

The *Avodah* of Yerushalayim, the Connection of Chevron

Yerushalayim, introduced at the end of *Parshas Vayera* as the location of *akeidas* Yitzchok, is *Klal Yisroel's* holiest site and the focal point of our connection to Hashem. Another introduction immediately follows at the beginning of *Parshas Chayey Sarah*, where we are told about Chevron and its acquisition by Avraham *Avinu*. The connection between the two cities run deeper than a superficial juxtaposition in the text of the *Chumash*. Chazal tell us that when Sarah *Imeinu* found out about the *akeidah* she passed away. It seems that as soon as Yerushalayim, the *makom haMikdash*, was established, Chevron and all that it represents had to be established as well.

The connection between these two cities is not only presented to us via their juxtaposition in the *Chumash*; it finds an almost eerie echo in the *Mishnah* as well. The *Mishnah* (*Yoma* 3:1) tells us that early Yom Kippur morning the *sgan* (supervisor Kohen) would ask if the time to begin the Divine service [i.e. Sunrise] had arrived, and would pose this question by asking, "Is the whole East light as far as Chevron?" The *Gemara* explains that Chevron was mentioned in order to, "evoke *zechus Avos* - the merit of our Patriarchs." Thus, Divine service starts with a mention of the *Avos*.

Our invoking *zechus Avos* is not merely an annual event. The truth is that every *tefillah* starts with *zechus Avos* saying, "The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchok, and the G-d of Yaakov." And even when, in that same first *beracha*, we speak of Hashem's praises, we do so by referring to Him as, "the One Who remembers the deeds of the *Avos*, and brings the redeemer to their children's children." This *beracha* is deemed so important that the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 101) rules that it is the only *beracha* which must be repeated if one did not have *kavanah* when saying it, and even if one had proper *kavanah* in every other *beracha* one nonetheless must repeat *Shemoneh Esrei!* [The Rema disagrees but only for pragmatic reasons, not essentially.] It is surely nice to mention the *Avos*, and it is wonderful to incorporate their merits into our prayer, but why is it the most important part of *tefillah*?

The Rambam describes the appropriate *kavanah* of *tefillah* as being cognizant that, "one is standing before the Divine Presence" (*Hilchos Tefillah*, 4:16). Rav Chaim Soloveitchik demonstrates that it is this *kavanah*, rather than the meaning of the words per se, that is the critical *kavanah* for *tefillah*. While it is very important to think of the meaning of the words, failure to do so does not invalidate one's *tefillah*. Yet if one failed to focus on being in front of the Divine Presence, one's *tefillah* is invalid and must be redone.

This presents a much greater challenge than we anticipate, for Hashem has no physical form whatsoever, and it is almost idolatry to picture him as having one. How is a person to stand "before Hashem" when the very meaning of those words is so elusive? How does one "picture" that which has no image? Essentially, this is perhaps our greatest general challenge in *tefillah*.

The answer lies in one of the core elements of the parent-child relationship. A child explores the physical world through his own sense, but the conceptual world's basic building blocks are transmitted from parent to child. The concepts of good, justice, responsibility, etc. are spoken about by parents and absorbed by children. A parent may not provide a dictionary definition of the word "responsibility" when he uses the word, but as he says it the tone, body language, context, and so much more are absorbed by the child. The child may also never have a precise definition of the word, but he certainly has a strong sense thereof. It is such a sense of the Divine Presence that looms in front of us when we daven. We may never have had the experience of an overt Divine encounter personally, but the *Avos* did.

Our "sense of the Divine" does not originate within ourselves, rather it has to come to us via the *avos*. Rashi makes this point when he interprets *Shemos* 15:2, based on the *Mechilta*, as follows: "this is the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him – I am not the source of this *kedusha*; it is something established for me from the days of the *Avos*."

Every *tefillah* must start with the sense of "*omeid lifnei haShechinah*" or it is not *tefillah* at all. This sense is accessible to each and every one of us because we are able to tap into "The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchok, and the G-d of Yaakov", and if we fail to note that our *tefillah* is invalid.

Yerushalayim is the location for Divine service, and Chevron is the repository of the *Avos*. We cannot properly engage in Divine service without our connection to the *Avos*. Therefore, as soon as the spiritual cornerstone of Yerushalayim was laid via the *akeidah*, the *beracha* of the "G-d of our forefathers" was similarly symbolically established in Chevron.