

## Truah Human Rights Shabbat

### Parshat Vayechi: Engaging Hebron, Unearthing our Values Project Hayei Sarah

Project Hayei Sarah is a group of rabbinical students, rabbis, Jewish educators & lay-leaders who have spent time in Hebron and are grappling with the difficult realities we encountered there. In light of our awareness of violations of human dignity in Hebron, many in the name of Judaism, Project Hayei Sarah seeks to:

- To educate Jewish communities about the history, complexity & current reality of our relationship to the holy city of Hebron.
- To reclaim Parshat Hayei Sarah, a text used to justify violence & displacement, ritualizing this period in our annual Torah reading cycle. We generate communal conversations, rooted in Jewish text & tradition, about the situation in Hebron today.
- To spark individual & collective action towards a reality in Hebron that is reflective of our highest Jewish ideals.

This source sheet is a resource to help you and your community engage in learning and study about Hebron this Human Rights Shabbat. We believe that *talmud-torah* [the engagement with text and tradition] can open up new pathways to historically difficult conversations within the Jewish community. We invite you to hold the *kavanah* [intention] in your learning of bringing light into dark places and restoring holiness to Hebron from an engagement with and realization of our highest Jewish ideals.

The following values guide the work of Project Hayei Sarah and may be a helpful starting place for your conversations:

- **Justice, Dignity & Rule of Law** - The establishment of justice & the rule of law are necessary to ensure the dignity of all residents of Hebron.
- **Responsibility** - The global Jewish community has a responsibility to confront & address the situation in Hebron.
- **Education** - An honest educational approach steeped in Jewish tradition & lived experience, aimed at promoting empathy & identification across cultural barriers.
- **Respectful Discourse** - Generating conversations within the Jewish community rooted in mutual respect & resilient listening.
- **Hope** - A deep sense of hope that things can change for the better.

#### Background:

We encourage you to spend some time familiarizing yourself and your audience with the history and realities of Hebron today. To get you started here are a few quick background facts on Hebron, adapted from Peace Now:

Hebron is one of the cities holy to Jews and Muslims, where our common forefathers -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sara, Rebecca and Leah -- are buried.

- In the riots of 1929, Palestinian residents of the area murdered 66 Jewish residents of Hebron and wounded more than 100. The lives of other Jewish families were saved by Palestinian neighbors who risked their lives to give them shelter.
- In 1968 settlers received permission from the government to celebrate Passover in Hebron. After the holiday they refused to leave and stayed in Hebron and Kiryat Arba (built in 1970) to this day.
- Hebron is the second biggest city in the West Bank, after East Jerusalem. It has 177,000 Palestinian residents and about 800 settlers.
- On Purim 1994, Baruch Goldstein of Kiryat Arba committed a massacre in the Cave of the Patriarchs. 29 Muslim worshipers were murdered and 125 were injured. Since then, hundreds of stores, markets and streets in central Hebron were closed to Palestinians.
- Israel maintains a strict policy of separation between the Jewish and Palestinian population in Hebron. About 18 checkpoints are deployed on the streets of the old city of Hebron, preventing the passage of Palestinian cars and pedestrians.

For more information on the situation in Hebron today, see: <http://www.btselem.org/hebron>

**To learn more about Project Hayei Sarah and to see our collection of video divrei Torah check out: [www.hayeisarah.org](http://www.hayeisarah.org)**

# Parshat Vayechi: Engaging Hebron, Unearthing our Values

## 1. The Death of Jacob:

בְּרֵאשִׁית פָּרָק נ: כַּט-לַג, גֵּנֶסֶס צַפְרָא 49 v. 29-33

*Parshat Vayechi and the book of Bereishit end with the death of Jacob who came to Egypt with his family after a famine. The following text is Jacob's last wish, to be buried with his ancestors in Hebron, spoken to his sons in the moment before death.*

כַּט וַיִּצְוּ אוֹתָם, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי נֹאֶסְף  
אֶל-עַמִּי--קְבְּרוּ אֹתִי, אֶל-אֲבוֹתַי: אֶל-  
הַמְעָרָה--אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֵה, עֶפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי.

