת לעמוסי בטן שהם עתידים להתחדש כמותה כו’ והוא שאמר דאי תקפי היום בראש חודש ברחמי הווי מייתי ליה למשיח”.

He writes that the renewal of the moon alludes to the future reestablishment of the sovereignty of Yisroel. Hence, Rosh Chodesh is especially suited for praying for the redemption. This is why Eliyohu was concerned that the arousal of divine mercy on Rosh Chodesh could likely lead to the coming of the Mashiach. I also found this exact same idea expressed in Kolan Shel Sofrim (Jerusalem 5747).

Yet, this, too, is perplexing in light of what the Maharsho himself writes elsewhere in Chidushei Aggodos (Sanhedrin 98a): **”שאמרו במדרשות דאליהו מעמיד את האבות, להתפלל עמו על חורבן בית המקדש וגלות ישראל”**—according to midrashic sources, Eliyohu stands the Ovois up to pray with him regarding the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and Yisroel’s state of exile. Clearly, he is referring to the Gemara in Bava Metzia cited above which states that Eliyohu stands the Ovois up on Rosh Chodesh.

The Maharsho, however, explains himself. Eliyohu HaNovi is the one appointed to announce the geulah to Yisroel; hence, he goes and prostrates himself over the tombs of the Ovois in Meoras HaMachpeilah on every Rosh Chodesh and prays for Yisroel’s redemption. In addition, he actually wakes the Ovois up so that they will pray with him for the geulah. This ties in perfectly with the Maharsho’s statement that Rosh Chodesh is an optimal time to pray for the geulah.

According to this, however, we are left with a huge contradiction in the words of the Maharsho. On the one hand, he writes that Eliyohu stands the holy Ovois up on Rosh Chodesh so that they will pray together with him for the geulah—seeing as Rosh Chodesh is the optimal time to pray for the geulah. On the other hand, he writes that Eliyohu refuses to get all three Ovois up at the same time, for fear that they will arouse overwhelming mercy, hastening the geulah prematurely.

Eliyohu HaNovi’s Tremendous Wisdom

It appears that we can resolve this tangled web and set things straight in one fell swoop. The Ben Yehoyada taught us that throughout the month, Eliyohu does not rouse the Ovois from their slumber. Instead, their neshamot pray while their bodies remain recumbent—seemingly in a state of sleep inside the cave. Yet, when Rosh Chodesh arrives—the optimal time to pray for the geulah—Eliyohu wakes them up to enter their bodies and pray with him—body and soul—for the future redemption. For, the prayer a tzaddik prays with the body and soul with which he performed mitzvot and good deeds in this world, is very dear in the eyes of Hashem.

Still, the concern exists that they may generate overwhelming mercy hastening the geulah prematurely. Therefore, Eliyohu devised an extremely clever test to determine whether or not the appropriate time had arrived to pray for the final geulah. First, he wakes each of the Ovois up individually; so that they do not pray together. Thus, each will elicit divine mercy vis-à-vis the future geulah at its proper moment and time. After each one has prayed, he returns them to their respective resting place. If the appropriate time for the final geulah has not yet arrived, none of the Ovois praying individually will succeed at hastening the geulah prematurely.

If, however, the time to elicit the geulah has already arrived, Eliyohu will not be able to put Avraham back to rest once he has woke him up to pray for the geulah. Rather, he will remain alive, body and soul intact, in keeping with the notion of “techiyat hameitim”—resurrection of the dead. He will then be able to join the other Ovois to pray together for the geulah. For, when he wakes Yitzchok, he, too, will pray for the geulah and will not return to his slumber. Similarly, Yaakov will remain awake, neshamah and body reunited. Thus, all three Ovois will join together in prayer and bring in the final geulah, at the appropriate moment, once and for all.

To summarize, the holy Ovois pray thrice daily in the Meoras HaMachpeilah—Shacharit, Minchah and Arvit. These daily prayers, however, involve only their neshamot without their bodies—which remain recumbent and do not rise. Quite possibly, Eliyohu HaNovi comes every day to remind them that it is time to pray. For that seems to be the implication from the language of the Rosh quoted above: **”אדמוקימנא ליה לאברהם. תימה והלא בכל יום היה עושה כך”**—concerning Eliyohu’s excuse for coming late

to the yeshivah on that Rosh Chodesh day, the Rosh is bothered by the fact that Eliyohu actually performed this act--of reminding the Ovois to daven--on a daily basis. So, why did he offer this excuse specifically on Rosh Chodesh? Perhaps, on other days of the month, he did not linger very long, because he did not perform the entire ritual of waking them up, washing their hands, and so on and so forth; hence, he was not delayed and did not come late to Rebbe's yeshivah.

