



Rabbi Dovid Hodges

Head of Burial Society, Federation

The author can be contacted at dovid.hodges@federation.org.uk



FEDERATION

“A MEANS TO AN END”

Parshah

Burial, Shivah and the end of life are fascinatingly a topic that few of us ever really care to discuss. As we age, we ignore the reality that one day we will have to make serious decisions for some of the people we love and are close to us. If we wait until the last minute to make these far-reaching decisions they become even more difficult and many times more costly.

A superficial reading of the beginning of Chayei Sarah may lead one to incorrectly conclude that Avraham also waited until the last minute. However, one need only glance back to Parshas Lech Lecha and the story of the Bris Bein HaBesarim to see that this is not the case. Avraham asks Hashem, after being promised Eretz Yisrael, ‘how will I know I am to take possession of it?’ Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains using Hashem’s response to Avraham, ‘You shall surely know that your seed shall be strangers in a land not theirs...’ that he will not possess the land and neither will his immediate offspring. Only after three generations of slavery and suffering will Avraham’s descendants be fit to possess and live in the land.

Avraham is a wanderer as he himself makes clear at the beginning of the Parsha, calling himself גר ותישב, one who does not live on his own land and has no rights in that land. As Rabbi Hirsch clearly writes, with all the great wealth that Avraham had amassed and in all the time that Avraham lived in Eretz Yisrael, he never bought even one square foot. Only when it comes time to bury Sarah in an everlasting

and permanent burial site does he finally seek an אחוזה, a permanent purchase that will be passed on to his descendants. It is fascinating that the first bond Avraham and the Jewish people have to Eretz Yisrael is through the burial of Sarah. The first possession of the land is solely for performing the mitzvah of קבורת המת. This provides us with an incredible understanding of how we as Jews are to relate to the Land of Israel. A few years ago I was sitting with a wealthy friend of mine and his family. The eldest child had just returned home from a baseball game. His father asked him if there was any money left over from what he had given him for the game. He said there was \$20 left and my friend put out his hand and asked for the money. Surprised, his son began to complain about how frugal his father was and that he had plenty of friends with less money but they drove nicer cars and were not as cheap as his father. In the middle of the heated discussion that ensued my friend turned to his son with the \$20 bill raised in his hand and asked him, ‘Do you know what this is?’ After he answered my friend looked at him and said, ‘it’s a tool’. Money is nothing more than a tool or a means to an end.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch in his classic work Horeb when writing about the duties of the subject and of the citizen, drives this point home asserting ‘possession of the land and the organising of the State for the Jewish people was not an end but a means to the better fulfilment of their Jewish duties.’ Having a Jewish State was for the better fulfilment of the Torah. For the past 2000 years Jews have davened towards Yerushalayim; sitting around Pesach Sedarim we speak of Next Year in Jerusalem, shuls in Poland are filled with murals of different places in Israel on their walls. Jews throughout the long exile have risked everything to return and even Moshe himself continually davened to Hashem just to enter Eretz Yisrael. As we all know there is something special about Eretz Yisrael, and the level of Avodas Hashem that can be achieved there cannot be achieved anywhere else in the world. Just as the \$20 bill serves as a means to an end so too Eretz Yisrael is a means to help Jews individually and collectively achieve their ultimate spiritual goals.



QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Don't speak unless you can improve the silence



SHAILATEXT

NEW NUMBER

07403 939 613

For more information visit www.federation.org.uk/shailatext/

ד"ר DAYAN GERSHON LOPIAN



A COMMUNITY SERVICE OF THE



FEDERATION

QUIZ TIME Living with Mitzvos
livingwithmitzvos.com

2. Why is it called Maaras Hamachpelah?