**29** And he [Jacob] charged them, and said unto them: 'I am to be gathered unto my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

ל בַּמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֵה הַמְכַפְּלָה, אֲשֶׁר  
עַל-פְּנֵי-מַמְרֵא--בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: אֲשֶׁר קָנָה  
אַבְרָהָם אֶת-הַשְּׂדֵה, מֵאֵת עֶפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי--  
לְאַחֲזֵית-קֶבֶר.

**30** in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place.

לֹא שָׁמָּה קְבְּרוּ אֶת-אַבְרָהָם, וְאֵת שָׂרָה  
אִשְׁתּוֹ, שָׁמָּה קְבְּרוּ אֶת-יִצְחָק, וְאֵת רֵבֶקָה  
אִשְׁתּוֹ; וְשָׁמָּה קְבַרְתִּי, אֶת-לֵאָה.

**31** There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.

לִב מִקְנֵה הַשְּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ, מֵאֵת  
בְּנֵי-חֵת.

**32** The field and the cave that is therein, which was purchased from the children of Heth.'

לַג וַיִּכְלַע יַעֲקֹב לְצִוּוֹת אֶת-בְּנָיו, וַיֹּאסֶף רַגְלָיו  
אֶל-הַמֶּטֶה; וַיִּגָּע, וַיֹּאסֶף אֶל-עַמִּיו.

**33** And when Jacob made an end of charging his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and expired, and was gathered unto his people.

### Questions:

1. What does Jacob emphasize in request for his burial? Why do you think these things are so important to him?
2. What purpose does this land serve for him? How does he imagine his relationship to this place?
3. What are the places that are important to you? How does memory and ancestry affect your relationship to these places?
4. What questions does this text raise for you?

**2. The Death of Sarah and Purchase of the Maharat HaMachpelah:**  
**Genesis Chapter 23 v. 1-20, בְּרֵאשִׁית פֶּרֶק כג: א-כ**

*The purchase of the Maarat HaMachpelah [Cave of Machpelah] by Abraham that Jacob refers to, comes from our next text at the beginning of Parashat Hayei Sarah. As you read, think about the values that Abraham and the Children of Het are enacting as they interact with one another.*

- א וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה, מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים--שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה. 1 And the life of Sarah was a hundred and seven and twenty years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.
- ב וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה, בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן--בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן; וַיָּבֹא, אַבְרָהָם, לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה, וּלְבַכְתָּהּ. 2 And Sarah died in Kiriatharba--the same is Hebron--in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.
- ג וַיָּקָם, אַבְרָהָם, מֵעַל, פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ; וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי-חֵת, לֵאמֹר. 3 And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spoke unto the children of Heth, saying:
- ד גֵּר-וְתוֹשֵׁב אֲנִי, עִמָּכֶם; תְּנוּ לִי אֶחְזֶזֶת-קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם, וְאֶקְבְּרָה מֵתִי מִלְּפָנַי. 4 'I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.'
- ה וַיַּעֲנוּ בְּנֵי-חֵת אֶת-אַבְרָהָם, לֵאמֹר לוֹ. 5 And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him:
- ו שְׁמַעְנוּ אֲדֹנָי, נְשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ--בְּמַבְחַר קֶבְרֵינוּ, קִבֵּר אֶת-מֵתְךָ; אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ, אֶת-קֶבְרוֹ לֹא-יִקְלָה מִמָּךְ מִקֶּבֶר מֵתְךָ. 6 'Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us; in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead.'
- ז וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְעַם-הָאָרֶץ, לְבְנֵי-חֵת. 7 And Abraham rose up, and bowed down to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth.
- ח וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתֶם, לֵאמֹר: אִם-יֵשׁ אֶת-נַפְשְׁכֶם, לְקַבֵּר אֶת-מֵתִי מִלְּפָנַי--שְׁמַעוּנִי, וּפְגַעוּ-לִי בְּעֶפְרוֹן בֶּן-צֹחַר, 8 And he spoke with them, saying: 'If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar,
- ט וַיִּתֵּן-לִי, אֶת-מַעְרַת הַמַּכְפֶּלֶה אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ, אֲשֶׁר, בְּקִצְהַ שְׂדֵהוּ: בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִי, בְּתוֹכְכֶם--לְאַחְזֶזֶת-קֶבֶר. 9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in the midst of you for a possession of a burying-place.'
- י וַעֲפְרוֹן יָשָׁב, בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי-חֵת; וַיַּעַן עֲפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי אֶת-אַבְרָהָם בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי-חֵת, לְכָל בְּאֵי שַׁעַר-עִירוֹ לֵאמֹר. 10 Now Ephron was sitting in the midst of the children of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying:
- יא לֹא-אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעְנִי--הַשְׂדֵה נָתַתִּי לָךְ, 11 'Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave

- וְהִמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ לָךְ נִתְּתִיָּה; לְעֵינֵי  
בְנֵי-עַמִּי נִתְּתִיָּה לָּךְ, קִבֵּר מִתְּךָ.  
that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my  
people give I it thee; bury thy dead.'
- יב וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ, אַבְרָהָם, לִפְנֵי, עַם  
הָאָרֶץ.  
12 And Abraham bowed down before the people of the land.
- יג וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל-עֶפְרוֹן בְּאָזְנֵי עַם-הָאָרֶץ,  
לֵאמֹר, אִךְ אִם-אַתָּה לוֹ, שְׁמַעְנִי:  
נִתְּתִי כֶסֶף הַשָּׂדֶה, קַח מִמֶּנִּי, וְאִקְבְּרָה  
אֶת-מִתִּי, שָׁמָּה.  
13 And he spoke unto Ephron in the hearing of the people of  
the land, saying: 'But if thou wilt, I pray thee, hear me: I will  
give the price of the field; take it of me, and I will bury my  
dead there.'
- יד וַיַּעַן עֶפְרוֹן אֶת-אַבְרָהָם, לֵאמֹר לוֹ.  
14 And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him:
- טו אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעְנִי, אָרֶץ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת  
שֶׁקֶל-כֶּסֶף בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ מֵה-הוּא; וְאֶת-  
מִתְּךָ, קִבֵּר.  
15 'My lord, hearken unto me: a piece of land worth four  
hundred shekels of silver, what is that betwixt me and thee?  
bury therefore thy dead.'
- טז וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם, אֶל-עֶפְרוֹן, וַיִּשְׁקַל  
אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרוֹן, אֶת-הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר  
בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי-חֵת--אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל  
כֶּסֶף, עֵבֶר לַסֹּחֵר.  
16 And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham  
weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the  
hearing of the children of Heth, four hundred shekels of  
silver, current money with the merchant.
- יז וַיִּקַּם שָׂדֶה עֶפְרוֹן, אֲשֶׁר בְּמַכְפֵּלָה,  
אֲשֶׁר, לִפְנֵי מַמְרֵ: הַשָּׂדֶה, וְהַמְעָרָה  
אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ, וְכָל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה, אֲשֶׁר  
בְּכָל-גְּבֻלוֹ סָבִיב.  
17 So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which  
was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein,  
and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the  
border thereof round about, were made sure
- יח לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה, לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי-חֵת,  
בְּכָל, בְּאֵי שַׁעַר-עִירוֹ.  
18 unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the  
children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city.
- יט וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן קִבֵּר אַבְרָהָם אֶת-שָׂרָה  
אִשְׁתּוֹ, אֶל-מְעַרַת שָׂדֶה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה עַל-  
פְּנֵי מַמְרָא--הוּא חֶבְרוֹן: בְּאָרֶץ, כְּנָעַן.  
19 And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave  
of the field of Machpelah before Mamre--the same is Hebron--  
in the land of Canaan.
- כ וַיִּקַּם הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ,  
לְאַבְרָהָם--לְאַחֲזֵת-קֶבֶר: מֵאוֹת, בְּנֵי-  
חֵת. {o}  
20 And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure  
unto Abraham for a possession of a burying-place by the  
children of Heth.

### Questions:

1. How would you characterize the interactions?
2. What motivates Abraham to want to buy the land as opposed to receive it as a gift?
3. What motivate Ephron to want to give the land as opposed to sell it to Abraham?
4. What values do you hear the text communicating?

