

The Jewish

Weekly

Mothers of the Motherland

By Mrs. Sara Nachshon

My love for the Land of Israel comes from my parents. They moved here when they were young — first to Tel Aviv, back when it was still small, then to a little farm in Kfar Hasidim — and they nurtured our connection to the land.

My family knew very little about Chabad. After Baruch and I married, he wanted to go see the Rebbe. Personally, I felt my place was in Israel, but I went along with my husband. In 1964, we traveled to New York by ship, and when they finally met, the Rebbe encouraged my husband to attend art school in New York, which led to us living there for a year.

About a month after arriving, I had an audience with the Rebbe; I was pregnant at the time, and I wanted to receive his blessing ahead of the birth.

He spoke to me like a father to his child. He asked me many questions, such as whether I had friends in New York, and what the doctors had said about my pregnancy. He even gave me the names of some local women with whom I could speak Hebrew — women I have remained friends with until today. I had known nothing about the Rebbe, but after that first meeting, I felt very close to him.

After a year in Crown Heights, the Rebbe told us that our place was in Israel.

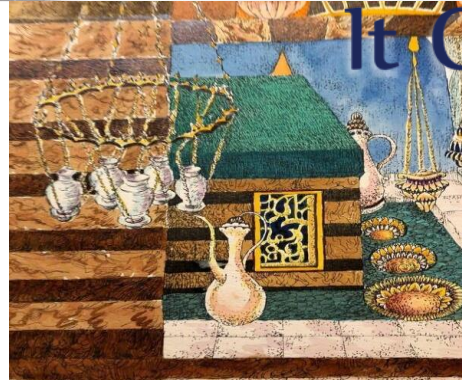
“Where?” we asked.

“Wherever you want,” he replied.

So, we went back to Israel, and a few years later a great miracle happened — the 1967 Six Day War. In just six days, we won back the Old City of Jerusalem, along with Hebron, Shechem, and other parts of Israel. In 1929, the Jewish community of Hebron had been destroyed in a massacre committed by the local Arabs, and now that we had reconquered the holy city, we had every right to move back. But Israel’s government forbade Jews from moving there. In 1968, they forced a group of Jews to leave an Arab-owned hotel in Hebron, but eventually they allowed a few families to take up residence in a nearby police station. Our family was given one room. When we asked the Rebbe about this idea, he gave us his blessing.

After three years, the government built a Jewish town near Hebron, which they called Kiryat Arba, and we were instructed to leave the police station and move there.

We lived in Kiryat Arba for a few years but, despite the government’s objections, we still very much wanted to live in Hebron proper. It is one of the four holy cities in Israel; our



Baruch Nachshon's painting of Mearat Hamachpela

forefathers and mothers lived and were buried there; King David reigned there; it belongs to the Jewish people. It was immoral that the Arabs could massacre our people and then dislodge us from our own property. If their presence on the lands they stole from us went unchallenged, their appetite would continue to grow, and there would be further victims.

By then, we had also made a brit in Hebron — it was the first since the 1929 massacre, and we named our son after the city, Shneur Chevron. In 1975, when our baby Avraham Yedidyah passed away in a crib death, I carried him to the old Jewish cemetery — which lay destroyed and desecrated — to lay him to rest there. I waited for hours until the authorities finally let me through. It was history as a circle: The Jewish connection to Hebron began when Abraham buried Sarah there, and on that day another Sarah buried her Abraham there.

So after all this, in 1979, we decided that we would go back and live in Hebron, no matter what. One night, a group of fifteen women and thirty-five children drove up to the old Beit Hadassah hospital of Hebron, which was built in 1893, the first modern Jewish hospital in Israel.

There was a soldier standing in front of the hospital, so we went around the back, cut some wires that the army had placed around the building, took a ladder and jumped inside. Once we had cleaned out a space for us to stay and put down some mattresses and supplies, we began to sing the song “Veshavu Banim Ligvulam — the children shall return to their borders.”

The army did not forcibly remove us, but they did not let anything or anyone else enter. The old hospital building had no electricity or running water, and it was only after a vote in the Knesset that an army truck was allowed to come every few days to replenish our water supply. After three months, the government decided that if we sent our children off to school every day, they would be allowed to come back in afterward. On Shabbat, one of our husbands could come and make kiddush. Other husbands, along with a group of yeshivah boys, would also come by after the Friday night prayers at the Cave of Machpelah to sing us Shabbat songs from outside the building, before going back to their homes in Kiryat Arba.

It Once Happened...

