

Bury me among my fathers, in the cave that is in the field of Ephron... there they buried Avraham and his wife, Sarah; there they buried Yitzchak and his wife Rivkah; and there I buried Leah. (49:29,31)

The *Meoras HaMachpeilah* (as explained by *Rashi*, *Ibid* 23:9) was called *machpeilah*, which means double. *Chazal* gave it this name either because it contained upper and lower chambers or due to the fact that *zugos*, couples, that were buried there. It was the burial site of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, couples united in life and death. Thus, *Yaakov Avinu* concluded his request to be buried there next to his “wife,” Leah. If *Yaakov*’s only reason for burial in the cave was to be buried next to his wife, he could have been buried next to Rachel *Imeinu* on the road to Bais Lechem. After all, she was the one whom he had originally preferred to marry. If he cared so much for her in life, he must have similarly cared for her in death. Why did he not insist on being buried next to Rachel? As a result of Rachel’s indiscretion concerning the *tzaddik*’s (*Yaakov*’s) bed, Heaven decreed that she could not be buried near *Yaakov*. The Patriarch himself had no problem being buried next to her. He did not feel that his honor had been impugned. He had forgiven Rachel.

Horav Bentzion Firer, zl, explains that *Yaakov* decided in favor of being buried near Leah because he wanted to be close to his father and grandfather. He wanted burial in the family plot. The fact that Leah, his wife, was buried there was a factor in favor of *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. On the other hand, once we acknowledge why Rachel was buried on the road to Bais Lechem, we wonder why this exact same reason did not apply to him. *Chazal* say that Rachel was buried on the road so that she would serve as a source of comfort, to console the exiles who were being driven out by *Nevuzaraden*. Rachel would rise from her grave and pray that they be able to return to their home one day. If Rachel did this, why did *Yaakov* not want to do the same? Let crying for the Jewish People about to be driven from their homeland become a family affair. Imagine the effect if both *Yaakov* and Rachel would have risen from their graves to petition on behalf of the Jewish People. We might say that *Yaakov*, like *Avraham Avinu* and *Yitzchak Avinu*, did not advocate on behalf of the Jews. When Hashem said to them, “Your children have sinned!” they replied, “Let them be punished for Your Name.” This is true only insofar that when *Yaakov* heard Hashem’s accusation, he was only supporting Hashem’s claim, “*Banecha chatu*.” Although he explained that Hashem had instructed him to bury Rachel on the road so that she would be an advocate for her children, he should have countered, “I will also weep for them.”

Rav Firer explains that, indeed, *Yaakov*’s burial in *kever avosav*, the “family” plot, was to encourage his descendants to return to the Holy Land. For Jews to return to *Eretz Yisrael* after their exile, two criteria had to be satisfied. First, the return must conform with Hashem’s Will; He must want them back in *Eretz Yisrael*. Second, *Klal Yisrael* must want to return. The first condition, to have Hashem agree that they return, was resolved via Rachel’s tears. Her outpouring of

emotions penetrated the Heavenly Gates and catalyzed a positive Heavenly response to end the exile and allow the Jewish People to return to the Land. The second condition that required *Klal Yisrael* to desire to return would be facilitated by Yaakov *Avinu* via his burial in *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. When the people would ruminare over return, versus remaining in Bavel or other countries of exile, the first query would be, "Is it our home?" If they were to return it was critical for them to feel that *Eretz Yisrael* was their homeland. Secure in the knowledge that therein lay their ancestors, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs who established their nation and from whom they (the exiles) descend, the people will have second thoughts about remaining in Bavel. No decision is easy. Was Yaakov to be buried next to Rachel or Leah? The answer was dependent upon what was ultimately (in the Patriarch's mind) the best catalyst for Jewish return to the land. What would engender their greatest longing for "home"?

Rav Firer observes that apparently Rachel's pleas achieved full realization, as Hashem granted reprieve to the Jewish People, ending their exile so that return to the Land was possible. The second criteria, which required the people to have a desire to return, was not as operative, since many Jews opted to remain in Bavel. Nonetheless, Yaakov's plan was not only focused on the Jews who were banished during the *Churban Bais Hamikdash*, but for all future generations, to the exiles driven out of the land by Titus and others. His plea continues to reverberate: "Come home to the Land where your forefathers are buried."