### 3. Excerpt from interview with Yehuda Shaul, co-founder of Breaking the Silence

[www.justvision.org/portrait/76157/interview](http://www.justvision.org/portrait/76157/interview)

*Hebron has been a very important city in the Jewish tradition since the times of the Torah. Today there are 500-800 Jewish settlers in the old city of Hebron who live in active tension with Palestinian residents and hold a large army presence in the old city. This testimony shares the voice of an Israeli soldier's experience serving in Hebron and reflects some of the difficult realities in Hebron today.*

*You were posted in Hebron for a long period during military service. Did you ever visit Hebron before you were a soldier?*

I was raised orthodox so I had visited Hebron before I was a soldier. I visited mostly during Jewish holidays, when the Tomb of the Patriarch is open only to Jews. But I didn't personally know people who lived there. It was very remote from politics: being a soldier you do what needs doing. In an abstract sense I thought occupation was negative, but I didn't understand it...

*What led you to found Shovrim Shtika [Breaking the Silence]?*

...Nobody trained me to stand at a checkpoint or enter a house. The situation in the Territories is very clear and doesn't really require training. You stand there and you know what your role is; you know who you are and what it is you need to do: to prevent and thwart terrorist activities, and protect the people in the Jewish settlement and passersby. You patrol; you are taught to look at the windows and that's what you do. During your first patrol you tremble with fear, when you leave the kasba you're sweating. During the second patrol you sweat less, even less during the third patrol, and after two weeks you walk around with your hands in your pockets because you feel comfortable. Nobody trained me and I don't think anybody could.

When we encountered Hebron and understood that settlers could do as they please and nobody would stop them – we started getting very mad and frustrated. Talking to the settlers didn't lead anywhere. There are huge ideological differences between myself and a person who is capable of approaching an Arab's door and spray-painting a Star of David or "Arabs out." To me, the historical memory is hair-raising. We all know the past significance of symbols on Jewish shop doors, and what those symbols were. We are all familiar with the expression when you replace the word "Arabs" with the word "Jews." We know that history. I saw graffiti that said "Arabs to the gas chambers," "Arabs to the crematorium" and I understood the horror of the historical context.

#### **Questions:**

1. What resonates for you in his narrative? What challenges you?
2. Are these images of Hebron new for you? How do they sit with the image of Hebron from the Torah verses above?

3. To what extent is this story a corollary to our inherited narratives of ownership? To what extent does it subvert our Biblical narratives?
4. Does this story hit you differently, given the ancient context of Hebron, than it would if it were any other city in Israel or the territories?

**4. Excerpt from email invitation to visit Hebron  
for Shabbat Chayei Sarah 2011**

[www.hebron.com](http://www.hebron.com)

*Every year on the Shabbat oHayei Sarah, tens of thousands of Jews journey to Hebron to pray in the Maaarat HaMachpelah on the liturgical anniversary of Abraham's acquisition of this place. This is an invitation to that event.*

**THE HEBRON FUND**

reminds you that

there is one week until Shabbat Chayei Sarah  
This year's program is one you don't want to miss.

Spend Shabbat with your ancestors in Hebron!

Join 30,000 other Jews from Israel and around the world in celebrating Shabbat Chayei Sarah in Hebron - the most unforgettable Jewish experience of a lifetime!

Three sumptuous Shabbat meals together with leaders of the Jewish Community of Hebron and other public figures.

Friday morning tour "East Jerusalem"; Friday afternoon meet Sheik Jabre in Hebron; Carlebach Kabbalat Shabbat and oneg Shabbat Friday night; Shacharit in Ohel Yitzchak; Seudat Shabbat in front of Maarat HaMachpela; lecture by the Mayor of Hebron; Tour by Simcha Hochbaum; VIP tour of the Kasba; Seudat Shlishit in front of Maarat HaMachpela; Arvit

Accommodations at Midreshet Hebron

Take a tour to unique pioneering towns and projects and meet the true heroes of Israel

Private busses to and from Hebron

VIP accommodations available upon request

**Questions:**

1. What values do you hear the invitation communicating?
2. What language from this invitation particularly stands out to you?
3. What is left out, in your opinion?
4. How does this text read after reading the testimonial from Yehuda Shaul? What feelings does that raise?
5. Would you want to go on this tour? Why, why not?

### **Concluding Questions for Discussion:**

1. What values are in tension for you in what we have considered in this text study and how do you work with them?
2. How do you read the last two texts differently in light of your engagement with the first two?
3. How can our narratives of the past be useful for framing our understanding of our current situation? How can they hinder understanding?