

## Project Hayei Sarah and Present-Day Hebron Text Study

Sarah Beller (sarah@jstreet.org)

November 14, 2011

### Commitments for our conversation:

Confidentiality

Listening

Speaking for ourselves (I statements)

Approaching material with curiosity

### Questions for Genesis text:

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

### Questions for Hebron Fund text:

- What values do you hear the invitation communicating?
- What is left out, in your opinion?

### Questions for Yehuda Shaul text:

- What resonates for you in his narrative?
- What challenges you?

### Questions for discussion:

- Share one thing that really struck you.
- What values are in tension for you in what we have considered tonight and how do you work with them?
- What do you want to do next?

### בראשית פרק כג

(א) וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שָׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה : (ב) וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֵא אַבְרָהָם לְסָפֵד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבַכְתָּהּ : (ג) וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ וַיִּדְבֹר אֶל בְּנֵי חֵת לֵאמֹר : (ד) גֵּר וְתוֹשֵׁב אָנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם תָּנוּ לִי אַחֲזֵת קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָה מֵתִי מִלְפָּנַי : (ה) וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי חֵת אֶת אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ : (ו) שְׁמַעְנוּ אֲדֹנָי נְשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ בְּמִבְחָר קֶבְרֵינוּ קֶבֶר אֶת מֵתְךָ אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת קֶבְרוֹ לֹא יִכְלֶה מִמֶּנּוּ מִקֶּבֶר מֵתְךָ : (ז) וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְעַם הָאָרֶץ לְבְנֵי חֵת : (ח) וַיִּדְבֹר אֹתָם לֵאמֹר אִם יֵשׁ אֶת נַפְשְׁכֶם לְקַבֵּר אֶת מֵתִי מִלְפָּנַי שְׁמַעוּנִי וּפְגַעוּ לִי בְּעַפְרוֹן בֶּן צֹחַר : (ט) וַיִּתֵּן לִי אֶת מַעְרַת הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר לוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּקִצֵּה שְׂדֵהוּ בְּכֶסֶף מְלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְאַחֲזֵת קֶבֶר : (י) וַעֲפְרוֹן יָשָׁב בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי חֵת וַיִּצַעַן עֲפְרוֹן הַחֵתִי אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי חֵת לְכָל בְּאֵי שָׁעַר עִירוֹ לֵאמֹר : (יא) לֹא אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעֲנִי הַשְׂדָּה נְתַתִּי לָךְ וְהַמַּעְרָה אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ לָךְ נְתַתִּיָּה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי עַמִּי נְתַתִּיָּה לָךְ קֶבֶר מֵתְךָ : (יב) וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַבְרָהָם לְפָנָיו עִם הָאָרֶץ : (יג) וַיִּדְבֹר אֶל עַפְרוֹן בְּאָזְנֵי עַם הָאָרֶץ לֵאמֹר אַךְ אֵתָּה לוֹ שְׁמַעֲנִי נְתַתִּי כֶסֶף הַשְׂדָּה קַח מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת מֵתִי שָׁמָּה : (יד) וַיִּצַעַן עֲפְרוֹן אֶת אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ : (טו) אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעֲנִי אָרֶץ אַרְבַּע מֵאֹת שְׁקֶל כֶּסֶף בִּינִי וּבִינְךָ מֵה הוּא וְאֶת מֵתְךָ קֶבֶר : (טז) וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם אֶל עַפְרוֹן וַיִּשְׁקַל אַבְרָהָם לְעַפְרוֹן אֶת הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי חֵת אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שְׁקֶל כֶּסֶף עֶבֶר לְסֹחַר : (יז) וַיָּקָם שְׂדֵה עֲפְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּמַכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר לְפָנָיו מִמְרֵא הַשְׂדָּה וְהַמַּעְרָה אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ וְכָל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּשְׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל גְּבוּלוֹ סָבִיב : (יח) לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי חֵת בְּכָל בְּאֵי שָׁעַר עִירוֹ : (יט) וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן קֶבֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל מַעְרַת שְׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה עַל פְּנֵי מִמְרֵא הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן : (כ) וַיָּקָם הַשְׂדָּה וְהַמַּעְרָה אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזֵת קֶבֶר מֵאֵת בְּנֵי חֵת : ס

### Genesis 23:1-20

1 Sarah's lifetime -- the span of Sarah's life -- came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. 2 Sarah died in Kiriath-arba -- now Hebron -- in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her. 3 Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, 4 "I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial." 5 And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, 6 "Hear us, my lord: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead." 7 Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites, 8 and he said to them, "If it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. 9 Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns, which is at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial site in your midst." 10 Ephron was present among the Hittites; so Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of his town, saying, 11 "No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." 12 Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land, 13 and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." 14 And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him, 15 "My lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver -- what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead." 16 Abraham accepted Ephron's terms. Abraham paid out to Ephron the money that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites -- four hundred shekels of silver at the going merchants' rate. 17 So Ephron's land in Machpelah, near Mamre -- the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field -- passed 18 to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, of all who entered the gate of his town. 19 And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre -- now Hebron -- in the land of Canaan. 20 Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site.

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

www.hebron.com

**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

**Excerpt from interview with Yehuda Shaul, co-founder of Breaking the Silence / Shovrim Shtika\***

www.justvision.org/portrait/76157/interview

*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.

\*www.breakingthesilence.org.il

## About Project Hayai Sarah and Present Day Hebron

### Who we are:

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. We want to invite our communities into a conversation about what we have seen.

### Mission:

In light of our awareness of violations of human dignity in Hebron, many in the name of Judaism, Project Hayei Sarah seeks:

- To educate Jewish communities about the history, complexity and current reality of our relationship to the holy city of Hebron.
- To generate communal conversations, rooted in Jewish text and tradition, about the situation in Hebron today.
- To spark individual and collective action towards a reality in Hebron that is reflective of our highest Jewish ideals.

### Values:

**Justice, Dignity & Rule of Law** - The establishment of justice and 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 and address the situation in Hebron.

**Education** - An honest educational approach steeped in Jewish tradition and lived experience, aimed at promoting empathy and identification across cultural barriers.

**Respectful Discourse** - Generating conversations within the Jewish community rooted in mutual respect and resilient listening.

**Hope** - A deep sense of hope that things can change for the better.

### Contact Us:

- hayei.sarah@gmail.com

### Facts for Thought:

Adapted from Peace Now, map from Foundation for Middle East Peace

- **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. 26 Muslim worshippers were murdered. 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.