After six months in Beit Hadassah without seeing any progress, I wrote a letter to the Rebbe outlining the situation and requesting his advice on what I should do. We could not receive mail, but three weeks later a group of Chabad women came, bringing with them a recording of the Rebbe at a public gathering. That night, we listened to the recording, and to my amazement, the Rebbe was speaking about me:

“Today, I received a letter from a woman who has been sitting in Hebron, with small children, for several months,” said the Rebbe, briefly relating our story.

Outraged, he went on to say that it was the Jewish authorities themselves who were stopping other Jews from coming into Beit Hadassah. And this, he decried, was even though “everyone acknowledges — even the Arabs — that this building belongs to Jews!”

“What can I answer her?” asked the Rebbe.

He went on to discuss the story of the daughters of Tzlafchad, who went to Moses after the passing of their father, asking to inherit their family’s portion of the Land of Israel. Moses asked G-d what to do, and He said that since they had such a love for the Land of Israel, they would receive a portion of their own. Hearing the Rebbe make this connection gave us the strength to carry on.


One Friday night a few months later, terrorists attacked a group of yeshivah students as they stood outside singing Shabbat songs to us. Six boys were killed, and more were wounded. As a result, the government decided to let us stay, and to rebuild the hospital building so that our families could live in it.

After this, more people were able to start settlements in the rest of Judea and Samaria, and Jewish people have been allowed to live in Hebron ever since.

Years later, I began sending my daughters to a Chabad school in Jerusalem, but this was very difficult because they had to take two buses to get there. I started to wonder whether moving to Jerusalem would be better for their education, and I wrote a long letter to the Rebbe about it.

“You came to live in Hebron — what changed?” the Rebbe replied. We had decided to live in Hebron despite all the challenges, so G-d would give us the power to bring up our children here too. From that line that the Rebbe wrote to me, I have stayed here until this day.

Reprinted from an email of Here's My Story.



Shabbat Times – Parshat Chayei Sarah

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:01	5:15	5:54
Tel Aviv	4:15	5:17	5:50
Haifa	4:05	5:15	5:50
Be'er Sheva	4:20	5:19	5:55



Moving My Parents By Chaya Rochel Zimmerman

My family was the only thing left behind.

When the last truckload, crammed with boxes of prayer books, stacks of chairs, and the four-foot-tall wooden dais, drove away, my father locked the doors of the synagogue as he had done for the past nine years.

Our beloved synagogue had opened its doors in 1913 on Staten Island, New York and now, in 1972, stood empty, except for a faint flickering on the wall of muted colors streaming through the stained-glass window. The Polish, Italian and Jewish immigrant families, who had inhabited my once thriving childhood neighborhood, had moved away when the streets gave rise to rough and rowdy teenagers playing loud music late into the night.

My elderly father worked hard to own his home and never thought about moving, nor of giving up his job as the physical and spiritual caretaker of the synagogue, a position he inherited upon the passing of my grandfather.

The synagogue purchased another building much further away, to continue servicing its aging congregants. So, at the age of sixty-eight without any complaints, my ever-conscientious father, began walking the two plus miles back and forth on Shabbos and the holy festivals through the now dangerous neighborhood.

Although my father's sweet smile and sincerity could melt anyone's heart, my mother and I feared for his life. Within a few months, my small father was mugged twice, each time explaining to some tall dark man that it was the Jewish Sabbath and he didn't have any money or cigarettes on him. Mercifully they let him go.

I decided it was time to move. I was twenty-one, in college, and the only child living at home; my brother had made Aliyah the year before and my married sister was busy with her two preschoolers.

I started packing, not sure yet where we would move to. "What are you doing?" said my father alarmed. My mother stood nearby in silent agreement, but helpless to verbalize it.

"It's time to move," I said. "This is my home."

"I know. I'll find you another home. It's too dangerous for you to walk home on Shabbos." "I'm not moving."

We had both walked these streets for years in safety, but now it was time to admit, it had changed. Torah commands us not to put our bodies in danger, lest our souls leave this world. I continued working.

I gathered, sorted, packed and discarded. This last category ended in deadlock. My attempts to throw out what I considered worthless and what my father considered priceless, threatened the whole move. Do piles of yellowed Yiddish newspapers from the last twenty years count as valuable? Or extras of old weekly synagogue bulletins, or unread catalogues that came through the mail?

It would be impossible to fit everything they owned into a small rented apartment, so I continued working against the rising resistance of my father who refused to allow me to dispose of the growing bags of garbage before he sorted through each one. This wasn't just a matter of elderly clutter or hoarding. I was disregarding his core beliefs that ran generations deep.