On Rosh Chodesh, however, the optimal time to pray for the geulah, Eliyohu came to the Meoras HaMachpeilah to pray and to stimulate divine mercy for the redemption of Yisroel. He enlisted the holy Ovois's assistance by waking them from their sleep so that they would pray together with him—with body and soul. Nevertheless, out of concern that they might upset the predetermined timetable—ushering in the geulah prematurely—he chose to wake each of the Ovois up individually; and, afterwards, he put each one back to sleep. This was the test he devised to determine whether or not the appropriate time for the geulah had arrived.

Yisroel's Prayers Join with the Ovois's Prayers in the Meoras HaMachpeilah

At last, we can provide a respectable explanation as to why all "tefilot" must journey by way of the Meoras HaMachpeilah. There is a well-known principle found in our holy sources, whose source is the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 10, 25b): **"אורייתא בלא דחילו ורחימו לא"** **"תורה ומצוה בלא דחילו ורחימו לא יכילת"** **"פרכת לעילא"**. Also (ibid.): **"לסלקא ולמיקם קדם י"ה"**. In other words, Torah study and the performance of mitzvot which lack proper "yirah" and "ahavah"—fear (reverence) and love—cannot ascend heavenward.

It turns out, according to this principle that our prayers cannot ascend without proper "yirah" and "ahavah." Yet, there are very few who are able to pray in this ideal, perfect manner. Therefore, in His infinite mercy and kindness, HKB"H established that all prayers must pass by the Meoras HaMachpeilah. There, they join with the prayers of our holy Ovois, who pray daily in the perfect, ideal manner. As a result, when their prayers ascend to the heavens, our prayers ascend with them, as well.

Now, we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 26b): **"איתמר רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא אמר תפלות אבות תקנום, רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום, תניא כוותיה דרבי יוסי ברבי חנינא, ותניא כוותיה דרבי יהושע בן לוי"** According to Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Chanina, the prayers were instituted by the Ovois; according to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, they were instituted corresponding to the daily "tamid" offerings. It is clear that both opinions are correct and both represent the word of G-d. The holy Ovois, recognizing through "ruach hakodesh" that Yisroel were destined to offer sacrifices in the future, instituted the "tefilot" corresponding to the daily "tamid" offerings.

Combining all of this information, we can happily resolve the apparent contradiction as to whether Yisroel's prayers pass by the Meoras HaMachpeilah and then proceed heavenward or whether they first pass by way of the site of the Mikdash and from there ascend heavenward. Based on our discussion, both opinions and traditions coincide beautifully. Initially, the "tefilot" journey by way of the Meoras HaMachpeilah so that they may join and unite with the "tefilot" of the holy Ovois—who pray in the ideal manner with "ahavah" and "yirah." This is alluded to by our blessed sages' statement: **"תפלות אבות תקנום"**—rather than interpreting **תקנום** as instituted, we can interpret it as rectified and remedied. In other words, Yisroel's "tefilot" are rectified and remedied by the Ovois, so that they may ascend heavenward.

In truth, the "tefilot" of the Ovois also pass by way of the site of the Mikdash—where the "korban tamid" was offered twice daily, morning and night. From the site of the Mikdash, all of the "tefilot" of the Ovois together with Yisroel's "tefilot" ascend heavenward in lieu of the sacrifice of the daily "korban tamid." This then is the significance of Rashi's comment: **"וזה שער השמים - מקום תפלה"** **"לעלות תפלתם השמימה"**—and this is the gate to the heavens": a place of prayer, for their prayers to ascend heavenward. While indeed "tefilot" travel by way of the Meoras HaMachpeilah, nevertheless in order to ascend to the heavens, they have to travel by way of the site of the Mikdash.

Donated by Dr. Ralph and Limor Madeb
For the Refua shelema of Refael Gavriel Simcha Chaim Ben shulamit