

Insights from the Meshech Chochma
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וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי חֵת לֵאמֹר. (פרק בג' ג)
Avraham rose from the presence of his dead, and spoke to the children of Heth, saying,...

The Stone Edition Chumash editors adeptly and poignantly place our pasuk in context: Avraham turned from his tears to provide for Sarah's burial. To purchase a gravesite, he needed the cooperation of the descendants of Heth, the son of Canaan, who were the leaders of the region.

Many Mefarshim raise the following issue: If the land Avraham was seeking to obtain belonged to Ephron, why did he begin the negotiations with all of the בְּנֵי חֵת?

A practical answer is provided by the Ohr HaChaim: "... the Torah wanted to explain why Avraham needed to speak to the בְּנֵי חֵת, when the land in question belonged to one man only, and the whole transaction should have been simple and uncomplicated. And that was because a cave could not be worked like a field, was not useful to its owner to build on; therefore, normal proof of ownership might be difficult to establish by his heirs in the future. Therefore, Avraham wanted *everybody* present as witnesses. The purchase would be fully valid and would not ever be contested after all these preconditions had been met."

Rav Meir Simcha agrees with this but as usual, utilizes תּוֹרָה שְׂבַעֲלֵ פֶה to bolster his approach, as follows: In בכורות נב: we are told that if one sells his grave, or the path to his grave, or the place where visitors would stand to comfort the mourners, or the place of his eulogies, the other members of his family may come and bury the deceased in his ancestral plot against the purchaser's wishes, due to the need to avoid מְשַׁפְּחָה, a family flaw i.e., harm to the family name if a member of their family had to be buried in the gravesite of a stranger. Avraham knew that he was purchasing the land from Ephron. Not knowing all of Ephron's family members and wanting to avoid any future discord over the sale, Avraham wanted to have the entire בְּנֵי חֵת present for the negotiations and transaction.

Rav Meir Simcha continues with the storyline: וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי חֵת אֶת אַבְרָהָם... שְׁמַעְנוּ אֲדֹנָי, נְשִׂיאַ /And the children of Heth answered Avraham...: "Hear us, my lord: You are the prince of G-d in our midst; in the

choicest of our burial places bury your dead; any of us will not withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead." Notice how they begin by answering as a group in unison, וַיַּעֲנוּ, but then individualize their statement by saying, אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת קִבְרוֹ לֹא יִכְלֶה, מִמֶּה מִקְבֵּר מִתְּךָ. According to Rav Meir Simcha, this is very מטעים. They told Avraham: "Because you are a נָשִׂיא אֱלֹקִים there would be no פְּגָם מִשְׁפָּחָה with selling these burial grounds to you. Quite the contrary, it would be an honor for us to have your eternal resting grounds in our community. So that even if אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ i.e., an individual would sell you the property without the rest of us being present, there would be no objection!" Avraham bows to the group and then has his discussions with Ephron. After agreeing on a price and Avraham paying Ephron, the pasuk tells us לְאַבְרָהָם לְמַקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי חֵת בְּכֹל לְבָאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ (it was confirmed) *as Avraham's, as a purchase, in the view of the children of Heth, among all who came to the gate of his city.* Avraham still makes sure that everyone is there to witness the "official" transfer of ownership. This obsession could be because Avraham was by nature extremely humble and never considered himself a נָשִׂיא אֱלֹקִים. The פְּגָם מִשְׁפָּחָה "issue" may rear its ugly head again and threaten his purchase. Also, perhaps, Avraham's definition of פְּגָם מִשְׁפָּחָה may have been the more traditional one as quoted previously: harm to the family name if a member of their family had to be buried in the gravesite of a stranger-no matter who that stranger is. To avoid any distortions of intent and definitions, he insisted on having the בְּנֵי חֵת-עַם הָאֲרֶץ-כֹּל בָּאֵי שַׁעַר, everyone around as this historic event came to a close. With 20/20 hindsight, looking at the course of history up to the present day, Avraham's paranoia was unfortunately well founded!

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