My father was a European product, born in Lomazy Poland, and had lived in Biala Podlaska, Berditchev, the Bronx, the Lower East Side and Staten Island. Moving was not new to him. He had lived through WWI in Europe and the Great Depression in America and it pained him to see anything usable destroyed or disposed of. The wrinkles on his balding forehead deepened as he paced the floor, watching me continue to sift through the layers of his life. His agitation increased as the pile of moving boxes grew. It was a matter of trust.

My true intentions were to uphold the fifth commandment, "To Honor and Fear Your Mother and Your Father So You May Lengthen the Days of Your Life". I wasn't sweating this backbreaking task to lengthen the days of my years, but to lengthen their days.

It also pained me to leave behind the place that held my childhood memories: reading a good book leaning against the tree heavy with peaches surrounded by the tall uncut grass we hid in when we played hide go seek, sitting on the steps of the wooden front porch sharing childish secrets with my friends, playing kick ball with my brother inside the house where the Angel of balls ensured that nothing ever broke, celebrating my good marks after studying with my mother at the kitchen table, smelling my mother's eggplant roasting atop the gas fire.

The Torah equates the honor and fear of one's parents with the honor and fear of G-d Himself. Rambam explains that to fear your father means not to contradict his word nor offer an opinion that outweighs his. I felt I paid a high price for not respecting my father's wishes, but surely moving was his inner wish.

My mother and I searched for an apartment in vain, until my aunt came to town at the last hour. She was my father's only sister, twenty-one years his junior, born in America, and he loved her dearly. My aunt, with my sister's help, found a house for rent two blocks from the new synagogue location and ordered a moving van.

Eventually, my father blessed me for moving him, forever grateful to be close to the synagogue. However, he remained troubled over the things I had disposed of in the moving process, that he felt still had value.

Although I had the noblest of reasons for moving my aging parents, it's not a decision to be taken lightly.

The name of the main character is missing. That's what we find in Parshat Chayei Sarah.

Let's say a school were putting on a play of this week's Parsha and a child came home and said, "I'm going to play Eliezer." I think his parents would be exceptionally proud of him, because we all know that Eliezer is the key character in the portion, which includes within it the longest chapter of the book of Bereishit.

However, let's have a look at the names that are mentioned in the Parsha. The name of Avraham is featured thirty seven times. Yitzchak, is mentioned thirteen times. Rivka twelve times, Sarah nine, Ephron nine, Bethuel four, Lavan three and Eliezer, zero.

Yes, he's the main character, but he's called either העבד – the servant or האיש – the man.

His name does not appear.

And the enormous message conveyed to us by the Torah is that sometimes the greatest contributions to humankind are made by people whose names are not in neon lights.

And that was Eliezer.

That's why, in the Talmud, we are taught: *יפה שיחתן של עבדי בתי אבות מתורתן של בנים* – the everyday conversation of the servants of the founders of our faith, is more significant to us, than the Torah, than the formal instruction given to descendants of those founders.

Because when it comes to the literal Torah, we find that the Torah is so concise, and we have to work out what every word says, what every letter means.

But here, the Torah expands on everything that Eliezer said and what he did, because we can learn so much from him.

And indeed, this is what we are finding right now in the midst of a tragic war here in Israel.

The contribution to the Jewish people is being made by so many Eliezers. We don't know their names, but the whole Jewish people is one משפחה (family), we are one single family right now and we feel the pain of those who are suffering, and everybody is helping in such an extraordinary way.

And you know something?

Eliezer's name says it all. We're helping, we're contributing from the depths of our hearts.

But – *אלי-עזר* – ultimately, it is Hashem who will help because that's what Eliezer means – Hashem is my help!

And may Hashem indeed help Medinat Yisrael and Am Yisrael at this time. And may we indeed prevail.

Let's all join as one family and let's pray with all our hearts for the healing of all those injured, for the safe return of those taken as hostages, as well as Divine Protection for our brave IDF soldiers, Police officers, medical professionals, Firefighters, ZAKA members, security personnel and all those citizens protecting us in Israel as well as around the world, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children or parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, safe, quiet and sweet Shabbat.

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Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's
PARSHA FACTS

NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA
 Although none of the 613 mitzvot are counted from Chayei Sarah, we learn about burial of the dead, and funeral practices such as eulogizing the dead. We also find lessons relating to marriage in this Parshah.

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 105
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1402
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5314

HAFTORA: Melachim I 1:1-31