

## **Avraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpeilah... which is Chevron. (23:19)**

The *Meoras Ha'Machpeilah* is the final resting place of four couples: Adam/Chavah; Avraham/Sarah; Yitzchak/Rivkah; Yaakov/Leah. As such, it is sacred ground which no one has penetrated and returned to report about. There was, however, one person who went, entered and even, exited – *Horav Avraham Azulai, zl*, author of the *Chesed L'Avraham*, great-grandfather of the *Chida, zl*. The story took place in 1643, in the city of Chevron. The sultan of the Ottoman Empire decided to visit the many places of distinction that were part of his vast empire. Chevron, which is home to the *Meoras Ha'Machpeilah*, was one of his stops. He entered the cave adorned in his royal garb, including his unique golden, diamond studded sword which hung at his side. He went from room to room, finally entering the huge hall named after Yitzchak *Avinu*.

The center of attraction in the Yitzchak hall is a small circular hole in the floor, which is considered to be the most sacred spot in the entire structure, since it leads down into the caves/burial place themselves. People would come from all over the world just to stand and pray at this hole, which according to tradition was excavated/created by Adam *HaRishon*.

The sultan leaned over the aperture and peered down into the hole. As he bent over, his precious sword became loose and tumbled through the opening. When the sultan heard the clang of metal hit the ground of the cave, he realized that his sword was now in the mysterious burial place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. He wanted his sword retrieved. He ordered the officer of the guard to send down a soldier to bring back the sword. Not one to waste the sultan's time, the officer immediately dispatched a soldier through the hole, after first tying a strong rope around his body. No sooner had the soldier been lowered when they heard piercing screams coming from the cave below. They pulled up the soldier, who was no longer alive!

The sultan kept on sending soldiers down into the hole – with the same result: no sword, and another dead soldier. The sultan had little concern for his soldiers. He just wanted his sword back. Finally, the officers suggested, "Since there are so many Jews in Chevron let one of them descend into the hole. Why should our soldiers die?" Word was sent to the Jews that the sultan expected one of them to retrieve his sword. No Jew was prepared to forfeit his life. The sultan "sweetened" the deal when he said, "Unless a Jew descends and retrieves my sword, the entire Jewish community will pay with their lives!" Sadly, this is the type of tyranny under which we had lived throughout our exile.

Not willing to put anyone's life in danger, the elderly *Rav* of Chevron, the *Kabbalist*, *Rav Avraham Azulai* said that he would go down. "I have no fear," he said. *Rav Azulai* prayed passionately for guidance and success, and dressed in his white *tachrichim*, burial shrouds, he then set forth for the cave. With a rope tied around his waist, the elderly *Rav* was lowered down to the ground of the cave. He was met by three bearded men, who "introduced" themselves as the Patriarchs. *Rav*

Avraham was in total shock. "Why should I leave here?" he asked. "I am old. I have come face to face with my Patriarchs. I desire to stay here with you."

The Patriarchs replied, "You must return the sultan's sword or the entire Jewish community of Chevron will be annihilated. However, have no fear, for in another seven days you will return here to be with us."

The *Rav* returned to a hero's welcome. After returning the sword to the sultan, he quickly went to his *shul* where he spent the next week transmitting to his students all of the esoteric teachings of the Torah. He learned with them night and day, imparting to them all that he knew. Seven days after entering the cave of *Machpeilah*, *Rav Avraham Azulai* was called "Home," returning his lofty soul to its Heavenly Source. He was buried in the ancient Chevron cemetery, overlooking the final resting place of our Patriarchs.